

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT

JESUS AND THE GOSPELS

JOSH McDOWELL
& SEAN McDOWELL, PhD



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**JOSH MCDOWELL
& SEAN MCDOWELL, PHD**



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Evidence That Demands a Verdict Study Guide

Jesus and the Gospels

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* Bible study. For the next six sessions, we will be investigating some of the most important questions we can ask in life. Questions such as:

- Why is evidence important for faith?
- Is there such a thing as truth?
- Is the New Testament reliable?
- Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?
- Did Jesus claim to be God?
- How do we know the Bible is accurate?

It's a big journey that we are undertaking—a journey that for me (Josh) began as a result of a struggle. I started my college years with a lot of hurt, anger, and bitterness. I was desperately seeking happiness and meaning in life, and I simply didn't know where to find it. I was successful in school, in business, in sports, and even in campus leadership. I put on a smile and acted like I had it all together, but my life seemed so empty. I desperately wanted to know truth.

It was at college that I encountered a small group of people, two professors or three professors and eight students, whose lives I could tell were different. It was clear to me they had something I didn't have. So, one day I asked one of the professors, "Tell me why you're so different from all the other students and faculty." She looked me straight in the eye and said two words I never expected to hear: "Jesus Christ."

Her answer struck me as the stupidest thing I had ever heard. “Jesus Christ?” I laughed. “Don’t give me that kind of garbage. I’m fed up with religion and the Bible. And I’m fed up with the church.” Immediately, she shot back, “Mister, I didn’t say *religion*. I said *Jesus Christ*.” She pointed out something I had not known—Christianity is *not* a religion. Christianity is God coming to men and women *through* Jesus Christ.

My new friends then issued me a challenge. They dared me—a pre-law student—to make a rigorous and intellectual examination of the claims of Jesus Christ. At first I thought it was a joke, but eventually I accepted their challenge. In time, the evidence led me to the conclusion that God did manifest himself through the Scriptures and the person of Christ. But what brought me to Christ was the love of God. I saw in the Bible that even if I were the only person in the world, Jesus would *still* have died for me.

Once I came to this intellectual conviction, I began to strategize how I could share the things I had discovered with others. During the first thirteen years after becoming a Christian, I shared my faith and continued to research the evidential basis for the Christian faith. After I would speak, people from the audience would ask me for copies of my notes. This gave me the idea of publishing my research to inform those who were truly seeking truth as well as to encourage followers of Christ. Out of this work came *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

Each video session in this study will feature a fifteen- to twenty-minute discussion between me and my son Sean as we tackle some of the biggest challenges to Christianity that we present in the book. During the course of this study, you will receive a background in what is known as *apologetics*. Note that this word does not mean to *apologize* for your faith—rather, it comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “to answer” or “to reason.” In other words, if someone asks why you believe in Jesus, the answer you give them is apologetics.

Christianity does not demand a *blind* faith but an *intelligent* faith. To this end, this study will help you to know the truth, understand your faith, and provide sound evidence to enable you to defend your beliefs. But even more, it will help you remember the reason *why* it is important to do this—not to get into intellectual arguments and prove a point but so you can share the love and truth of God with others. The core of apologetics, and this study, is about clearing away the stumbling blocks that derail people from their journey to Christ.

If you are a follower of Christ, our prayer is that God will use this material to give you newfound confidence that what you believe is true and a newfound ability to boldly share your faith with others. And if you are one who is seeking to know more about Christ, our prayer is that you will discover through this study just how much God truly cares for you and desires to know you personally. So, with this in mind . . . let's begin!

Josh McDowell

How to Use This Guide

The *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a welcome section, two questions to get you thinking about the topic, and a reading from a key passage of Scripture. You will then watch a fifteen-to twenty-minute video featuring Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell and engage in some small-group discussion. You will close each session with a brief time of personal reflection and prayer as a group.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide. You are also encouraged to have a copy of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. (See the Recommended Reading section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapters that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.)

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from

participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion.

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, reflect on the material you have covered by engaging in any or all of the between-sessions activities. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

Keep in mind that the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination—so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be attentive to what God is saying to you as you weigh the *evidence that demands a verdict* for Jesus and the Gospels.



Note: If you are a group leader, there are additional resources provided in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.



SESSION ONE

WHY IS EVIDENCE IMPORTANT FOR FAITH?

[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling,
not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and
grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus . . . to which I was
appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. . . .
I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to
keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

2 TIMOTHY 1:9, 11-12

Welcome

Imagine a courtroom scene. At the head of the courtroom, behind a desk on an elevated platform, sits the judge. Positioned nearby is the court reporter, the clerk, and the bailiff. To the right is the jury. In the middle of the room, off to one side, is the lawyer who will be prosecuting the case. To the other side is the defendant and his attorney.

It is the job of the prosecutor to make his case in such a way that it leaves no reasonable doubt the defendant is guilty. To do so, he will call witnesses to testify and present relevant evidence. But now imagine that as the prosecutor steps up to make his opening arguments, he simply tells the judge and jury that they need to have faith that his convictions about the defendant are true. Chances are, not only would the prosecutor fail in his attempts to get the court to believe him in “blind faith,” but he would also likely get thrown off the case.

What is interesting is that many Christians today treat their faith this same way. Some even believe this type of blind faith is *required* . . . that they are never supposed to have any doubts about God, or the Bible, or the doctrines they learned in church. German philosopher and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche criticized Christians for this very reason when he wrote, “Christianity has done its utmost to close the circle and declared even doubt to be sin. One is supposed to be cast into belief without reason, by a miracle, and from then on to swim in it as in the brightest and least ambiguous of elements. . . . What is wanted are blindness and intoxication and an eternal song over the waves in which reason has drowned.”¹

The truth is that Christianity never demands blind faith. Furthermore, by taking on the role of the prosecutor and investigating the claims of the Bible, we find that God *does* provide enough evidence for rational belief. In fact, author Lee Strobel, a former journalist and skeptic, found after conducting his own investigation of Christianity, “The conclusion was compelling, an intelligent entity has quite literally spelled out the evidence of his existence through

the four chemical letters in the genetic code. It's almost as if the Creator autographed every cell."²

God has not provided *exhaustive* knowledge of his existence, but he has given *sufficient* knowledge for those with an open heart and mind. In this session, we will take the first step on this journey to discovery by looking at why evidence is so important for faith.³

Share

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Next, begin by discussing one of the following questions:

- Why is it important to have evidence to back up your belief in something? When are some times that you put your faith in something that later proved to not be worthy of your trust?

— or —

- What is the single biggest question about truth, the Bible, or Jesus that you find people struggle with today? What evidence are you hoping God provides to you during this study to answer that question?

Read

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage from 1 Peter 3:15–17. Listen for fresh insight and then share any new thoughts with the group using the questions that follow.

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; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

According to this passage, what should believers in Christ be ready to defend?

What traits should you display when sharing the evidence for your faith?

Which of these two is harder for you to maintain when you are in the midst of defending your beliefs? Why?

Watch

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Notes

What apologetics is all about is clearing away the stumbling blocks that people have on their journey to Christ. It is a way of loving other people.

Christianity is a historical and testable faith. One thing that separates Christianity from other religions is that it is based on truth. If you follow the evidence, it will lead you to truth.

The Bible does not teach that you should have blind faith. Rather, the biblical pattern is that God does some kind of miracle or reveals himself, which gives people knowledge, and then they are called to exercise an examined and intelligent faith in him.

Apologetics simply means to be ready at all times to give a reason for the hope that you have found in God, the Scriptures, and the Christian story.

Apologetics is not a recent phenomenon in the church. Jesus reasoned with people, as did the apostle Paul and many of the first- and second-century church fathers.

Today, the internet has brought many challenges to the Christian faith, but it has also brought awareness to the great amount of historical evidence that reveals Christianity is true.

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FIVE REASONS WHY APOLOGETICS IS IMPORTANT TODAY

1. *We are all apologists anyway:* Apologetics is not listed as a spiritual gift for teachers, preachers, or evangelists, as though only some ought to become apologists. Rather, all Christians are called to be ready with an answer.
2. *Apologetics strengthens believers:* When Christians learn good evidences for the truth of the Bible, for the existence of God, or how to respond to tough challenges to the faith, they gain confidence in their beliefs.
3. *Apologetics helps students hang on to their faith:* Young people today have genuine intellectual questions—including questions about their faith. When these questions are not answered, many leave the church.
4. *Apologetics helps with evangelism:* One of the key functions of apologetics is to respond to peoples' questions and clear away any objections or doubts they have that hinder their trust in Christ.
5. *Apologetics helps shape culture:* Apologetics questions come from both Christians and non-Christians—because they both live in the same cultures, and the same world influences their thinking.⁴

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Discuss

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Did you grow up in a church and family environment where you were told what to believe or in one where everything was questioned? How has this environment in which you were raised affected how you approach your faith in Christ today?
2. Why is it important to know *why* you believe rather than just *what* you believe?
3. Paul wrote, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV). What are practical ways you can “correctly handle the word of truth” today?
4. Why do you think popular culture (and even many Christians) embrace “blind faith”? What are some of the problems with this approach to faith?
5. What is the difference between *intelligent* faith and *blind* faith? Based on the words of 1 Peter 3:15, which do you think Scripture teaches you to pursue?

6. How can knowing the evidence behind what you believe about Christ help you to remove any stumbling blocks that others might have in their journey toward faith in Jesus?

Respond

Theologian Clark Pinnock described apologetics as being “an activity of the Christian mind which attempts to show that the gospel message is true in what it affirms . . . an apologist is one who is prepared to defend the message against criticism and distortion, and to give evidences of its credibility.”⁵ As noted in the teaching, apologetics is not a recent phenomenon in the church. In fact, there are at least eight instances in the New Testament where the writers employed the Greek word *apologia*, which is often translated in English as “defense.” Today, close out your time by selecting two verses from the list below that use this word. Briefly read over the corresponding passage and write down what the person was “defending” in each case.

Verse	Passage	What the Person Was Defending
Acts 22:1: “Brethren and fathers, hear my <i>defense</i> before you now.”	Acts 22:1–21	

Verse	Passage	What the Person Was Defending
Acts 25:16: “It is not the custom . . . to hand over any man before the accused . . . has an opportunity to make his <i>defense</i> ” (NASB)	Acts 25:13–21	
1 Corinthians 9:3: “My <i>defense</i> to those who examine me is this . . .”	1 Corinthians 9:1–12	
1 Corinthians 7:11: “For observe . . . that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what <i>clearing of yourselves</i> .”	2 Corinthians 7:8–12	
Philippians 1:7: “I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the <i>defense</i> and confirmation of the gospel.”	Philippians 1:3–8	

Verse	Passage	What the Person Was Defending
Philippians 1:15–16: “Some indeed preach Christ . . . from goodwill . . . knowing that I am appointed for the <i>defense</i> of the gospel.”	Philippians 1:15–18	
2 Timothy 4:16: “At my first <i>defense</i> no one stood with me, but all forsook me.”	2 Timothy 4:9–16	
1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to give a <i>defense</i> to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”	1 Peter 3:13–17	

Pray

Wrap up your time by taking a few moments to pray together. Here are a few ideas of what you could pray about based on the topics of this session:

- Ask God to give you a hunger and a joy to know truth.
- Express your willingness to pursue the evidence for your beliefs . . . wherever that might lead.
- Pray for the courage to pursue an *intelligent* faith over a *blind* faith.
- Tell God your desire for answers to the big questions with which you are struggling.

BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY



Reflect on the material you've covered this week by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Each day offers a short reading from *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, along with a few reflection questions to take you deeper into the theme of this week's study. This week, before you begin this study, you may wish to review the Introduction, Prologue, "He Changed My Life" section, and chapter 1 in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Be sure to journal or write down your thoughts after each question. At the start of the next session, you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned.

1 Was Jesus an Apologist?

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, page xxxiii

As you saw in the teaching for this week, all of the New Testament appearances of the word *apologia*—with the exception of 1 Peter 3:15—come from the writing or the ministry of the apostle Paul. The Gospels do not mention Jesus using the word *apologia*, nor is that word employed in their descriptions of how he taught the people. Nevertheless, a strong case can be made that Jesus was, indeed, an apologist.

Douglas Groothuis, a professor of philosophy, has carefully studied the question of whether Jesus was a philosopher, an apologist, or both. In an article published in the *Christian Research Journal*, he provides many examples of how Jesus rationally defended the crucial claims of Christianity, and then concludes:



Contrary to the views of critics, Jesus Christ was a brilliant thinker, who used logical arguments to refute His critics and establish the truth of His views. When Jesus praised the faith of children, He was encouraging humility as a virtue, not irrational religious trust or a blind leap of faith in the dark. Jesus deftly employed a variety of reasoning strategies in His debates on various topics. These include escaping the horns of a dilemma, *a fortiori* arguments,⁶ appeals to evidence, and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.⁷

Jesus' use of persuasive arguments demonstrates that He was both a philosopher and an apologist who rationally defended His worldview in discussions with some of the best thinkers of His day. This intellectual approach does not detract from His divine authority but enhances it. Jesus' high estimation of rationality and His own application of arguments indicates that Christianity is not an anti-intellectual faith. Followers of Jesus today, therefore, should emulate His intellectual zeal, using the same kinds or arguments He Himself used. Jesus' argumentative strategies have applications to four contemporary debates: the relationship between God and morality, the reliability of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus, and ethical relativism.⁸

Read Matthew 23:23–33. The term “horns of a dilemma” refers to two choices that both have difficult or unpleasant outcomes. Throughout the New Testament, the Jewish religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in these types of dilemmas. How did Jesus escape the trap the Sadducees tried to set for him in this passage? How did Jesus *defend* his position?



Do you see Jesus more as a philosopher, apologist, or a combination of the two? Why?

Read John 7:14–19. How did Jesus use apologetics in his teaching in this passage?

Some would argue Christianity is anti-intellectual faith. How does Jesus prove otherwise?

According to Groothuis, the strategies Jesus used can apply to four contemporary debates: (1) *the relationship between God and morality*, (2) *the reliability of the New Testament*, (3) *the resurrection of Jesus*, and (4) *ethical relativism (the belief that morality is relative to what is considered moral or immoral in a given culture)*. Which of these four categories do you feel most—and least—qualified to speak on? Why?

2 We Are All Apologists

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, pages xxxiii–xxxiv

In Paul's letters, he provides two separate lists of the "gifts of the Spirit" (see Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; 28) and one listing the offices within the church (see Ephesians 4:11). Paul does not include apologetics in any of these lists as a spiritual gift for teachers, preachers, or evangelists. Rather, *all* Christians are called



to be apologists—those who are ready with an answer to defend their faith (see 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3).

Beyond the specific Christian calling to have a ready defense for the faith, there is a sense in which everyone is already an apologist for *something*. In fact, the question is not *whether* we are apologists, but *what kind* of apologists we are. Christian author and social critic Os Guinness addresses this idea when he writes:

From the shortest texts and tweets to the humblest website, to the angriest blog, to the most visited social networks, the daily communications of the wired world attest that everyone is now in the business of relentless self-promotion—presenting themselves, explaining themselves, defending themselves, selling themselves or sharing their inner thoughts and emotions as never before in human history. That is why it can be said that we are in the grand secular age of apologetics. The whole world has taken up apologetics without ever knowing the idea as Christians understand it. We are all apologists now, if only on behalf of “the Daily Me” or “the Tweeted Update” that we post for our virtual friends and our cyber community. The great goals of life, we are told, are to gain the widest possible public attention and to reach as many people in the world with our products—and always, our leading product is Us.⁹

Think about the statement, “Everyone is already an apologist for something.” What are several everyday things that people become experts at defending passionately?

Even those who don’t see themselves as apologists make a case for Christianity with their lives in some manner or another. When is



a time that you represented your faith well by the way you lived? When was a time you failed to live out your beliefs?

What does Os Guinness mean when he writes, “We are in the grand secular age of apologetics”? Give a current example that validates this observation.

Do you agree that we live in a world where almost everyone is in “the business of relentless self-promotion”? In what situations are you most tempted to take part in this self-promotional frenzy? What have been the results when you have done so?

Guinness writes, “The great goals of life are to gain the widest possible public attention and to reach as many people in the world with our products—and always, our leading product is Us.” If that is true, we are the biggest apologists for . . . ourselves. What are some ways you can break this cycle so you focus more on defending God’s truth than yourself?



3 Christianity: A Historical Faith

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, page xxxvii

Christianity appeals to history. Specifically, it appeals to facts of history that can be examined through the normal means of historicity. As theologian Clark Pinnock stated, “The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of religious fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based.”¹⁰ Luke, in the introduction to his Gospel, demonstrated this historical nature of Christianity:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (1:1–4).

According to Luke, among these historical and knowable events was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that was validated by Jesus himself through “many proofs” during a forty-day period and before numerous witnesses (see Acts 1:3). Make no mistake—the historical facts matter for Christianity. The Christian faith is an *objective* faith. Therefore, it must have an object that is *worthy* of faith. Salvation comes not from the *strength* of our beliefs but from the *object* of our beliefs. Yes, salvation comes through faith (see John 6:29; Ephesians 2:8–9), but the merit of faith depends on the object believed (not the faith *itself*).

One time, Josh debated the head of the philosophy department of a Midwestern university. In answering a question, he happened to



mention the importance of the resurrection. At that point, his opponent interrupted and sarcastically said, “Come on, McDowell, the key issue is not whether the resurrection took place or not. The key issue is this: ‘Do you believe it took place?’” He was hinting at—even boldly asserting—that Josh’s *believing* was the most important thing.

Josh retorted, “Sir, it does matter whether the resurrection took place, because the value of Christian faith is not in the one believing, but in the One who is believed in, its object.” He continued, “If anyone can demonstrate to me that Christ was not raised from the dead, I would not have a justifiable right to my Christian faith.” As Christians, we must avoid the attitude, “Don’t confuse me with the facts—my mind is made up!” The historical events reported in the Scriptures are essential. This is why Paul said, “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The world tends to minimize Christianity by saying it is just one of many religious faiths. How does it change things to say that Christianity is a *historical* faith?

Clark Pinnock wrote, “The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of religious fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based.” Does this give you a different perspective on pursuing evidence for Christianity? If so, how?



Read Acts 1:1–3. How does Luke show that he intended his Gospel and the book of Acts to be historically accurate? What evidence does Luke provide for this historical accuracy?

As noted earlier, Christians have to be careful to avoid the attitude, “Don’t confuse me with the facts—my mind is made up!” Where in your faith do you most struggle with a tightly held belief . . . even if the facts do not support it? Explain.

What might it take for you to release that belief? Are you willing to ask God for the humility to go where the evidence leads on this issue? Why or why not?

4 Christianity: A Testable Faith

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, page xxxviii

As Paul makes clear in his first letter to the Corinthians, Christianity is a historical religion tied to the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These claims are *testable*, in that anyone can actually examine their validity and determine historically whether they are reliable. As Paul noted, “If Christ is not risen, your faith



is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Craig Hazen, a professor of apologetics, considers this to be one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature. He writes:

I have not been able to find a passage in the Scriptures and teachings of the other great religious traditions that so tightly links the truth of an entire system of belief to a single, testable historical event. . . . This idea that the truth of Christianity is linked to the resurrection of Jesus in a testable way does set Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions in a dramatic fashion. When you boil it down, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the like are about inner, personal experience and not about objective public knowledge. Other traditions *seem* to be about objective knowledge until you probe a little more deeply. Mormonism, for instance, seems to be about hidden gold plates, Jesus’ ancient visit to the Western hemisphere, and latter-day prophets—things that could certainly, in principle, be evaluated in an objective way. However, when facing evidence contrary to these claims, the Mormon missionary, scholar, or apostle steps back and begins to talk about the special inner knowledge, a “burning in the bosom,” that is the only confirmation that really counts about these unusual stories. At the end of the day, the Mormon is no different from the Buddhist in that they both rely on inner experience as their ultimate source and warrant for religious knowledge.¹¹

Read 1 Corinthians 15:14–17. What does Paul say are the consequences for his preaching if Christ is not risen?



What does Paul say are the consequences for believers everywhere if Christ did not rise from the dead?

Why do you think Craig Hazen considers this to be one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature? Explain your answer.

What does Hazen say sets Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions—like Hinduism and Buddhism—in dramatic fashion?

Prior to this week's teaching, did you view Christianity as a "testable faith"? How does this session shift your view of Christianity in comparison to other religions?

5 Being a Relational Apologist

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, page lvi

Believers often want to know what is the "silver bullet" argument that proves Christianity. But the truth is that *there is no argument you can make that can force anyone to believe*. Given this, how should Christians engage their neighbors? We suggest four ways.



First, be *gentle and humble*. As discussed in this week's teaching, Jesus reasoned with the religious leaders of his day, providing multiple lines of evidence that he was the Son of God. And yet, though he was divine, he willingly humbled himself for the sake of loving others (see Philippians 2:5–7). We can do no less. As Philosopher Dallas Willard observed, "Like Jesus, we are reaching out in love in a humble spirit with no coercion. The only way to accomplish that is to present our defense gently, as help offered in love in the manner of Jesus."¹²

Second, be *relational*. While labels can sometimes be helpful, depersonalizing people by putting them into various boxes can cause harm. If labels cause you to ignore the unique personhood of *every* individual, you need to reexamine how you are using them. It is critical to have genuine relationships with people who are atheists, agnostics, and others who hold a variety of worldviews. Your goal is not simply to *convert* them but to *value* them as human beings. Apologetics is an explanation you offer to help people you deeply care about.

Third, be *studious*. Know what you are talking about and do thorough research to back up your claims. Critically examine your arguments and understand both sides of every issue. Study both sides and talk about your findings with fellow Christians and non-Christians. Do the hard work of learning a discipline and presenting the truth fairly and accurately.

Finally, be a *practitioner*. Young people today prize authenticity. They want to know not only if you can make a good argument but also whether your life reflects the truth you proclaim. If your life doesn't reflect your truth claims, what you say will fall on deaf ears. If you claim to believe in the deity of Jesus, is he really Lord in your life? If you believe in the resurrection, does it shape how you face death? How does your belief in the truth of the Bible really shape how you treat people? Actively live the truth you proclaim.



Do you wish there was a “silver bullet” argument to prove Christianity? Why do you think that God did not choose to provide us with one?

What are the four essential characteristics for an apologist who wants to engage others? Which of those four is the most challenging for you? Why?

As an apologist, it is easy to forget that your ultimate purpose is to value other persons as you share about God and truth. This is far more important than convincing them you are right. How can you nurture genuine relationships with those you engage?

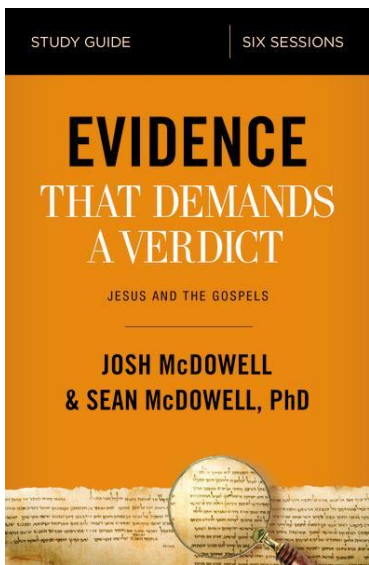
A relational apologist must invest a generous amount of time to understand both sides of an issue in order to reach the person who sees the issue differently. Do you find that difficult to do? If so, why? If not, give an example of how you have done this.



In the end, it all comes down to whether our lives reflect the truth we proclaim. Let's not allow pride, guilt, or shame to overcome us. The goal isn't perfection, but a lifelong commitment to loving God and loving others with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Given that, how are you doing in living what you believe?

Recommended Reading

Use the space below to write any key insights or questions from your personal study that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. In preparation for that meeting, you may wish to review chapters 1 and 27–28 in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

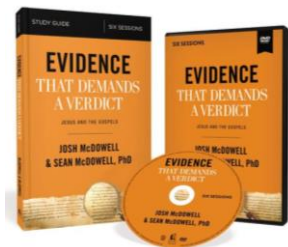


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