



Reachout Subject Guide

6 Steps to Defending Your Faith

Many Christians today don't share their faith with others, either informally with family, friends and colleagues, or formally in outreach with the Church. The world is increasingly intolerant of truth claims and this can undermine confidence. Also, Christians often don't feel equipped to share, especially when faced with the cults. These steps will help you achieve balance and prepare you for those doorstep conversations.

1. Be Grounded and Prepared

'Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.'
(1 Tim.4:7-15)

The work of apologetics, if not carefully managed, can lead to an unbalanced Christian life. You can spend so much time looking at negative things - scripture twisting, deception, and half-truths - that one day you look up and find you don't have a positive side to your faith. You spend so much time looking at the error that you don't spend time learning and growing in the truth.

The best preparation for witnessing is a steady Christian life, church involvement, Bible reading, a prayer life, spiritual development, being faithful in the little things. These things keep us grounded in the truth, the good news about Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1)

Make it your business to understand and live by the basics of Christian teachings: the nature of God, the person of Jesus, the nature of man and the fall, God's work in redemption, the work of the Spirit, the church, the purposes of God in saving a people for himself. All these shape the way we think about the world and our place in it and live accordingly.

The reason Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon missionaries are so apparently capable on the doorstep is that they have spent time preparing what to say. It requires effort but we should be willing to do the same. Are you excited about being a Christian, about what God has done, and what he has promised? It is not much extra work to think about how I would share with others what engages and excites me in the gospel in which I am daily rooted.

2. Be Confident

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

Have you noticed how people share their beliefs and interests, teams they support, their views on this and that? They readily produce an apologetic if their choice or view is criticised, it never occurring to them this is anything but normal.

A key to learning confidence in sharing our faith is to do the same, to treat it as a normal part of our lives that you can share quite casually in conversation. Indeed, some of the best witnessing opportunities are simple conversations about every day life.

I have lost count of the times when I have seized the opportunity to say something simple like, 'I don't know how people cope without faith,' or to relate something I heard at church at the weekend. This finds common ground with a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness who have their own faith experiences. It introduces the subject around the coffee break at work, and can lead to meaningful conversations.

We can often feel that it is such a big thing, but it doesn't have to be. If someone takes you up on something, that is where being prepared comes in. Not just being prepared with the answers, but with ways to deal with the questions you can't easily and immediately answer. How often an opportunity arises to meet again to share something you promised to find out about. How often an opportunity arises to say, 'Why don't you come and see for yourself?'

My wife relates how she was sharing a piece of family news that made us glad because we are Christians. One woman said to her, "I didn't know you were one of those religious people." Instead of dissembling, my wife replied, "Oh yes, an absolute fanatic, have been for years!" and laughed.

It broke the tension, and in the conversation that followed, she was able to say, "You'd be amazed at the difference it makes to my life." My wife went back to her work, leaving her colleague with food for thought. Work can be handy like that - obligations to your employer give you an excuse to share a thought then cut a conversation short before it gets too heavy.

3. Be Curious

'Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.'

(1 Cor.9:19-22)

Because we feel defensive and protective about the gospel, it is easy to feel obliged to answer every question that gets thrown at you. An unmanaged conversation can see random questions coming at you from all directions. You can end up feeling like a dartboard! There is nothing wrong with asking that you stick to one point, and don't be afraid to ask them questions. It is both respectful and helpful to show an interest in the other person's view.

Often people only repeat things they have heard or read elsewhere, without having really thought it through. If you ask them to examine their own opinions, explain their reasoning, clarify what they are trying to find out or disprove, you will be surprised at the results. Questions are useful for controlling the conversation. They make you feel less threatened, and give you breathing space to think about what the other person is saying.

If you do have a point to make, make it in the form of a question. It is less threatening and more likely to elicit a thoughtful response. Instead of throwing out a Bible text ask what they think of the text. Instead of confidently asserting that Jesus never used the name Jehovah ask a Jehovah's Witness to show you. Paul did not insist on his superiority and freedom in Christ but adopted an attitude of humility and patience with those to whom he witnessed, becoming *'all things to all men.'*

Christian apologetics is both a science and an art.

"The science of apologetics stresses the trustworthiness of the cognitive foundations of Christianity, while the art of apologetics seeks to show how this framework may make sense of experience." [Bridge Building, Alister McGrath p.109]

We are not just trying to win an argument or convince by logic, we need to make the message of the gospel relevant to people. The science of apologetics explains the "what" of Christianity, the art of apologetics explains the "so what?" In order to make it meaningful, we need to understand the particular needs and viewpoint of the person or people that we are talking to. The best way to do this is to ask questions.



4. Be Brave

What scares many Christians about sharing and defending the faith is that they are going to be asked some very difficult questions. Remember there are answers out there and you are not the first person who has been faced with questions. Reachout has ready resources to equip and prepare you for those questions. Examples are:

Always Being Ready is a practical help for Christians to be ready to talk to those in the cults about Jesus but with good general applications.

Awake to the Watchtower is an invaluable resource for the average church member who wants to do more than just shut the door in the face of a Jehovah's Witness. An investigation into their beliefs and practices.

Mormonism a Gold-Plated Religion offers insights from an insider's perspective, a study of the history and teachings of Mormonism and practical advice on witnessing.

Cults and More gives a brief introduction to a range of cults and groups, with witnessing helps.

You are bound to be asked a question you can't readily deal with. Keep calm and don't be afraid to say, *'That's a difficult one, we need some time to go into it. Can we meet one evening?'* The resources are there to be consulted, readying you for the next conversation, and every conversation is a learning experience.

Accept that there are some things that we don't understand and don't have neat answers for - but don't be defensive about it! This is true for everyone, even that confident Jehovah's Witness on your doorstep.

5. Be Honest

Have you ever been lost for answers? Everyone has, and there is no shame in that - But find out! If Jehovah's Witnesses have knocked on your door four times this year, that's four opportunities to learn and grow. Too many forget the conversation as soon as the door is closed and that is a wasted opportunity.

Being a Christian doesn't instantly make you an expert theologian. You should know the fundamentals, the basics mentioned above, but we are all learning all the time. You will not lose face if you admit you don't know, as long as you keep your promise to find out. It also gives you an opportunity to get together with the person at a later date, when circumstances may be more conducive to talking and you are better prepared.

6. Use Tracts

Keep one or two leaflets on your hall table, in your pocket, literature that you are familiar and comfortable with. Often tracts can explain things better than you can. Think of the sort of people that you usually associate with and find something that will be relevant to them. When you get into a discussion you can finish by giving them a leaflet - which gives them something to go away and think about, and gives you an opportunity for a further conversation when you ask them what they thought of it.

There are some ***cult-specific tracts*** available on the Reachout website. I would also encourage you to get to know and use your local Christian bookshop, where there will be more general literature. You may even be ambitious and make your own tract of your testimony.

It doesn't have to be fancy, it could be hand-written and photocopied. This is personal and people will read it out of curiosity. What God has done in your life is very powerful, and personal testimony is a very effective tool for encouraging people to investigate further the Christian faith.

Remember, God calls us to be witnesses, he doesn't call us to convert people. He calls us to tell the story, he doesn't expect us to convince people. He calls us to speak about our own Christian convictions, he doesn't call us to convict people. The Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of convicting, convincing, and converting. We are simply called to go and tell, and what a story we have to tell the world!



Keep in touch with us. Reachout is always ready to come and speak to groups and churches, ready to sit down with cult-members prepared at last to listen, ready to advise those who have finally taken that step away from error and don't know, perhaps, what comes next.



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