

ASK
THEM
WHY

ASK THEM WHY

How to Help Unbelievers
Find the Truth

Jay Lucas

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DEDICATION

I have always been surrounded by people I do not deserve: my beloved wife, Becky, and six wonderful children—Sharayah, Courtney, Jonathan, Trinity, Rebekah, and Kirsten; professors and teachers who taught me to love God's Word; and a staff and church family at Grace Community Baptist Church, which are second to none.

This book includes two audio CDs of the encounters in part 2. If you are using this book in a group setting, listen to the audio CD as a group before you read the analysis and discuss the questions that follow each printed encounter. If you are using the book outside a class setting, you will profit, as well, by listening to the encounter before you read the analysis and questions.

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ASK THEM WHY

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FOREWORD

*Proclaim the truth. Defend the truth.
Embrace genuine truth claims.
Expose false truth claims.*

THIS book, *Ask Them Why*, will help you to do just that. It will provide a process whereby you can distinguish truth from error (1 John 4:1–6), contend for the faith of evangelical Christianity (Jude 3), and proclaim the inerrant Word of God (2 Tim. 4:2).

Jay Lucas is a loving husband, a guiding parent, and a faithful pastor of a growing congregation. He served as my associate pastor for three years before I retired as senior pastor. It was my joy to recommend him to the deacons and to the church as my successor.

In addition, Jay is both an apologist and an evangelist. He is aware of the deception of the contemporary postmodern culture and its impact upon both believers and nonbelievers. He has confronted its proponents both by spoken word and written form. However, he doesn't want just to win an argument; he engages postmodernists in compassion to bring them to redemption through Jesus Christ.

Many Christians know *what* they believe, but they cannot explain *why*. Thus they are timid in their outreach to the lost. This book is not for the fainthearted or for the weak-minded. It will stretch you—your thinking, your faith, and your vocabulary

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comprehension. This book will encourage you to become a stronger, more informed child of God.

It is my prayer that you will develop a Biblical worldview and that you will articulate it to an unredeemed world. *Ask Them Why* will guide you in this pursuit. I highly recommend it to all believers who want to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

*Dr. Robert Gromacki
Pastor Emeritus, Grace Community Baptist Church
Distinguished Professor Emeritus
of Bible and Greek, Cedarville University*

INTRODUCTION

IT IS my honor and privilege to be able to commend to you this first published work of my friend and mentor, Pastor Jay Lucas. God has gifted me with Jay's friendship for over twenty years, and as fellow pastors we have had numerous discussions relating to the need for believers to be adequately equipped to defend their faith ("apologetics") and the most Scriptural approach for doing so. During my doctoral program, it was my privilege to be able to serve alongside Jay in pastoral ministry in upstate New York, and it was during those years that the book you now hold first began to take shape. While numerous books are available on Christian apologetics, there are three reasons why this work should be highly commended to the Christian public.

First, unlike most books on apologetics, which are written by professional theologians or "ivory tower" scholars, this book is preeminently *pastoral*, which is seen in a number of ways. For example, it seeks to equip everyday believers for the ministry of winning their lost friends to Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12). And it exudes a spirit of graciousness (Col. 4:6) consistent with the heart of a pastor who understands through years of ministry that it is more important to win a soul to Christ through the unleashed power of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) than it is to win a cleverly crafted argument. This book also differs from other works on Christian apologetics in that it is eminently *readable*. Anyone who has attempted to wade through the existing literature on Christian apologetics will tell you what a blessing this book is.

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As a professor, I have been waiting years for a book such as this one. Its readability not only makes it useful for the busy pastor, but—more importantly—accessible to laypeople who would never get past the first chapter of other apologetics books. If one of the marks of genuine scholarship is the ability to take complex subjects and arguments and present them clearly and simply so that normal people can understand them, then this book represents a remarkable piece of scholarship. Jay possesses that rare (and enviable) gift of writing with conciseness and brevity without sacrificing content or substance in the process. Endnotes provide resources for further study for the reader whose appetite has been stimulated.

Second, this book is *presuppositional*. In our discussions over the years, Jay and I have been guided by a presuppositional approach to apologetics, largely because, of all the apologetical systems, it takes the theological realities of the depravity of mankind and the absolute authority of Scripture most seriously. Furthermore, presuppositionalism recognizes that *everyone*—believers and unbelievers alike—operates from a set of assumptions that greatly influences how he handles the evidence. This book builds off the premise that most unbelievers have never considered the implications of their own presuppositions and where they inevitably lead.

A third reason why this book represents a valuable addition to the existing literature on Christian apologetics is that it is eminently *practical*. Again, most apologetics books are primarily theoretical, and certainly good practice must have good theory as its basis. However, most apologetics books seem to stop there. They provide little help in showing the believer what Christian apologetics looks like in real life. Once again, this book fills that gap with the real-life scenarios that make up the bulk of the work. I am aware of no other published work on Christian apologetics that includes a section like Part 2: Encounters. These scenarios

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alone are worth the price of the book. *Ask Them Why* gives believers equipment to interact effectively with *real* people who hold such views and enables believers to be prepared ahead of time to channel the conversation to the gospel. (This is especially valuable for people like me who don't think fast on their feet!)

The common denominator in each of these cases is the effective use of questions that invariably compel unbelievers to face the implications of their own presuppositions. Given how often Jesus, Paul, and the Old Testament prophets used questions to persuade their listeners, it is amazing how often this approach is overlooked in books on Christian apologetics. *Ask Them Why* goes a long way to fill that gap.

For these reasons and more, I am delighted to be able to recommend this book to you. I join my friend the author in praying that this work will serve as a valuable tool in equipping believers everywhere to “always [be] ready to make a defense [the Greek word is *apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15, NASB). *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Michael M. Canbam, ThM, PhD
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PREFACE

THE typical non-Christian is even less prepared to defend his beliefs than is the typical Christian! This realization plays a major role in this book. If an unbeliever resists the gospel when we share it with him, it is because he is relying on something other than God for determining the meaning and purpose of life, as well as for discovering truth itself. That person's belief system, whatever it is, is false and logically self-defeating. The probability is that the person has never had this fact pointed out to him. I pray that after reading this book, you will understand the value of asking the unbeliever to explain the reasons for his beliefs. I also pray that this book will help you learn to dissect unbelief and expose it as error.

The first section of this book explains the methodology that I call the Ask Them Why (ATW) approach. The second section comprises fictional encounters between non-Christians and Christians who use the ATW method. At the end of each encounter is a summary to help the reader identify the key points made by the Christian. There are also several appendixes after the encounter section. I suggest reading each appendix the first time it is referred to, whether in the main body of the book or in the endnotes. The ATW method is not the only way to share the gospel, but I think it is an approach that can be of great value for the believer and the unbeliever.

Another important fact needs to be acknowledged at the outset. Within scholarly Christian circles there is a complex debate

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regarding the proper approach to apologetics. Examining the debated issues is valuable, but such an evaluation is not the purpose of this book. In my own study of apologetics I have read dozens of books and journal articles, listened to numerous lectures by leading Christian apologists, and talked to some of them in person. I have observed these apologists in action as they have debated atheists, skeptics, and other non-Christians. Most importantly, I have searched the Scriptures to see for myself what method of defending and proclaiming the faith is most Biblical. My hope and desire is that this book honors the Lord of the Bible and that He will be pleased to use it both to encourage believers and to rescue unbelievers from spiritual darkness.



Part 1

THE
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METHOD

INTRODUCTION

GET INTO THE GAME

MANY Christians find personal evangelism intimidating. They would rather give their last dollar to the missionary fund than to engage someone in a meaningful conversation about Jesus Christ, prompting an observer to question their depth of love for Him. After all, believers who truly love Jesus Christ will obey His commands, which include being His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Failure to do so indicates a lack of commitment.

This assessment might be true, yet it does not tell the whole story. Many Christians who are reluctant to witness are discouraged and shamed by their failure. If they did not love Christ, their silence would not bother them. The level of frustration and regret indicates that for many believers the problem is not a lack of love for Christ but a lack of confidence in their ability to effectively communicate the claims of Christ in an increasingly secular or post-Christian culture.¹

I recall my struggle to witness to my friends when I was a student in a public high school. Connecticut was not even close to being a Bible Belt state, and my hometown was no exception. Our area had few Bible-believing, doctrinally sound churches, and those that existed had small youth groups at best. In a school of a thousand students, I knew of only three other born-again students. I assume there were more than the four of us, but if so, the others were as anonymous as I. I knew and believed the gospel, but I doubted my ability to explain it in a reasonable way to someone who was inclined to resist it. Today as I look back on those days, I find myself thinking, *If only I had known then what I know now. If someone had taught me how to defend my beliefs, I would have had the courage to speak up.*

This book has been written to help Christians of all ages and abilities proclaim and defend the claims of the gospel. The task is not as difficult as many Christians perceive. Those who have rejected Jesus Christ and the Bible are standing on shaky ground. In contrast, a trained Christian has every reason to be confident in his or her position.

Because I am a pastor, I feel especially burdened to encourage Christians and to help them learn to defend their Christian beliefs. Although Christians in America don't face the kind of violent persecution found in other parts of the world, they are still under attack in the arena of ideas. Over the years I have heard too many accounts of Christian teens going off to colleges and universities only to have their faith completely undermined. When I have had occasion to speak with such students, I invariably discover that they have fallen prey to weak and easily rebutted arguments against the Bible and Christianity. How much better it would have been had they been taught apologetics in their home churches. Too often we are merely shutting the barn door after the horse has run off.

It is not just college students who need to be equipped.

Every Christian is commanded to be ready to give an answer when asked about the Christian faith (1 Pet. 3:15). If every Christian attended a Biblically sound seminary or Christian college, the local church would be far better prepared to engage the larger culture in which we live.

The reality is that only a small percentage of Christians attend such educational institutions. To make matters worse, many students who attend Christian colleges for four years never actually take an apologetics course.² As a result, our churches are filled with people who love the Lord and care about lost people yet are unprepared to answer attacks against the Christian faith.

I believe we need to take apologetics to the streets; the use of apologetics should be made practical enough that we can actually use it as a tool in our daily interaction. To do this we must teach it in our churches. Defending the Christian faith does not need to be a losing battle. The more that Christians begin to understand the strength of the Christian belief system, the more we will see Christians emboldened to share their faith.

Before proceeding, an important truth needs to be stated. The power of salvation resides in the gospel message itself (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:15). Even as a timid high school student, I could have been an effective witness for Christ by sharing the gospel in spite of not being equipped to defend my beliefs. God changes hearts through His Word by the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This transaction does not depend on our debating skills (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Therefore, this book does not proceed from the premise that the lost will remain unconverted unless we master certain logical arguments.

This book builds on the premise that Christians should take the necessary steps to become better trained as servants for God's use as we grow in our knowledge of Him. Learning to articulate the superiority of the Christian worldview over mankind's false systems provides great freedom and encouragement.³ This

mastery can greatly reduce the fear and anxiety sincere Christians often experience when witnessing. Reservations can be replaced by excitement and confidence, resulting in rich blessing for the Christian as he joyfully seeks to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

An additional benefit awaits the Christian who strives to sharpen his skills for God’s use. I have found that as I increase my studying, my confidence in the reliability of the Scriptures and my walk with Christ have become more vibrant. Yes, I am now more confident to share Christ with non-Christians than I was during my youth, but I also personally enjoy the Christian life more than I had ever thought possible. The process of examining my beliefs, comparing them to non-Christian beliefs, and learning to defend my beliefs has been the single greatest source of growth and blessing in my life.

The field of apologetics is undergoing significant changes that correspond to the rise of postmodernism. Many Christian thinkers believe that traditional apologetics is in danger of becoming irrelevant in a postmodern culture, which has little use for logic and propositional truth. Some of the concerns of these Christian thinkers are valid and need to be incorporated into twenty-first-century apologetics. On the other hand, I believe that some of the concerns amount to little more than nervous hand-wringing that minimizes the power of God’s truth to overcome error and unbelief. *Ask Them Why* (ATW) reflects an awareness that postmodernism, a dominant worldview, must be addressed (see appendix D, page 239). We Christians can be confident that God’s truth will stand the test of time and that whenever the next major paradigm shift occurs (post-postmodernism!), the gospel of Jesus Christ will still be rescuing the hearts and minds of men and women, boys and girls.

Appendix C (p. 225) presents a partial transcript of a formal debate in which I participated. In some ways the debate repre-

sented the culmination of my studies in apologetics. When I was in high school, I would not have believed someone who told me I would someday debate the existence of God in such a setting. The experience was exceptionally positive, and it strengthened my belief that almost any Christian who is willing to think through the issues can learn how to effectively proclaim and defend the gospel. Christian, let's do our homework, prepare our hearts in prayer, and then get into the game.

Notes

1. By “secular” I do not necessarily mean crass naturalism or atheism (although this is included). Tens of millions of Americans claim to believe in God, yet this professed belief does not govern their actions in their daily lives. To those people who claim belief in God but rarely give it much thought, I attach the label “secular.” By “post-Christian” I mean the growing trend in our culture to move away from the Christian underpinnings of early American history. Unlike in the past, a high percentage of Americans today have never been exposed to the Bible and are completely unaware of even its most basic teachings.

2. For those who want a comprehensive treatment of the various methods of apologetics and an introduction to dozens of individual apologists, I recommend *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* by Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).

3. Everyone has a worldview. The term “worldview” refers to a person's core beliefs, which provide him or her with a “lens” through which the person sees and interprets the world and his or her place in it. Many people are not fully aware of their worldview commitments, but this lack of awareness does not prevent them from making use of their worldviews. This book will teach the Christian how to expose the flaws of non-Christian worldviews. A worldview includes a belief about God's existence and His character, standards of right and wrong, the nature of reality, and the meaning of life, among other essentials. The right-thinking Christian bases his or her worldview on the truths revealed in the inerrant Scripture. Appendix A (p. 209) is a fuller explanation of the Christian worldview.

CHAPTER I

THE POWER OF QUESTIONS

WHERE are you?" This simple question is one of the most profound and important ever asked. It was the question God asked Adam after Adam and Eve sinned and hid from Him in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6-9). Didn't God know? He did. He asked this question and the ones that followed, not for His information but for Adam and Eve's benefit (Gen. 3:11-13). God's questions forced the couple to acknowledge truths they did not want to face.

Questions: A Powerful Tool

A well-conceived question or series of questions can be a powerful tool in the proclamation and defense of the truth. Most Christians recognize the importance of proclaiming and defending the truth, but many have little understanding of, or appreciation for, the value of questions. This situation exists even

though the Bible is saturated with questions posed to expose the truth already known to the questioner. Christians who learn to effectively duplicate the Biblical model will find that evangelism and apologetics need not be a cause for fear and timidity but an act of courage, boldness, and confidence. The Ask Them Why (ATW) method is fairly easy to master. It cannot be mastered, however, until it is first understood.

Jesus: The Master Questioner

The Master Questioner in the Scriptures was Jesus Christ. In Matthew 14:31—17:25 Jesus asked almost two dozen questions, and because He is omniscient, He knew the answer to every one of them. Why then did He ask them? He asked questions to reveal a great deal of truth to the person who answered the questions.¹

Jesus frequently asked His disciples questions. He also dealt with unbelievers in a similar manner. Consider two examples. In Matthew 16:13 Christ asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Jesus perfectly knew the answer to that question. But He asked the question to sharpen the thinking of the men to whom He addressed the question. After they answered (v. 14), Jesus asked them a follow-up question: “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 15). The thinking prompted by Jesus’ questions was important in the process of preparing the disciples for future ministry.

A second example of the value of questions is found in Matthew 22:41–46. Jesus asked the same type of questions He had asked the disciples in Matthew 16, but in this case Jesus was dealing with the unbelieving Pharisees. Again, Jesus demonstrated the power of a carefully crafted series of questions. Note that His opening question was similar to the one put to the disciples: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” (v. 42).

The Pharisees replied, “The Son of David” (v. 42). By giving

this particular answer, the Pharisees revealed that they were failing to acknowledge the full implications of the person of Jesus, that is, His deity. He then asked a follow-up question by appealing to the Pharisees' own source of beliefs, the Old Testament. (The Pharisees at least claimed to be committed to the Scriptures, though in reality they did not truly practice them.) He asked, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord'?" (v. 43). Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 and asked the Pharisees, "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" (v. 45). Matthew recorded the response in verse 46: "And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."

In this portion of Scripture, we see that Jesus exposed the errors of the Pharisees simply by asking questions. By their own errors they were reduced to silence. (See also Matthew 21:23-27.)

Our Goal: To Speak the Truth in Love

It would have been wonderful if, upon having their errors pointed out, the Pharisees had had an immediate change of heart and embraced Jesus as "the Christ" and the Son of God. We should desire that response for all unbelievers. However, there is another important goal too: rendering the arguments of unbelievers powerless. People may still cling to their errors, but let it be in spite of sound reasoning to the contrary. The apostle Paul expressed it in this way: "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). We must rely on the Holy Spirit to touch the hearts of unbelievers, but let us fulfill our obligation to speak the truth and expose error.

This approach may include an attitude that the Christian must guard against. Our goal must not be to win an argument for the purpose of feeding our pride. It is not too difficult to trap most

non-Christians with our questions because they hold views that are inherently defective. Our goal must always be to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and to acknowledge their lost condition and point them to the salvation found in Christ alone (Acts 4:12). As someone has said, sharing the gospel is like one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread. We ask unbelievers questions to help them see that they need bread and do not know where to find it. Then by the grace of God, we can show unbelievers that the bread they need is Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

If unbelievers continue to reject the truth after being shown the errors of their position and the supremacy of the Biblical worldview, we at least know that we have spoken the truth and opposed error. This is no small issue. Christians who seek to be Biblical must love the truth. We must desire to see people brought to the truth, but even if they reject the truth, we perform a sacred service when we proclaim and defend it.

The Method: Ask Them Why

What questions should we ask? What errors are we trying to expose? Part 2 presents fictional encounters between Christians and non-Christians. These encounters are designed to show that in our culture there is no shortage of opportunities to ask questions that lead to truth. Every thinking person has his own set of beliefs, some of which are true and some of which are false. The non-Christian holds even true beliefs without adequate reasons. The encounter scenarios in part 2 show that the only sound basis for knowing truth and believing truth is a surrender of intellectual autonomy and submission to the teachings of God's authoritative revelation to mankind.² This revelation is found in the Bible. The process begins when we ask an unbeliever, why?³

Notes

1. Jesus asked different types of questions for different reasons, depending on the issue and the audience. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example (Luke 10:25–37). For our present purposes, let it simply be noted that Jesus regularly made use of questions in the proclamation of truth.

2. The concept of intellectual autonomy is an important one. “Autonomy” basically means “self-law,” or “self-rule.” Intellectual autonomy speaks of the human propensity to set one’s self up as the highest or final authority when it comes to the question of truth. This propensity first appeared in the Garden of Eden when the serpent persuaded Eve to set up her own thinking as the ultimate standard (Gen. 3:1–6). Eve decided that God’s word was not the highest authority and that it had to satisfy her sense of the way things ought to be. Over the centuries, intellectual autonomy has produced various forms of unbelief. The momentum today is toward postmodernism. (See appendix D, page 239.)

3. The Greek philosopher Socrates made use of questions as a method for exposing false assumptions and error as well as for planting seeds of truth or fleshing out truth that was innately known. Not surprisingly, his method became known as the Socratic method, but I do not believe that this Greek philosopher should be given credit as the originator of “the question as teaching tool.” The ancient book of Job testifies that God Himself was unsurpassed as a questioner many centuries before Socrates was born (Job 38–41). Also, Socrates’ view of innate knowledge differs from Biblical epistemology at key points, but that topic is beyond the scope of this volume.

For an interesting illustration of the Socratic method, I recommend Peter Kreeft’s *Socrates Meets Jesus: History’s Greatest Questioner Confronts the Claims of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987). I strongly disagree with some of Kreeft’s theology, but I have great respect for his abilities as a writer and thinker.