

MORE ANSWERS ON THE GROUND

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This interview is an appendix to issue 07 of *Primer*, which explores the meaning and the role of apologetics. Find three more interviews in the issue, along with articles by Dan Strange, Matthew Peckham, William Edgar, Jonathan Leeman and Gavin McGrath.



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1. How would you describe the community you are seeking to reach?

Roll the dice around London Bridge and you never know who you're going to get. It's home to the richest in penthouses along the river, the homeless living on the streets, graduate workers come to

London to get on the career ladder, and families who've called the area their home for generations. At The Globe Church we encounter each of those communities to different degrees, though it's fair to say at the moment our main contact is with young workers/ students who our church family are rubbing shoulders with day to day.

2. What are the major apologetic challenges or questions you encounter?

I once did some apologetics training with the church, presenting a Stephen Fry-esque humanism against the worldview of Genesis 1. While the hard, atheistic humanism of Fry is around, many of the church said “that’s not quite what my friends think.” Humanism is the functional worldview (“I just try to be a good person and do my bit to make the world better, I don’t need religion to tell me how to do that”), but it’s less confrontational and *atheistic*. There is an openness to the spiritual, the possibility that there’s *something* there, they just don’t know what. Many don’t expressly hate God, they just don’t give him a passing thought.

What people do hate, though, is our ethics. The apologetic rub is less in the argument about the existence of God, but whether or not our church members will wear the rainbow lanyard and celebrate Pride Month at work. Our Christian students aren’t just weird on campus, they’re considered bigoted and dangerous with their views. Essentially the question is: “how can you and your God say you love me *and* tell me that the way I am is sinful? You can’t disagree with me and love me.”

Alongside those fresh challenges and questions are some of the mainstays of the modern era – the compatibility of science and Christianity, reliability of the Bible, etc.

3. As a church, how have you tried to address those issues as you reach out and disciple young believers?

We need a generation of Christians who not only *know* what the Bible says about sexuality, gender roles, etc. but who also *love* it and who are faithfully *living* it. So every Sunday is apologetics training in that it convinces our church that God’s ways are good, beautiful, and liveable when their daily environment tells them

the opposite. We decided to preach through 1 Corinthians in the second year of our church’s life. It was tricky! But it tackled head on some of these issues, and the fruit of that has been Christians continuing to live faithful lives and believing more deeply that what God says about men, women, and our bodies is good.

Not only that, but in our sermons we model speaking with resolute clarity about the truth with a loving tone, compassion, and gospel appeal. This equips our church to engage with those who think you can’t disagree and love at the same time.

We’ve run apologetics training in our small groups, as mentioned. There we’ve taught the concept of ‘worldview’ explicitly to give the church the vocabulary to understand what we believe about who we are, what’s wrong with the world, etc. but also to be able to analyse what their friends and our wider culture believe. Our church needs to see that everyone is religious, everyone has beliefs. An awareness of worldview has helped the church be less afraid of engaging their friends, as it demystifies those who claim not to believe anything. Our church is able to think, “yes you do, let me listen, understand, and engage.”

Understanding our context has also shaped our more centralised outreach. As some of us drove back from the FIEC Leaders’ Conference a couple of years ago, challenged on evangelism, we wrestled with a way to connect with the vaguely spiritual, never-thought-about-it, I’m-happy-thanks generation. We came up with “Have You Ever Wondered?” The question we’re asking people is not so confrontational like “do you think Christianity is compatible with science?” but “have you ever even thought about faith, God, heaven, what life is about?” We want to tap into that inkling that this isn’t it, that life is dissatisfying, and invite people to give some time to hear out Christianity. Under this banner we’ve run café nights with a talk and questions with a range of

titles: Have You Ever Wondered about... faith, prayer, heaven, Easter, God, life after death, love, what on earth is going on.

If the apologetic challenge in our context is that Christians are unapproachable because of our beliefs on sexuality and gender, then our outreach must build relational bridges. This happens every day, of course, in the normal life of the church in the world. But more centrally we've deliberately run events which are an easy invite to those less comfortable with Christians. We've held Story Slams (an open mic night, but with stories). One night, Christians and non-Christians alike took the mic to tell a story on the theme "silver lining." As one non-Christian guest told a story, followed by his friend, the second shared that they were transgender, and now, as a man, in relationship with the other man who had just been up. And it struck me: they've been lovingly witnessed to by a Christian, they wouldn't have come to a Christianity Explored course (though we run those), but here they are, mixing with Christians, and being respectfully heard out as they spoke about their lives alongside Christians sharing their stories. That will have spoken volumes to them. Now we need to equip their Christian friend to deal with the transgender questions coming his way! But events like this go a long way to building bridges.

4. What are the most helpful resources you have found?

As a staff team we've used the excellent SHORT ANSWERS videos produced by Solas (solas-cpc.org/shortanswers), equipping us with one or two sentences with which to answer our friends.

Behind much of my preaching and evangelistic talks is Tim Keller's *Making Sense of God*. Keller's urban New York context is similar to ours, and his method of connecting, confronting, and leading to Jesus is memorable and replicable. He tries to show how Christianity is appealing on a number

of important levels and shouldn't be excluded from the table. We've also used his *Reason for God* videos in small group evangelism training, though the study guide is less helpful so we produced our own.

Also available



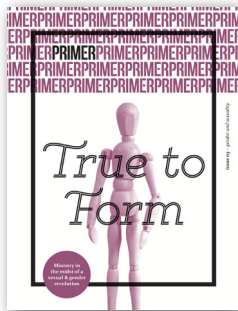
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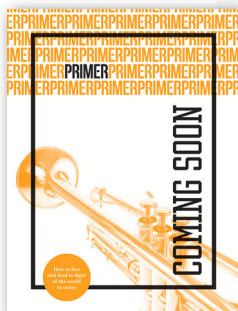
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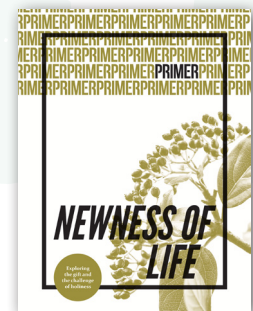
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