

Short Talking Points for Complicated Questions
About Christianity and Apologetics

*When talking with someone about faith, knowing how to respond to their questions is hard. So much information exists for each issue below. Many people are (understandably) overwhelmed with the information and afraid of either not being able to answer questions or answering a question wrongly.

*The goal of this document is simply to provide some talking points. On each of the issues, always be willing to say, "I don't know the answer to your question, but I know some places we can look for answers and I'd like to explore this alongside you."

*We have provided a list of resources on the Emmaus website (www.emmausokc.org/doubt), and feel free to reach out to any of the pastors at Emmaus. (My email address is owen@emmausokc.org.)

1. Creation - Is there a God? (*Talking Points Acronym: B.O.M.*)

a. Keep Pushing **Backwards** toward **"the Beginning"**

- i. Unless it feels absolutely necessary, don't focus on issues of how old the universe is or even what kind of God might exist.
- ii. The only issue at this point is whether something exists other than "matter".
- iii. If someone mentions the Big Bang, that's good. You can ask, "Where did the material for this event or the spark for this event originate?"
- iv. If someone says, "Matter is eternal," continue to ask, "Yes, but where did that matter come from?"

b. **Order** (Design)

- i. Does the natural world seem most in keeping with something designed with order and irreducible complexity, or does it seem like a matter of chance?

c. Focus on **Moral Law**

- i. Do you have a sense that right and wrong exists?
- ii. Where does this sense of right and wrong originate?

d. Simply ask: **If there is no creator, what is your personal explanation for how matter came to exist?**

2. Resurrection - Did Jesus of Nazareth die on the cross and rise from the dead? (*"Early A"*)

a. **Early Accounts**

- i. Paul's mention of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is within 25 years of Jesus. The Gospel accounts are within 25-50 years.
- ii. For ancient historical documents, a 25-50 year time span (in a culture that emphasized eyewitness, oral accounts) is remarkable.
- iii. Someone can reject the Resurrection, but they must be ready to admit that the evidence for Jesus' death and resurrection is early and widespread.

b. **Early Appearances**

- i. Prominence of female eyewitnesses
- ii. Lack of idealization regarding Jesus' death - it's simple and straight-forward
- iii. Multiple appearances – even scholars who reject the resurrection have to account for the fact that early Christians *saw something* and the appearances don't fit the stereotype of mass hallucinations

c. **Early Attempts to Cover Up**

- i. From the week after Jesus' death, attempts were made to explain away his resurrection.
- ii. If Jesus' body was still in the grave, counter evidence to the resurrection should have been easy to provide, but there is no indication that his body was still in the grave.
- iii. Somehow, he died, he was buried, he was no longer in the grave, and multiple people experienced an appearance of Jesus over an extended period of time.

3. **Eternity - Is there anything beyond this life?** (*Internal / External*)

a. **Internal Sense of Life After Death**

- i. "God has put eternity into man's heart." (Ecclesiastes 3:11)
- ii. Simply ask - Do you believe there is anything after this life?
- iii. **Not concerned at this point about what might happen after life. Just focused on whether life after death is possible.

b. **Extensive and Varied Belief in Life after Death**

- i. Many (most?) world religions contain some belief that this life is not the end.
- ii. This extensive belief seems to point to a shared reality (even if our atheist friends might suggest that this shared reality only came about because people need eternal hope to keep them going in this dark world).
- iii. Because the belief in eternity is so pervasive, the belief seems to go beyond a simple matter of evolution or social construction.

c. **Desire for Beauty, Adventure, Curiosity, and Justice**

- i. People have a strong sense that this life doesn't (and cannot) feel complete or sufficient. There is so much more to know, explore, learn, and discover.
- ii. Also, many people have a strong sense of justice. We seek justice for others in this world, but justice often feels incomplete and imperfect in this world.
- iii. This sense of justice should point us toward a future Judge.

d. Ask - **If eternity exists, are you ready to stand before your Creator?**

4. **Bible - Can I trust the Bible?** (*Story*)

a. **Unified** Story

- i. The Biblical story was written over thousands of years by multiple authors, yet it holds together remarkably well from beginning to end, with multiple types of writing and multiple characters.
- ii. Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22 illustrate the connection from beginning to end.

b. **Realistic** Story

- i. The Biblical story is not idealistic. The characters are flawed. The story deals with sin, evil, and death. The story reflects what people experience in the world.
- ii. The stories match what we have come to learn from history and archaeology.
- iii. The stories must be read as the original audience would've received them, with the genre (style of writing) that would've made sense to the original audience. The stories are written to actual people in actual places and circumstances.

c. **Written** Story - Manuscripts open to study and critical analysis

- i. The Bible was not composed in a single moment, by an unsuspecting author in a private setting.
- ii. The Biblical evidence consists of thousands of manuscripts written by multiple authors, and these manuscripts are open to study and critical analysis.
- iii. Even if the message of the Bible is rejected, people must account for its literary credibility and manuscript evidence.

5. **Suffering - If God exists, why is there suffering in the world?** (*Cross/Resurrection*)

a. **Everyone Must Deal with the Effects/Reality of evil**, even if they reject God.

- i. The "Problem of Suffering" is often the most difficult question to answer. This question is often quite emotional and personal for the one who is asking. The question is rarely theoretical or purely intellectual.
- ii. If someone has trouble believing in God because of the reality of suffering, it is helpful to ask - "How do you explain the suffering and evil in the world? Where does the idea of evil come from? What is the best answer and response to this suffering?"

b. **Free Will**

- i. Not every Christian has the same beliefs about free will. However, everyone will acknowledge that people are not robots or living fully pre-determined lives (at least I hope they don't believe this!).
- ii. In order for God to create the very best possible world (love, joy, redemption, sacrifice, worship, flourishing), a world had to exist in which evil, rebellion, and suffering were possible.

c. **Already / Not Yet = **Emphasize the CROSS AND RESURRECTION**

- i. God Himself has Dealt with Suffering, and through Jesus Christ, has experienced suffering.
- ii. God is not distant from suffering or unconcerned. He has addressed suffering and provided an answer and a path that goes through and beyond suffering. Suffering won't have the final word. God is able to redeem, use, and overcome suffering.
- iii. Without the Cross and Resurrection, I simply know of no way to respond to people's questions about suffering and evil in the world.

6. **New Generation - Is God good?** ("What world does Christianity make possible?")

a. **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

- i. **Acknowledge the bad and the ugly** - We must admit where Christianity has been misused, but show how these instances don't represent the true character or theology of Christianity.
- ii. **Share Examples of the good** of Christianity (medicine, education, etc)
- iii. ***Rebecca McLaughlin's work is very helpful for this question.

b. **Sexuality / Ethics**

- i. Does the Christian sexual ethic lead to a world that is good and healthy for people in general?
- ii. If no boundaries are placed on sexuality, does that lead to a better future? (I think most people would admit not.)
- iii. If boundaries are needed, how do we determine those boundaries? (Christianity has a helpful, time-tested, good approach to boundaries.)

c. **Politics**

- i. It's not uncommon for younger people to be bothered by the apparent connection between Christianity and one political party in America.
- ii. We must show how the Bible speaks to God's sovereign rule over earthly political rulers, and how the way of Jesus critiques every human form of government.
- iii. *Discussions of politics are an opportunity to see brokenness in the world and the futility of purely human solutions.*
- iv. For a younger generation (and many people from older generations), we don't want partisan politics to distract people from the true Gospel message.
- v. Point to Jesus, the hope we have in Him, and the power of God's Kingdom.

d. **Future** - In its best form, does Christianity have the potential to lead to a better future?