

Apologetics

Answers to Honest Questions



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STRONG

curriculum

A world weak on truth needs a strong, trustworthy message. STRONG Curriculum builds stronger churches by teaching all Scripture to produce spiritually mature believers who measure up to the stature of Christ.

A Plan You Can Trust

The Bible has the answers to what students need most. No other book or philosophy contains God's power to save and transform lives. Because of this, we've made it our unwavering commitment to build Strong Students upon the sure foundation of God's Word. With this curriculum, your church can develop teens who will be strong defenders of the faith.

The Strong Students scope and sequence is designed around the seven teaching aims Jesus modeled in His ministry. Since these are Jesus' aims, teachers can be confident in the aims' effectiveness and purpose. Every lesson in the Strong Students scope and sequence addresses at least one of Jesus' teaching aims.


Every lesson also focuses on students' needs. We understand the challenge of teaching the Bible to today's teens because of four barriers culture has pushed on them:


- Struggles with identity
- Subjective view of truth
- Hope in a social utopia
- Belief that a career and wealth guarantee happiness


Strong Students takes care of the tough part for you by striking at the foundation of these barriers and providing a Biblical response to each one. With Strong Students, you can concentrate on communicating to your teens and helping them grow into strong believers in Christ without worrying whether you are effectively addressing the philosophies competing for their minds.


Look for the **BuildUP** icons in the table of contents and on the first page of each lesson.


JESUS' TEACHING AIMS


 **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.** Jesus taught His students to trust in Him alone for salvation and to share the gospel with others. This aim is obviously fundamental to all the rest


 **UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ETHICS.** Jesus instructed His students to live according to moral values. These values provided them with the tools to make wise decisions.

 **INTERNALIZE GODLINESS.** Jesus taught His followers to be godly on the inside. He warned them not to become like the Pharisees, with a mere outward appearance of godliness.

 **LEARN DOCTRINE.** Jesus knew the importance of teaching His students the truth and identified doctrine as one of the means for spiritual growth. Wishy-washy doctrine leads to faulty practice.

 **DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS.** Jesus taught His followers to meet life's challenges in a way that honored and glorified God. He gave them the skills to navigate those challenges successfully.

 **UPLIFT OTHERS.** Jesus' life was all about others. Leading by example, He taught His followers to be all about others too.

 **PREPARE TO SERVE.** Jesus prepared His followers to serve in the context of local churches that were established soon after His ascension. He emphasized sacrifice and dedication.

How to Teach **STRONG STUDENTS** Lessons

Leading a Student to Christ

STRONG STUDENTS has been designed to help you clearly present God's Word to your students. Each lesson will guide students through the Bible, encouraging them to interact with the material and apply it to their lives.

Familiarize yourself with the resources included in the kit so that you can maximize your effectiveness in the classroom. The key resources you need are Student Books, the PowerPoint (CD), and the Home Connection Tool (CD).

Encourage students to use their Student Books during each lesson so they can follow the PowerPoint presentation by taking notes. The words to fill in the blanks are either part of the outline or highlighted in orange in the sentences in the PowerPoint.

Some of the PowerPoint presentations contain additional slides that obviously tie into the teacher guide lessons. Make sure you review the PowerPoint presentations before teaching.

The student books include a daily devotional. Encourage your students to complete them either before or after coming to class.

The Home Connection Tool gives the parents of your students an idea of what you are teaching in class. Consider emailing those to each family represented in your class. You can find them on the CD or online using the download code.

Before Each Lesson

- Read the Scripture Focus passage several times.
- Do the Time with God section of the Student Book to know what your students are studying.
- Memorize the key verses.
- Prepare the materials you will need for each activity.
- Work through the Bible Study section and carefully plan the lesson.
- Plan how you will apply the Bible lesson to your students' lives. Make sure what you say is clear and shows students how they can use the lesson.
- Pray for yourself, your students, and your lesson.

AS A TEACHER, your most important concern is the personal salvation of your students. Find out whether your students know Jesus Christ as their Savior in a way that doesn't introduce doubt in their minds. An easy and gentle way to find this out is to give your students several minutes to write out an answer to a question like, How can a person get to Heaven? Collect their answers and read them during the following week. If any of your students seem confused about salvation, you can present the gospel to them and provide the opportunity for them to receive Christ. If possible, deal with students individually.

The Plan of Salvation

- Everyone is a sinner. No one can live up to God's perfect standard (Romans 3:23).
- Sin's penalty is death (Romans 6:23).
- God loves us and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our sin. Christ died in our place (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).
- When a person places his trust in Jesus' payment for sins, Christ becomes his Savior. His sins are forgiven, and he receives God's gift of eternal life (John 1:12; 5:24).
- Everlasting life begins the moment we trust in Jesus (John 3:36).
- After that, nothing we ever do will take us out of God's hand; we are secure (John 10:27–29).
- The experience of the new birth (being born into God's family) is not based on a feeling, but on confidence in God's Word (1 John 5:11, 12).

Encourage students to pray, but explain that prayer does not save a person. Prayer is how we communicate our inward thoughts to God. Ask new believers to explain what they have done and what has happened to them.

Discipleship

Encourage new believers to read the Bible, and explain the importance of prayer. Also explain 1 John 1:9 to them so they can deal with sin in their new Christian life. Make it a priority to follow up with new believers.

Knowing Middle School Students

Description of Physical, Social, and Emotional Development

- I MAY feel developmentally out of step with my peers—behind or ahead in physical changes—as I enter and experience puberty.
- MAY be sensitive about my weight and body shape and worry about whether I am normal.
- I AM developing my own sense of identity.
- I AM more interested in and influenced by my peer group than by the adults in my life.
- I MAY be moody, depressed, or anxious about academic or social issues in my life.
- I AM very focused on myself and may feel both high expectations and lack of confidence.
- I AM better able to express feelings through talking, but I tend to respond dramatically, feeling that no one else has ever experienced the same feelings and emotions.
- I DO NOT always exhibit the emotional maturity that matches my more adult-like appearance. I have trouble thinking before acting; sometimes I seem silly and unfocused on the task at hand.

Effective Responses

- Provide emotional and spiritual support and encourage students to develop a strong sense of self as a valuable person, created by God.
- Accept students as they are and avoid comparing to others. Resist stereotyping. Not every tall boy is a basketball player.
- Generate an atmosphere of acceptance and love for all, demonstrating interest and care for each student.
- Create an atmosphere of mutual respect so youth feel they are part of a community.
- Help build genuine relationships by honestly sharing mistakes and life experiences.
- Help students talk through the ramifications of their choices without asking, “How could you? What were you thinking?”

- Avoid arguments by remaining calm and not engaging in banter over an issue.
- Be patient with the tendency of some youth toward constant personal grooming.

Cognitive (Learning) Development

- I MAY be hesitant to try new things for fear of embarrassing myself in front of my peer group.
- I AM developing new thinking skills and am able to think about multiple options and possibilities.
- I CAN think more deeply and significantly about abstract ideas such as faith.
- I AM developing a stronger sense of right and wrong.
- I MAY be ready to take significant steps in areas of faith and Christian growth.

Effective Instructional Methods

- Create an open and stress-free environment where youth can learn and share concerns in a confidence-building atmosphere.
- Provide background information, a purpose to the lesson, and understanding of the text.
- Combine love, high energy, enthusiasm, and seriousness with engaging ways to present the lesson. Use personal stories that illustrate Biblical principles to keep students engaged in learning.
- Provide honest answers to questions.
- Stimulate thinking in areas of salvation and Christian growth.
- Help Christians work through issues of assurance of salvation and to begin studying the Bible for daily decision making.
- Encourage students to articulate Biblical principles of right and wrong that they are learning from God’s Word.
- Invite volunteers to look up and read aloud Bible passages. But don’t put students on the spot or ask them to do things that make them feel foolish.

SESSION 1

WHAT IS APOLOGETICS?

Scripture Focus

John 16:7–11; 1 Peter 3:14, 15, 20–25

BuildUP Theme



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God expects us to prepare to defend and share our faith.

Measurable Response

The students will assess their readiness to defend and share their faith.

Memory Verse

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear”
(1 Peter 3:15). NKJV

“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” (1 Peter 3:15). ESV

Teacher Preparation

- Read 1 Peter 3:14, 15. Peter wrote to believers about facing persecution for their faith. Such persecution is a blessing in that it means God’s Word is going forth and having an impact. It is also a blessing in that God rewards believers for suffering for their faith. But not all believers are prepared to stand for Christ and confidently share their faith. So Peter called believers to get ready to take a stand, beginning with sanctifying the Lord in their hearts and including being ready to defend their faith.
- How prepared are you to defend your faith? Have you thought through how you would answer someone who doubts God exists or that Jesus actually rose from the dead? Do you know how to defend the fact that the Bible is the trustworthy Word of God? Do you have an answer for the presence of evil and suffering in the world?
- This course will prepare you and your students to have an answer for those who question your faith. It will give you confidence and make you effective witnesses for Christ.

Cultural Barrier

This session addresses the claim that truth is subjective. The world likes to make that claim because it gives them an out when confronted with truths that make them uncomfortable. They dismiss uncomfortable truths about God and the Bible as being someone else’s truth. They then adopt conflicting truths, thinking their truths are just as valid. The Bible’s claims are objective. God’s Word leaves no room for alternatives. This session begins to establish that fact.

Session Starters

Option 1—Wrong Beliefs

Steps

1. Share a wrong belief you held as a child. Perhaps you had a misunderstanding of who someone was, what a word meant, or how something worked. Share what contributed to your misunderstanding of reality and what helped you come to understand the truth.

2. Discuss beliefs with your students.

ASK: What wrong beliefs did you hold as a child?

ASK: What, if anything, did you do to defend your belief?

ASK: What caused you to recognize and accept the truth?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Most people have wrong beliefs about God, the Bible, Jesus, and the origins of the world. Some have dedicated their lives to defending their wrong beliefs and attacking Christianity. They sound convincing. This course will help us know how to respond to such attacks and how to defend Christianity.

Option 2—Ready to Answer

Gather

- Paper and pens.

Steps

1. Read the following true or false questions. Have students write their answers.

- True or False: There are errors in the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. True.
- True or False: The New Testament contains myths and legends. False.
- True or False: Truth is determined by what a person believes is true. False.
- True or False: There are no good arguments for the existence of God. False.
- True or False: The existence of evil proves God isn't real. False.
- True or False: The evidence for the big bang is irrefutable. *False.*

- True or False: The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is irrefutable. *True.*

2. Review the questions and have the students give their answers. Discuss being ready to talk on the topics referenced in the questions.

ASK: Which of the topics covered by the quiz questions would you like to learn more about?

ASK: How prepared are you to talk about them?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

This course presents a defense of the Biblical truths about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the world. Such truths aren't just our opinions but objective truths that will greatly affect everyone. This session will help begin to understand apologetics, the process of answering questions about the basis of our faith.

Bible Study

I. Defining Apologetics

The word "apologetics" has nothing to do with apologizing or admitting wrongdoing. It means the opposite in a sense. "Apologetics" comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning to "speak away." The word was used in ancient court rooms to describe the answer a defendant gave in response to an accusation. The defendant claimed he was innocent of charges of wrongdoing and spoke on his behalf to prove it before a judge.

Christian apologetics, then, is generally a defense of the Christian faith. All believers should be working to become good defenders of their faith. It is our duty and not something to be left to intellectuals or scholars. Teens can practice apologetics. Peter made clear that apologetics is for all believers.

II. Apologetics Guidelines (1 Pet. 3:14, 15, 20–25)

Peter talks about defending the faith in his first epistle. From his instructions, we can draw four important points to guide our apologetics.

A. Share Christ (1 Pet. 3:14, 15)

Peter wrote to a group of believers who faced persecution or at least the possibility of suffering at the hands of unbelievers. He wanted them to know that suffering for being godly brings blessings.

READ: 1 Peter 3:14.

In Greek, the preposition *apo* means "away" and the word *logia* means "speech." The apologist fends off accusatory speech, showing it to be false.

Isaiah called on Israel to fear God rather than their enemies. Instead of making sinful alliances with foreign powers, they should have trusted in God, their rock and sanctuary. Isaiah warned that God would become a snare to them if they decided to rebel against Him by making alliances (Isaiah 8:12–15).

The blessing for suffering as a righteous person comes in the form of deep joy. That's what "blessed" means. That joy comes from God and is not normal. People normally get angry or sad when enduring suffering.

ASK: What forms of suffering might you endure for being righteous? Which ones have you endured?

Peter, quoting Isaiah 8:12, told his audience not to be afraid of the possibility of suffering for Christ's sake. Instead, they were to put their focus on Christ.

READ: 1 Peter 3:15.

Believers are to make Christ the Lord over their hearts. Our "hearts" are where we make decisions that affect our thoughts, actions, and direction in life. To sanctify the Lord in one's heart means to treat Him as holy, or set apart, from everyone else. Jesus is to be the most important Person in our lives. We should take our cues from Christ rather than living in response to threats from unbelievers.

B. Share confidently (2 Pet. 3:15)

When believers set Christ up as the most important Person in their lives, they need to be ready to talk about their relationship with Him. Peter commands believers to be ready to give a defense, or to speak to the validity of Christianity. Peter means to be ready to "speak away" the attacks on Christianity and to present truths that validate their faith. He also means to be bold and confident in defending the faith.

ASK: Some believers set themselves up as the most important person in their lives. How do you think they will respond to ridicule for their faith? *Many will cave to the threats and not defend their faith, choosing to fit in or go unnoticed instead.*

READ: Mark 14:66–72. **ASK:** Who do you think Peter had set up as most important in his heart on the night Jesus was arrested and tried? *He had set himself up as most important. He claimed Jesus was first in his life (Mark 14:29), but his actions betrayed his heart's sinful condition.*

Peter spoke from experience. He had learned the importance of making Christ holy, or first, in his life. After his miserable failure and following Christ's death and resurrection, he successfully faced many threats, choosing to give an answer for the hope that was in him instead of cowering in fear. Christ's example impacted his life (1 Pet. 2:21–25). In the end, Peter died as a martyr, just as Christ had predicted (John 21:18, 19).

ASK: What do you think Peter concluded about his life as he was being carried away to be martyred for his faith? Did he consider

himself blessed? Was he glad he had defended his faith in the face of threats?

C. Share hope (2 Pet. 3:15)

Once Peter committed to live for Christ, he lived with certainty that Christ will prevail and that all God's promises will come true. All believers share Peter's eternal hope. And when we cling to our hope in the face of persecution or ridicule (1 Pet. 3:15), we present a strong argument for the validity of God, Christ, and the Bible. Believers who live full of hope in God will stand out in a world of uncertainty and despondency.

ASK: What might hope look like in a believer's life? *The person is filled with joy and optimism rather than discouragement and worry.*

ASK: What practices cause a person to become obviously hopeful? *Building a deep faith in God through studying His Word; living with eternal values in view; loving others with Christ's sacrificial love.*

ASK: Has anyone ever asked you about the hope in you? What were the circumstances? What did you say?

The darker and more hopeless the world becomes, the greater the opportunity believers have to shine the hope of Christ. We must be intentional in conveying our hope to the world through our words and actions.

D. Share meekly and respectfully (2 Pet. 3:15, 20–25)

The hope-filled believer should also be meek and respectful—meek toward others and respectful toward God. Believers represent Christ to the world, so they should not be heartless or aggressive in defending their faith and hope in Christ. Unbelievers aren't the believer's enemies to be silenced; they are the believer's mission field. Heartless and aggressive defense of the faith ruins Christ's testimony. Believers must meekly serve unbelievers, caring for their lost souls as they present to them their case for God, Christ, and the Bible.

ASK: What might motivate a person to be heartless and aggressive in defending Christianity? *They are self-centered and make personal any opposition to Christianity. They are aggressive and heartless because they want to dominate and silence their opposition.*

To fear God is to respect His place of authority in our lives and trust His perfect wisdom in directing our lives. He commands us to give an answer for the hope that is in us, and He tells us to do it with meekness. Our fear of God will motivate us to obey God in the manner He directs.

Peter recorded that Jesus exercised both meekness and respect for God while facing the threat of the cross.

READ: 1 Peter 3:20–25.

Jesus, though all-powerful and divine, submitted to the cross with meekness, refusing to defend Himself while committing Himself to the Father. Peter pointed to Jesus as the believer's example of suffering for doing good. He also noted that Jesus' suffering makes our righteous obedience to God possible. So Jesus gives us an example of meekness and then enables our meekness.

III. Purposes for Apologetics

Historically, apologists have recognized four main reasons for apologetics. Each of them will be evident throughout this course.

A. Provide evidence of Christianity

Apologetics validates Christian belief, setting forth positive evidence for Christianity. It communicates that Christianity is reasonable and worth accepting.

This function of apologetics includes a careful examination of scientific and philosophical evidence. The apologist presents the Christian worldview alongside opposing worldviews to show the validity of Christianity. If Christianity is all it claims to be, then facts should align with its claims.

ASK: What facts would you set forth as evidence that Christianity is a valid belief system?

B. Defend attacks against Christianity

Apologetics also deals with attacks unbelievers lob at Christianity. For instance, unbelievers will attack the Bible as being full of errors and ultimately unreliable. Apologetics gives answers to those attacks. Such answers clear away obstacles that keep unbelievers from considering Christ. It dispels arguments that Christianity is unreasonable.

ASK: What attacks on Christianity have you heard?

ASK: What about Christianity might seem unreasonable to unbelievers?

C. Refute arguments for opposing beliefs

Unbelievers hold a variety of views that are opposed to Christianity. They, like Christians, give their defense of their views, listing what they consider to be irrefutable evidence. Evolutionists, for example, teach that they have clear evidence for the evolutionary origin of all living things.

ASK: How is “evidence” for evolution presented in public schools, secular museums, and on secular websites?

Generations of unbelievers who have gone through public schools believe evolution is a fact rather than a theory. They see the world, including themselves, as a byproduct of random chance rather than part of God’s plan. Apologetics examines the “evidence” for evolution and other systems of belief to expose them as unreasonable and even impossible.

D. Persuade unbelievers to trust Christ

Finally, apologetics seeks to persuade unbelievers to trust Christ as Savior. The Holy Spirit ultimately convicts unbelievers of truth and of their need for a Savior (John 16:8–11). No one can make someone believe in Christ by carefully crafting arguments. But the Holy Spirit can use the Biblical truth shared during an apologetic defense to draw the unbeliever to God.

READ: John 16:7–11.

The Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers of their sin, the need to meet God’s righteous standard, and God’s coming judgment on sin. God’s righteous standard is embodied in Christ. He obviously left to return to the Father. The Spirit now uses God’s Word as shared by believers to reveal the righteous standard for humanity. Believers must make God’s Word an integral part of their apologetics. God’s Word is powerful (Heb. 4:12).

Memory Builder

Gather

- Whiteboard and marker.

Steps

1. Write out 1 Peter 3:15 on the board. Review the meaning of the verse.

Paul calls on believers to give Christ a place of lordship in their hearts. They must recognize Christ as their leader. Christ will use God’s Word to guide them in preparing to give an answer for the hope that is in them. That presupposes their hope is obvious to others. Preparing to give answers means learning to defend their faith. Believers should deliver such answers with meekness toward others and respect toward God.

2. Discuss being spiritually ready to practice apologetics.

ASK: If you began to share Christ with unbelieving friends, how would they react? Would they think it is odd for you to be sharing Christ, or would they think it makes sense?

ASK: What might you do to make your hope in Christ more obvious to the unbelievers in your life?

3. Alternate between erasing key words in the verse and reviewing it as a class.

Session Application

Steps

1. Review the Bible lesson.

The word “apologetics” comes from a Greek word meaning to “speak away.” The word describes the answer a defendant gives in response to an accusation. Guidelines for apologetics include focusing on sharing Christ, sharing truth with confidence, sharing one’s hope in Christ, and sharing truth with meekness toward others and respect toward God. Apologetics includes making a positive case for Christianity, refuting opposing beliefs, and persuading unbelievers to trust Christ. God expects all believers to practice apologetics as part of their daily lives.

2. Read some of the titles or themes for the coming lessons in this course. Talk to your students about how ready they are to answer the questions this course raises.

ASK: Which of the questions raised by this course would you be comfortable answering?

ASK: Which of the questions have unbelievers asked you? How did you respond?

3. Pray for your students to put Christ first in their lives and to build their confidence in giving a reason for the hope that is in them.

Session Takeaways

Before dismissing the students, draw their attention to the Time with God page in their student books. Instruct them to complete the study on their own. The activity will reinforce their understanding of the guidelines for practicing apologetics.