

The Compass

a tool for disciplers



Equipping Believers for Ministry

Apologetics

Conversation On the Journey

The Biblical Foundation

The study of articulating answers to philosophical questions and objections raised against the Gospel and Christian faith is called apologetics. It comes from the Greek word “apologia” (from where we get the word “apology”) and means to make a well – reasoned defense.

You may want to refer to Col. 4:6 or Phil. 1:7 in demonstrating the biblical foundation for apologetics, but generally speaking it’s going to be more interesting to take a look at some biblical examples of apologetics in action; examples of where the disciples not only tried to explain the Gospel but were also trying to provide proof, or evidence, as well as anticipate objections.

The Book of Acts contains some of the disciples’ real-time evangelistic messages and there are some great examples of apologetics in here. I often go through Acts 2, but you may want to choose a different passage to go through for this exercise. Have your disciple read Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14 to 2:37 (but start at Acts 2:1 to get the whole context) and ask her to identify some of the persuasive reasoning used by Peter to defend the Gospel and the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Here are a few:

1. Peter quotes from Joel. Read Joel 2:28-3:2. In this section, Joel is describing some of the phenomenon that will surround the messianic age: the earth going dark, people other than the prophets prophesizing and having visions. When the Lord died the land had gone black, and with the coming of the Holy Spirit people were speaking in foreign tongues (read just prior to Acts 2:28) and prophesying. Peter is saying “can’t you see that this is what’s going on, therefore it must be the coming of the messianic age.”
2. Peter then brings to their remembrance the miracles Jesus did. This was not just anyone who had claimed to be the Messiah - Jesus’ miracles provided a strong defense to that claim.
3. Next Peter mentions that King David, in Psalm 16:8-11, had spoken of the resurrection of the messianic king from the dead. Because David never rose from the dead, Peter’s point is, the prophecy must refer to Jesus.
4. Now, look at this last point: Peter says that David’s tomb “is here to this day.” This is a very tactful inference to the fact, to which his Jewish audience is painfully aware, that Jesus’ tomb - unlike David’s - is currently empty.

This Week’s Excursion

Addressing questions skeptics may pose towards the Gospel is not usually included in beginning discipleship, but because we are helping disciples communicate their faith in order to then multiply their faith, it will not be long before your disciple will be sharing her faith if she isn’t already. So, you are going to have to teach her how to answer some of the basic objections raised concerning the Gospel message. The goal of the appointment is to discuss the biblical foundation for apologetics, the attitude by which one should address objections, and to whet her appetite to study on her own.



What you want your disciple to see is the thought, the reasoning, and the persuasive defense of the Gospel that's going on. This is not simply a presentation of the Good News, Peter is using apologetics to present a strong defense that the Gospel is true, and anticipating questions that would be in the mind of his audience.

The Heart of Apologetics

Well, you've been doing a lot of talking, so it's time to ask a question and do some listening. You might ask your disciple if she has ever had to defend in any way the Gospel or her being a Christian. If so, what did she say and how did she say it?

This next section of the appointment deals with the motivation behind the use of apologetics. 1 Pet. 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Where people lose focus in apologetics is when an attempt to prove that the Gospel is right, subtly turns into an attempt to prove that they're right. One is out of a concern for the hearer, the other is out of a selfish desire to be right or win the argument. Most Christians have at least one story where they have erred in this way and this would be a good place to share yours.

You might ask her how she would show "gentleness and respect" when communicating the Gospel. Some good answers or issues to point out would be: to always seek to understand the person's real hesitancy behind his surface question; to always be prayerful about what questions and issues to address and what not to; to ask questions and clarify what you think you "hear" them saying; and perhaps the best thing you can do if you don't know an answer is to humbly say, "That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that. Can I get back to you with an answer?"

Share any examples you have to help them see what it means to defend the Gospel, while at the same time being gentle and respectful.

Basic Apologetics

In presenting the Gospel there are several issues of defense, or apologetics, with which your disciple will need to become well-versed. The first is a defense of Jesus as the Messiah. But before you give them some answers, ask them how they would defend the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

There are many ways to defend this belief, but have your disciple master the one most found in the Bible: proof from fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Tell your disciple she will need to learn, memorize, or have accessible four passages from the Old Testament. They are:

Is. 9:6,7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."

Next Steps

While you've just equipped her to answer one question, there are dozens more to which she'll need to become conversant. You won't have the time to teach her all they should know on this topic; your goal is to whet her appetite to read, learn, and memorize more in the realm of apologetics. So the application is to put in her hands a couple of articles that will help her master a few more basic apologetic answers.



Is. 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.”

Mic. 5:2: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Is. 53:1-11: “...He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed... He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the LORD makes His life a guilt offering... After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.”

Isaiah 9 says that God will be born as a child. Isaiah 7 is a prophecy that a sign of the Messiah’s birth would be a pregnant virgin. Micah 5:2 states that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, and Isaiah 61 predicts that he will be crucified for the sins of the world.

It’s also important for them to remember when these Old Testament books were written, for their power lies not simply in their accuracy, but in how many centuries they were written before their fulfillment. The book of Isaiah was written around 600 B.C. and Micah about 700 B.C.

To show someone these passages and prophecies, and for that person to see how clearly they describe the story of Jesus, is extremely persuasive. For someone to further realize how long these prophecies were written before Jesus’ birth is additionally compelling, and when one ponders how many other people could fit this description besides Jesus (born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, crucified, etc.), the evidence becomes overwhelming.

There it is, your disciple’s first introduction to apologetics. Have her learn these passages.

End 

Side Trails

Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Josh McDowell. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

A Ready Defense. Josh McDowell. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The Case for Christ. Lee Strobel. Zondervan.

Why I Believe. James Kennedy. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

I’m Glad You Asked. Kenneth Boa, Larry Moody. Cook Communications.

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