

EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY

Answers to Teenagers' 50 Toughest Questions

A Rapid-Response Reference for Youth Leaders

Copyright © 2012 Phil Bell

group.com

simplyyouthministry.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher, except where noted in the text and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, email inforights@group.com, or go to group.com/permissions.

Credits

Author: Phil Bell

Executive Developer: Nadim Najm

Chief Creative Officer: Joani Schultz

Copy Editor: Rob Cunningham

Cover Art and Production: Riley Hall and Veronica Preston

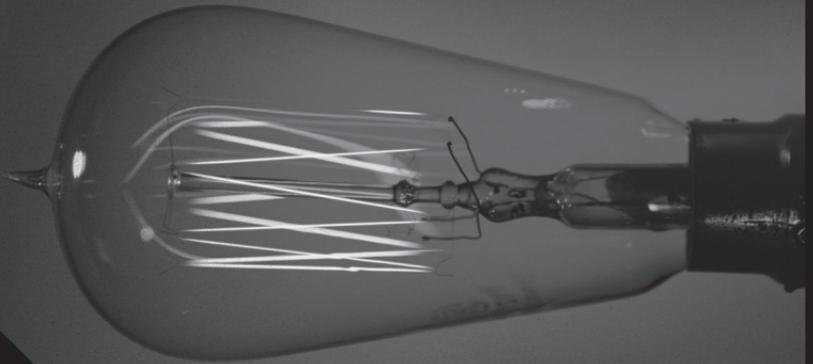
Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.



ANSWERS TO TEENAGERS' 50 TOUGHEST QUESTIONS

a Rapid-Response Reference for Youth Leaders



BY PHIL BELL

AN **EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY**
RESOURCE FROM SIMPLY YOUTH MINISTRY

:: THE VOICE OF THE IN-THE-TRENCHES YOUTH WORKER

Contents

Introduction	i
Section 1: Faith Basics	1
Section 2: Faith Struggles	39
Section 3: Discipleship and Evangelism.....	71
Section 4: Life Choices	93
Section 5: Family and Friends.....	117
Section 6: Dating and Sex	153
Contributing Authors	178

Introduction

YOU Are the Answer to So Many Questions!

We serve in youth ministry because we love God and we love teenagers. Maybe you've wanted to be a youth worker since you were a teenager yourself. Maybe you discovered this call somewhere along the road of life. Or maybe someone bribed you to help out with the youth group for a few weeks, but now you're plugged in to a ministry that has given you more purpose than you could have ever imagined. Regardless of our individual stories, we all desire to invest in teenagers, knowing that God is using us to make an eternal difference in their lives. We all have a heart to help them find Jesus and to help them navigate through the messy journey of adolescence with minimal damage and pain.

But here's the problem: Often we wonder if we are helping students. Or we wonder if we have anything to offer that can truly help them. We know that there is power in "being there" and remaining a constant stability in their lives. We know that listening to them is paramount and that asking questions about their lives communicates care and develops trust. But what about

the questions they face? In a world full of contradictions and confusion, teenagers are desperate for answers that will bring them hope and direction. They are yearning to discover answers that are founded in truth and can be lived out practically. Can you and I answer these questions effectively? The answer is a definite YES!

Written in collaboration with veteran youth workers, *Answers to Teenagers' 50 Toughest Questions: A Rapid-Response Reference for Youth Leaders* will aid you as you seek to answer students' questions. These questions are among the most frequently asked questions by the teenagers in *your* ministry. These are the questions that you and I have tripped over in the past and still stumble over today. The answers that are provided are biblical, practical, and effective in giving you the next steps to engage your students further. We've built each answer around a scenario involving a specific teenager; all of the student names in this book represent either composite characters of teenagers we've worked with or actual students whose names have been changed.

As you dive into this resource, bear in mind that as youth workers, we will never have all the answers. It is completely OK to let a student know that you need to

research a question for yourself first, before providing an answer. Even better, it is brilliant when we can create opportunities to meet with students to go digging for the answers together!

Please know that you make an eternal difference in the lives of teenagers! Your Christ-centered life and willingness to invest in their messy journey is exactly what they need. Whether they know it or not, your students are discovering answers through *your* life and *your* example every time you meet with them. Thank you for pointing teenagers to Jesus, who is the greatest answer in their lives.

SECTION 1:

FAITH BASICS

1. “How do I know there really is a God?”

by Katie Sutton

The Situation: Mike is friends with some of the teenagers in your group. He has been coming to church for several weeks now. You don't know a lot about him. Tonight, he has joined your discussion group that is talking about prayer. As the group examines different ways to communicate with God, Mike says he needs to ask you about something.

The Question: *“How do I know there really is a God?”*

The Response: At first glance, this seems like a straightforward, innocent question. But is Mike asking this question as a challenge to you, or is he sincerely questioning the existence of God? In either case, it's imperative that you handle the question with sensitivity and avoid simplistic answers. Teenagers are looking for more than “You just have to have faith” or “The Bible says it, so it's true.” They want to know how YOU know there is a God. Share your personal story of how you came to realize that there is a God. Tell Mike about specific instances in your life when you knew God was real. Then use Scripture (and the logic that supports Scripture) to

validate the testimony that you have shared. Here are some verses that might be helpful:

1. Psalm 19:1-4—The sky shows evidence of God all over the world.
2. John 3:8—The existence of the wind is hard to explain, but it is real. The same is true of the work of God in a person's life.
3. Romans 1:20—Evidence of God can be found in creation.
4. Romans 2:15—Our consciences point to the existence of God.
5. 1 Peter 1:8-9—People who love and trust in God even though they cannot see God are rewarded with salvation.

Be honest with teenagers like Mike. It does take faith to truly know that God exists. Let students know that faith does not mean ignorantly believing in something that might not be true; it means confidently believing the evidence that something exists even though you can't see it (see Hebrews 11:1).

The Next Steps:

- Answer with follow-up questions without engaging in fruitless arguments. If the conversation becomes heated, defer back to your testimony. Personal experiences are hard to refute.
- Ask other students in the group how they know that God is real. Teenagers trust their peers.
- Keep the conversation open by letting the group know that you are available whenever they have questions about God.
- Pray for students like Mike and his friends. Mike's question shows a spiritual curiosity and is a signal that God is working in his life.

Further Reading and Resources:

- *The Case for Christ—Student Edition*, by Lee Strobel and Jane Vogel
- *The Case for Christ* documentary on DVD

2. “What is the Trinity?”

by Leneita Fix

The Situation: You are talking about God the Father’s love to your Wednesday night youth group. JoJo is a young man trying to understand really who God is. While you are talking he raises his hand. “I don’t get it,” he says. “We talk about the Father’s love, but we also talk about following Jesus. Are they the same? In fact, how can Jesus be God and God’s Son all at the same time? And I don’t understand the Holy Spirit at all. Are they all God?”

The Question: *“What is the Trinity?”*

The Response: The Trinity is “three in one.” This means that there is only one living God. Yet God exists together in perfect unity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here are some helpful passages that offer insight into this important biblical truth:

We serve one God

- *Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the*

wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground” (Genesis 1:26, emphasis added).

- Then I [Isaiah] heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I said, “Here I am. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8, emphasis added).
- But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life (1 Corinthians 8:6, emphasis added).

God is one God who is three distinct persons in one

- For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all (Ephesians 4:4-6, emphasis added).
- God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you

have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace (1 Peter 1:2, emphasis added).

Important items to highlight in your conversation:

- The word *Trinity* is never used in the Bible—but neither is the word *Bible*. It comes from the Latin word *trinitas*—*tri* meaning three and *unitas* meaning unity. It is three in perfect unity acting as one.
- Right from the beginning in Genesis, God uses “we” and “us” references.
- Consider talking about the Trinity as being similar to an apple, which has three basic parts: the skin, the “meat” section, and the core.
 - Let’s say you peel the skin from the apple. You are now holding the skin in one hand and the rest in your other hand. It did not miraculously become two apples. Maybe you skin it and core it. Now you are holding three parts of the same apple. They each hold a

different function. This is like the Trinity: We have one God, working in three ways.

- The Father is like the skin of the apple, our protector. The Father looks after us as God's children. *"And he will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation' "* (Psalm 89:26).
- The Son, Jesus, is like the "meat" of the apple. Through his shed blood we are saved. Jesus called himself the "bread of life." He is the one that through him we have life (see John 6:43-59).
- The Holy Spirit is like the core of the apple. The core contains the seeds to grow another tree. It is through the "helper" that we can "bear fruit." In other words, when we have a relationship with Christ, it is really the Holy Spirit living in us. (This does not make us God, however.) The Spirit helps us to show the world who he is in us. Here's how Romans 8:9 describes things: *But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by*

the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all).

- Another way of thinking about the Trinity is to think of who you are. What are some of the names that describe you? The list might include Daughter, Son, Friend, Cousin, Grandchild, or Student. As an adult, you might be called Husband or Dad, Wife or Mom. This does not make you multiple people. However, your role in each of these relationships is different. That is why you have these different names. That is the same with the Trinity. We serve one God, yet in God there are three distinct ways God relates to us.

The Next Steps:

- Take the time to bring home what one God in three persons really means. Look at passages like: Matthew 3 (the baptism of Jesus), Matthew 28:18-20 (the Great Commission), and Galatians 4:6
- Do a study on each unique person of God in the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit) and their role in our lives.

Further Reading and Resources:

- Study on the Trinity by Christ In You Ministries (christinyou.net/pages/trinity.html)
- *3 in 1: A Picture of God*, by Joanne Marxhausen (children's book that really helps)

3. “How can I be sure that I’m a Christian?”

by Leneita Fix

The Situation: Becky boldly entered into a relationship with Jesus when she was 5 years old. Her parents assure you that although she was young, she understood the decision she was making—in fact, she has told her friends how to follow Christ. Recently, however, she has started to have some doubts about her salvation and if her connection to Christ is real. What if this relationship with Jesus isn't true?

The Question: *“How can I be sure that I’m a Christian?”*

The Response: For many teenagers—maybe even for most—doubting is a natural part of growing up, and it

can be a healthy experience because students need to make sure that their faith in Christ is theirs and not just the faith of their parents. Being certain that we're Christians begins with the understanding that we need a relationship with God. Knowing that we are sinners (we make bad choices that we can't fix) and that Christ is the one that conquered sin through his death and resurrection is our first step.

Read Together: Romans 10:9-13 and Ephesians 2:8.

1. Romans 10:9-13 maps it out for us and give us reason to remain confident in our faith. If we trust God, then we can know that God has us, watches over us, and assures us that we genuinely have become a follower of Christ.
2. Salvation is a gift that allows us to deepen our relationship with God. If we cry out and say, "I know I need you!" then that is evidence that our heart wants to belong to God.
3. We must take to heart what Romans 3:10 says: "*No one is righteous—not even one.*" In other words, none of us will ever be able to earn or work our way

into salvation. It is all about receiving the gift that God has given us in his Son.

4. Sometimes it is as simple as having faith in who Jesus is to us. Tell students what Hebrews 11:1 says: *Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.* We may not be able to see Jesus, touch him, or even feel his presence at times. But when we choose to give our lives to him, we have chosen faith in who he is.

The Next Steps:

It is natural and normal for adolescents to have questions and doubts about their faith. As they move from being concrete-thinking children into abstract-thinking young adults, their brains will naturally go through a process of reconstructing and evaluating all they have been learning. It's imperative that we emphasize to them how normal this is. Many students feel guilt when they doubt.

Further Reading and Resources:

- *The Case for Christ—Student Edition*, by Lee Strobel and Jane Vogel
- *The Case for Faith—Student Edition*, by Lee Strobel and Jane Vogel
- Walk students through the book of Romans (theromanroad.org)

4. “How do I pray?”

by Mike Kupferer

The Situation: Amy is a quiet freshman who always seems to be listening intently. You know she has answers for questions you ask, but she never speaks up. Then one day, while you are discussing the importance of talking to God through prayer, she raises her hand. She does not say much, but her four-word question is honest and sincere.

The Question: “How do I pray?”

The Response: The Bible gives us a lot of insight into how we should pray.

Read Together: Matthew 6:5-15.

1. **Talk to God:** Think of prayer as simply a conversation between you and God. Don't use fancy words or try to impress God; just talk to God.
2. **Praise God:** It can be easy to lose perspective on life. Offering praise for who God is and what God has done helps you remember that God is more powerful than anything you face.
3. **Be specific:** Psalm 62:8 talks about the importance of pouring out our hearts toward God. You don't need to hide anything; God already knows what you need (see Matthew 6:8) and what you are going through. Talk to God like a friend, share your emotions, verbalize your needs (see Philippians 4:6-7), and talk about your struggles.
4. **Ask for forgiveness:** Not only do you need to ask in order to be forgiven, but when you ask you'll be reminded of your reliance on God.

The Next Steps:

- Encourage the student to set aside time every day to spend in prayer. Offer to provide a prayer journal or devotional if she would like some specific ideas or structure. It might also be a good idea to have the student read some of the psalms to get a bigger picture of how different prayers can be, and how personal and specific David and the other writers of the psalms made their prayers.
- Plan on following up in a week or two, by simply asking if the student has been praying. You want to make sure she hasn't given up, but don't turn prayer into a spiritual checklist item that must be done out of obligation or guilt. Remind her that prayer is part of a growing relationship with God.

Further Reading and Resources:

- *The Prayer of Jesus*, by Hank Hanegraaff
- A simple prayer journal—anything students can use to record their prayers and God's answers to those prayers