

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

Small Group Participant Guide

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"This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace."

Links to Lectures and Notes: <https://srmatthews.com/tsg>



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End of Course Review

I. Session 1: Set 1, Lecture 1: The Cosmological Argument

Session 1 walked through the Cosmological Argument — Dr. Art Lindsley's case for God's existence based on where the universe came from. The argument is simple enough to share in about three minutes:

1. Something exists right now — you, me, the stars.
2. Out of nothing, nothing comes. So something must have always existed.
3. That "something" is either the universe itself, or a Creator behind it.
4. The universe shows clear signs it had a beginning, so it can't be what always existed.
5. Therefore, the best explanation is an eternal Creator — God.

Three lines of evidence point to a universe with a beginning:

- **Big Bang** — The universe started from a single moment.
- **Second Law of Thermodynamics** — Everything is running down; an eternal universe would already be burned out.
- **Anthropic Principle** — The universe is fine-tuned for life with such precision that even tiny changes would make life impossible.

The big takeaway:

- Science and logic point *toward* God, not away from Him.
- No single argument forces belief, but together they give faith a solid rational foundation.
- We have good reasons for what we believe — we don't have to be defensive.

Argument: The Universe Exists Because God Created It

CONTEXT: Everything around us exists right now. That raises the oldest question in history: where did it all come from? Something must have always existed — the only question is *what*.

CLAIM: God — an eternal, personal Creator — is the best explanation for why the universe exists.

CASE: Three things point to a universe with a beginning: the Big Bang, the Second Law of Thermodynamics (an eternal universe would already be burned out), and the Anthropic Principle (the universe is fine-tuned for life with staggering precision). A universe with a beginning needs a cause outside itself.

CHALLENGE: Skeptics say it came from nothing, or that infinite parallel universes make our fine-tuning just lucky. Neither has any scientific evidence — both are moves of desperation that contradict how we observe cause and effect.

CONCLUSION: An eternal, intentional Creator is the most reasonable explanation. These arguments don't force belief, but they give faith a rational foundation and open the door with honest skeptics.

II. Session 1: Set 1, Lecture 2: The Argument from Desire

Session 2 explored the Argument from Desire — the idea that our deepest longings are clues pointing us toward God.

Think about how hunger points to food, thirst points to water, and tiredness points to sleep. Every built-in desire we have points to something real that satisfies it. But humans carry a longing that nothing in this world can fully fill — not money, relationships, fame, or vacations. C.S. Lewis called this feeling *Sehnsucht* — a bittersweet ache for something more. Even the famous atheist writer Franz Kafka described life as "there is a goal, but no way" — all desire, no satisfaction.

Lewis said there are three ways people respond to this longing:

- **The Fool's Way** — Keep chasing things, always hoping the next one will finally satisfy. It never does.
- **The Cynic's Way** — Stop wanting much so you won't be disappointed.
- **The Christian Way** — Recognize the longing as a signpost pointing toward God.

The big takeaway:

- Our deepest desires aren't cruel jokes — they're invitations.
- If every natural desire points to something real, our longing for "something more" points to God.
- Unmet desires are not dead ends — they're signposts directing us home.

Argument: Our Deepest Longings are Signs Pointing Toward God

CONTEXT: Every person on earth — no matter where they live or what they believe — feels deep longings for love, belonging, justice, and beauty. And no matter how much we get of those things, we always want more. Even Franz Kafka, one of the most famous atheist writers, described life as "there is a goal, but no way" — all desire, no satisfaction.

CLAIM: Our deepest longings are signposts pointing toward God — evidence that we were made for something beyond this world.

CASE: Every built-in desire points to something real — hunger to food, thirst to water, tiredness to sleep. Humans also share a longing that nothing on earth fully satisfies. If every natural desire has a real fulfillment, this one must too. C.S. Lewis — once a skeptic — traced his own lifelong aching desires all the way to Christ, calling them signposts that pointed him home.

CHALLENGE: Skeptics say these longings are just biology — brain quirks with no deeper meaning. But that reduces humanity's greatest poets, philosophers, and thinkers to nothing more than misfiring chemistry. It also leaves humans uniquely miserable — the only creatures capable of deeply reflecting on desires that can never be satisfied.

CONCLUSION: Our longings aren't accidents. They are built-in pointers toward the God who created us for a joy only He can fully provide. As Lewis put it — our desires are not too strong, they're too weak. We were made for infinite joy, and God is the only source that truly delivers it.

III. Session 3: Set 1, Lecture 3: Who Is the Real Jesus?

Session 3 tackled popular claims that distort who Jesus really was — claims spread by books like *The Da Vinci Code* and scholars like Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels.

Three big questions were addressed head-on:

- **Was Jesus married?** Zero historical evidence — even skeptical scholars agree. Jesus taught that some are called to singleness for ministry, and He lived that out.
- **Was His divinity invented at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD?** Absolutely not. Church fathers were calling Jesus God as early as 105 AD — more than 200 years before Nicaea. The council vote wasn't even close: 316 to 2.
- **Do the Gnostic Gospels change our picture of Jesus?** No. They were written 150–300 years after Jesus lived, reflect a fringe philosophy, and were never seriously considered for Scripture.

The big takeaway:

- The canonical Gospels are rooted in eyewitness testimony written within decades of Jesus' life — the Gnostic texts are not even close in reliability.
- The Priory of Zion "secret" from *The Da Vinci Code* was a proven hoax — its creator confessed it under oath in court.
- These claims aren't new — they're old errors dressed up in bestselling packaging. We don't have to be shaken by them.

Argument: Jesus is the REAL Jesus of the New Testament

CONTEXT: Popular books and films claim Jesus was married, His divinity was invented centuries later, and suppressed Gospels tell a truer story. These sound like shocking discoveries — but the historical record disagrees.

CLAIM: The Jesus of the New Testament — fully divine, unmarried, and risen — is the historically reliable Jesus.

CASE: No historical evidence supports Jesus being married — even His critics agree. His divinity wasn't invented at Nicaea; church leaders called Jesus God as early as 105 AD, and the council voted 316 to 2 confirming existing belief. The Gnostic Gospels were written 150–300 years after Jesus lived and were never seriously considered Scripture. The canonical Gospels trace directly to eyewitnesses.

CHALLENGE: Skeptics claim Constantine suppressed alternative Gospels and controlled Christian belief. But the Gnostic texts were always separate, always later, and always rejected. The *Da Vinci Code*'s "factual" foundation — the Priory of Zion — was a hoax its own creator confessed to under oath.

CONCLUSION: The evidence for the New Testament's reliability is overwhelming. These challenges recycle old errors with new packaging. Believers can engage them calmly — the facts are firmly on our side.

IV. Session 4: Set 1, Lecture 4: Prophecy About Christ

Session 4 examined how biblical prophecy points to Jesus as the Messiah — not through vague guesses, but through specific, verifiable detail written centuries in advance.

Prophecy works like an address system — starting broad and narrowing in. From a promise to all humanity in Genesis 3, Scripture narrows through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the tribe of Judah, the house of David, and finally the birthplace of Bethlehem — all converging on one person.

The centerpiece is Isaiah 53, written over 700 years before Jesus' crucifixion:

- He would be despised, rejected, and have no outward majesty.
- He would be pierced for our sins and crushed for our wrongdoing.
- He would die silently and be buried with the wicked but with a rich man.
- He would be raised from the dead — his days prolonged after death.

The big takeaway:

- Jesus fits Isaiah 53's job description perfectly — no other figure in history does.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed Isaiah 53 existed 200 years before Jesus — it was not added later.
- Fulfilled prophecy is not coincidence. It is God's fingerprint on history.

Argument: Session 4: Prophecy About Christ

CONTEXT: Skeptics claim the Bible's portrayal of Jesus was invented after the fact. But the Old Testament contains hundreds of specific prophecies written centuries before Jesus — narrowing from broad promises down to precise details about His suffering, death, and resurrection.

CLAIM: The fulfillment of biblical prophecy in Jesus is compelling evidence that Scripture is God's Word and Jesus is the promised Messiah.

CASE: Isaiah 53 — written 700+ years before the cross — describes a servant pierced for others' sins, silent before accusers, buried with the wicked yet with a rich man, and raised to life. Jesus fulfilled every detail. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed this passage existed 200 years before Jesus, eliminating any claim it was written after the fact.

CHALLENGE: Some argue Isaiah 53 refers to Israel, not an individual. But the text describes someone with no violence or deceit — which cannot fit sinful Israel — who dies *for* Israel's transgressions, not *with* them. Early Jewish rabbis themselves interpreted this passage as referring to the Messiah.

CONCLUSION: No other figure in history fits Isaiah 53's job description. Fulfilled prophecy is God's advance signature on history — pointing directly to Jesus and giving believers confident, well-grounded faith.

V. Session 5: Set 1, Lecture 5: The Case for the Resurrection

Session 5 made the case that the resurrection of Jesus is not a legend or a feeling — it is a historically grounded event that changes everything.

First, clarify what the resurrection is NOT:

- **Not resuscitation** — Lazarus came back and died again. Jesus rose to a permanent new order of life.
- **Not mere influence** — "He lives" means ideas live on. Jesus' resurrection claims a physical rising from the dead.
- **Not a late legend** — The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 traces back within 3–5 years of the crucifixion.

Three lines of historical evidence:

- **Empty tomb** — Enemies admitted it. If a body existed, they would have produced it immediately.
- **Appearances** — Jesus appeared to individuals, groups, and 500 people at once. Hallucinations don't happen in groups.
- **Transformed disciples** — Frightened men in hiding became world-changers who died for what they witnessed. People don't die for what they know is a lie.

The big takeaway:

- The resurrection vindicates the cross — proof that Jesus' death actually paid for our sin.
- The same Spirit who raised Jesus lives in every believer today.
- Because Christ is risen, nothing done in His name is ever wasted.

Argument: The Case for the Resurrection

CONTEXT: Christianity stands or falls on one claim no other religion makes — that Jesus physically rose from the dead. As C.S. Lewis said, if true, it is of infinite importance; if false, of none.

CLAIM: The resurrection is the best historically supported explanation for the empty tomb, the appearances, and the transformation of the earliest disciples.

CASE: The tomb was empty — enemies admitted it and never produced a body despite every reason to. Jesus appeared to individuals, small groups, and over 500 at once. Paul, Christianity's chief persecutor, and James, Jesus' skeptical brother, became believers only after encountering the risen Christ. The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 dates within 3–5 years of the crucifixion — too early for legend.

CHALLENGE: Every alternative fails. Wrong tomb — authorities could walk to the right one. Swoon theory — medically absurd given what Jesus endured. Theft — frightened disciples overpowering armed guards. Hallucination — cannot explain group appearances or hostile conversions.

CONCLUSION: No naturalistic explanation accounts for all the evidence. The resurrection does — vindicating the cross, empowering believers today, and guaranteeing nothing done in Christ's name is ever wasted.

VI. Session 6: Set 2: Lecture 1: Can the Gospels Be Trusted?

Session 6 tackled a foundational question — are the Gospels reliable history or the invention of the early church? The answer is a well-evidenced yes.

The case for reliability rests on three pillars:

- **The character of Jesus is too unique to be invented.** Even skeptics and non-Christians have asked — which uneducated fisherman or unknown committee could have fabricated a personality that has riveted the world for 2,000 years? As John Stuart Mill put it, who among His disciples was capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus?
- **The time frame is too short for legend.** Mark was written in the 60s. Paul received his core gospel tradition within 3–5 years of the crucifixion. Legends take centuries — the Gospels exploded into life fully grown.
- **Jewish and Middle Eastern culture valued precise memory.** Rabbinic students memorized their teacher's words verbatim. Stories were passed on with strict accuracy. Free invention of tradition was culturally unthinkable in that time and place.

The big takeaway:

- The burden of proof lies with critics who deny authenticity — not with believers who affirm it.
- Evidence moves us to high probability; the Holy Spirit confirms to certainty.
- Christianity is not myth or feeling — it is grounded in events that either happened or didn't.

Argument: The Gospels Can Be Trusted

CONTEXT: Critics like Bart Ehrman, the Jesus Seminar, and popular books like *The Da Vinci Code* claim the Gospels were largely invented by the early church. This is not a minor question — Christianity stands or falls on whether these events actually happened.

CLAIM: The Gospels are reliable historical documents, not late inventions — and the burden of proof lies with those who deny their authenticity.

CASE: The character of Jesus is too extraordinary to have been fabricated — even atheist scholars admit no known person in the early church could have invented Him. The time frame is too short for legend — Paul's core creed dates within 3–5 years of the crucifixion. Jewish and Middle Eastern culture required verbatim precision in passing on tradition — free invention was culturally impossible. Jesus' unique use of Amen-prefaces, antithetical parallelism, and parables bear the unmistakable mark of a single master teacher, not a community committee.

CHALLENGE: Critics claim the early church freely invented sayings of Jesus to address their own situations. But living eyewitnesses — including apostles willing to die for their testimony — were present and could refute fabrications. No disciple cracked under torture and offered an alternate story. No enemy ever produced a body or a credible counter-narrative.

CONCLUSION: In light of the evidence, the Gospels are authentic. Evidence builds a strong case for high probability; the Holy Spirit confirms it to personal certainty. Christians need not be intimidated — there are solid, well-documented answers to every major critical claim.

VII. Session 7 | Set 2, Lecture 2: The Problem of Evil

Session 7 tackled one of the most common objections to faith: if God is all-powerful and all-good, why does evil exist?

The first surprise — every worldview has a problem of evil, and atheism's is worse. To call something truly evil requires an objective moral standard. Without God, evil becomes mere personal preference. C.S. Lewis realized this as an atheist, and it helped lead him to faith.

Three intellectual responses to the problem:

- **Free Will** — Real moral freedom requires the genuine ability to choose evil. A world without that capacity would not be a better world.
- **Natural Law** — A consistent world is necessary for responsibility and moral growth. Constant divine intervention eliminates consequences and character.
- **Soul Making** — Suffering has creative power. Pain is God's megaphone to a deaf world.

The big takeaway:

- Plantinga showed the logical contradiction charge permanently fails — if God could have a good reason to permit evil, there is no necessary contradiction.
- Intellectual answers alone are not enough — Lewis's *A Grief Observed* shows the emotional problem requires honest lament, presence, and time.
- We may not always know *why* — but we can trust the God who does.

Argument: Evil Does Not Disprove God

CONTEXT: The most powerful objection to faith: God is all-powerful and all-good, yet evil exists — therefore no such God can exist. C.S. Lewis used this argument as an atheist, until he found a fatal flaw in his own reasoning.

CLAIM: Evil does not disprove God — and worldviews that deny God have a far greater problem explaining evil than Christianity does.

CASE: Calling something truly evil requires an objective moral standard — atheism has no basis for one. Plantinga resolved the logical contradiction permanently: if God could have a good reason to permit evil, no contradiction exists. Three reasons support this — free will requires the capacity for wrong choices; natural law requires a world where choices carry real consequences; soul making shows suffering can forge genuine character.

CHALLENGE: Critics argue the amount of suffering makes God implausible. But we cannot know from our limited perspective what greater goods God works through permitted suffering. We only see the underside of the tapestry.

CONCLUSION: Christianity alone takes evil seriously, names it as real, and offers a God who enters into suffering. We may not always know why — but we can trust the God who does.

VIII. Session 8 | Set 2, Lecture 3: Is Christ the Only Way?

Session 8 addressed one of the most common objections to faith today — the charge that Christianity is too exclusive in claiming Christ is the only way to salvation.

C.S. Lewis observed that all major religions contain partial truths, organized around four characteristics:

- **The Numinous** — A sense of awe and mystery before something "wholly other." Many religions share this.
- **The Moral** — A recognition of right and wrong. Most religions affirm this.
- **Both Combined** — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam uniquely hold a God who is both transcendent and morally holy.
- **The Incarnation** — This is where Christianity stands alone. No other religion claims God entered history as a specific human being to rescue humanity. People must rise to God in every other faith — in Christianity, God comes down.

The big takeaway:

- Pluralism — all roads lead to God — collapses under scrutiny. Religions contradict each other on creation, sin, salvation, and life after death.
- The Lord, Liar, or Lunatic argument stands: Jesus' claims about Himself leave no middle ground.
- Exclusivity is not arrogance — it is an urgent invitation rooted in history, not preference.

Argument — Christ is the Only Way

CONTEXT: In a culture that prizes tolerance, Christianity's claim that Jesus is the only way to salvation is one of the most resisted objections to faith. Many assume all religions are essentially the same and lead to the same destination.

CLAIM: Christ's exclusivity is not arrogance — it is rooted in unique historical claims that no other religion makes and that cannot be avoided or softened without abandoning Christianity itself.

CASE: Religions are not the same. They contradict each other on creation, sin, God, salvation, and life after death. C.S. Lewis showed that Christianity uniquely combines the numinous and the moral — and goes further still with the incarnation: God entering human history as a specific person. Scripture is explicit — John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:14 — that salvation comes through Christ and through knowing His name. Jesus' own claims about Himself were so radical that Lewis's trilemma stands: Lord, Liar, or Lunatic. No middle ground exists.

CHALLENGE: Some argue sincere followers of other faiths will be saved through general revelation. But the clear biblical witness calls us to proclaim Christ's name precisely because people need to hear it. Speculation about exceptions must not replace obedience to the Great Commission.

CONCLUSION: Christianity's exclusivity is not a barrier to love — it is the reason for urgency in sharing. If Christ's claims are true, the Gospel is of infinite importance. If not, of none. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.

IX. Session 9 | Set 2, Lecture 4: Understanding Atheism

Session 9 tackled the charge that belief in God is just wish-fulfillment — a psychological crutch invented by weak people who can't face reality. This argument was developed by Feuerbach (religion is projection), Marx (religion is the opiate of the people), and Freud (religion is wishful thinking) — and is now repeated by Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris.

Three responses cut right to the heart of it:

- **The Bulverism Fallacy** — C.S. Lewis identified this move: assuming someone is wrong and then explaining *why* they're wrong, without ever actually proving they are. You must show a belief is false before explaining why someone holds it.
- **Desire doesn't disprove its object** — Hunger points to food. Thirst points to water. Deep human longings for meaning, morality, and eternity may be cosmic pointers — not fantasies.
- **The tables turn** — Atheism is equally subject to the wish-fulfillment charge. Multiple atheists have openly admitted they *want* there to be no God — because it means no judgment, no accountability, and no authority over their choices.

The big takeaway:

- If all thought is just materialistically determined, atheist thoughts are too — making their arguments self-defeating.
- Far from faith being irrational, atheism risks undermining the very reason needed to argue for it.
- Religion may not be the crutch — freedom from accountability might be.

Argument: Christianity is not Wish Fulfillment

CONTEXT: New atheists like Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris claim religious belief is wish-fulfillment — a fantasy invented by weak, irrational people unable to face reality. This charge has cultural traction, but it contains a serious logical flaw.

CLAIM: The wish-fulfillment charge against Christianity is a logical fallacy — and atheism is far more vulnerable to it than faith is.

CASE: C.S. Lewis called this move "Bulverism" — assuming someone is wrong and explaining why, without ever proving it. You must establish a belief is false before dismissing it psychologically. Meanwhile, natural desires consistently point to real objects — hunger to food, thirst to water. Spiritual desires may likewise point to a real God. Christianity also contains many uncomfortable truths — judgment, hell, self-denial — that no one invents for comfort.

CHALLENGE: Multiple atheists have openly admitted they *want* no God to exist — Nagel wrote "I don't want the universe to be like that." Aldous Huxley admitted atheism was "an instrument of liberation" from moral constraints. If atheism is driven by a desire for freedom from accountability, it is wish-fulfillment by its own definition.

CONCLUSION: If all thought is materialistically determined, atheist reasoning is equally suspect — they saw off the branch they sit on. Far from faith being the crutch, freedom from divine accountability may be. Belief in God, grounded in evidence and reason, stands on far firmer ground.

X. Session 10 | Set 2, Lecture 5: Apologetics & the Ascension

Session 10 asked a surprising question: why did the disciples respond to Jesus leaving with *great joy*? The answer unlocks something the church has largely forgotten — the Ascension is not an ending, it is a launching pad.

Jesus said plainly: *"It is to your advantage that I go away."* Why? Three reasons:

- **Where He went** — To be seated at the right hand of God, crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Lordship of Christ is the foundation of all apologetics. As 1 Peter 3:15 puts it — *sanctify Christ as Lord*, then give your defense. Confidence flows from His reign, not our cleverness.
- **Who He sent** — The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete — a passionate legal advocate who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Arguments alone cannot do what the Spirit does. True apologetics is always Spirit-empowered.
- **What He does now** — He intercedes for us. When you walk into a hard conversation, Christ is praying for you.

The big takeaway:

- Kierkegaard's challenge stands: stop being a spectator — get onto the playing field with passion.
- Our faith must be "latent" but real in every profession, discipline, and conversation.
- The cross was raised at a garbage heap, not a cathedral. That is where Christ's people ought to be.

Argument: The Ascension of Christ is Foundational for Our Confidence that Christ is Lord

CONTEXT: The church has largely neglected the Ascension, reducing the gospel to Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. But without understanding where Jesus went, who He sent, and what He is doing now, believers enter the world's marketplace without their most essential resources.

CLAIM: The Ascension is the missing key to effective apologetics — it grounds our confidence in Christ's lordship, our power in the Spirit, and our courage in Christ's ongoing intercession.

CASE: Jesus is not absent — He reigns at the right hand of God. That lordship is the foundation of the classic apologetic text: "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, then give your defense" (1 Peter 3:15). He sent the Holy Spirit — not just a helper, but a Paraclete, a passionate legal advocate — who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment in ways no argument alone can. And He continually intercedes for us, as He did for Peter before his greatest failure.

CHALLENGE: Many Christians reduce apologetics to winning arguments. But Lewis warned that people spend an hour listening to our case, then return to a world where the opposite is assumed. What is needed is faith lived with excellence and integrity in every profession — Christianity "latent" but real in every field.

CONCLUSION: Effective apologetics is not just intellectual — it is Spirit-empowered, Christ-grounded, and lived publicly. The cross was not raised in a cathedral between two candles, but at a crossroads between two thieves. That is where Christ's people are called to be.

XI. Session 11 | Set 3, Lecture 1: Reason and Imagination

Session 11 explored how C.S. Lewis combined reason and imagination as a model for communicating faith effectively.

Lewis's foundational insight: "*Reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning.*" We don't truly grasp an idea until we have a picture for it — which is why his mud pies vs. holiday at the sea image lands harder than a theological argument alone.

Lewis's own conversion followed three stages:

- **Imagination baptized** — Reading George MacDonald stirred something his atheism couldn't explain.
- **Reason satisfied** — A late-night conversation with Tolkien helped him see Christianity as *the myth become fact* — the story every human myth reaches toward, but which actually happened in history.
- **Will submitted** — Quietly, on a motorcycle ride to the zoo, he arrived a believer.

The big takeaway:

- Don't rush to arguments. The more closed a person is, the more indirect your approach should be — questions, stories, and metaphors open doors that debates close.
- Receive before you refute — state the other person's position to their satisfaction before responding.
- Christianity addresses the whole person: reason, imagination, desire, and will.

Argument — Reason and Imagination Must Work Together

CONTEXT: Many believers have solid arguments that still bounce off people. The problem is often not the argument — it's the approach. Lewis understood that truth must be both logically defensible and imaginatively compelling to reach the whole person.

CLAIM: Reason and imagination must work together — truth that cannot be pictured cannot be fully grasped, and a story without truth has no lasting power.

CASE: Lewis's own conversion moved from imagination to reason to will — and he used the same pattern in *The Chronicles of Narnia* to bypass defensive walls and speak to the heart. His key insight: Christianity is the myth become fact — the story every human longing points toward, which uniquely happened in real history.

CHALLENGE: Some argue stories are soft alternatives to real argument. But Jesus communicated primarily through parables. Imagination is not the enemy of truth — it is the organ through which truth becomes meaningful and memorable.

CONCLUSION: Effective apologetics speaks to the whole person. The more open someone is, the more direct you can be. The more closed, the more indirect — questions, stories, and metaphors open doors arguments cannot. As Lewis put it: I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen — not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

XII. Session 12 | Set 3, Lecture 2: Faith and Reason

Session 12 explored why faith and reason must work together — and what that means for how we share our faith.

The foundation is 1 Peter 3:15: *"Always be ready to give a defense — with gentleness and reverence."* The context matters: don't be intimidated, sanctify Christ as Lord, then give your defense. Confidence flows from who God is, not how sharp our arguments are.

Saving faith moves through three stages:

- **Knowledge** — understanding what the gospel claims.
- **Assent** — believing it to be true. This is where apologetics helps.
- **Trust** — actually entrusting yourself to Christ. Like Blondin's wheelbarrow — people believed he could carry someone across Niagara Falls, but no one volunteered. Only the Spirit produces this final step.

Four approaches to faith and reason:

- **Rationalism** — reason without faith. Overconfident, like Lewis's Mr. Enlightenment.
- **Fideism** — faith without reason. Sincere but indistinguishable from any subjective claim.
- **Classical** — faith and reason together. Augustine and Lewis both modeled this.
- **Postmodernism** — neither objective faith nor objective reason.

The big takeaway:

- Doubt has many sources — intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. Diagnose before you respond.
- Apologetics clears the path. The Spirit does the saving.

Argument: Faith and Reason Need to Work Together

CONTEXT: Many assume faith and reason are opposites — that faith means believing without evidence, or that reason alone leads to God. Both assumptions produce weak Christians and ineffective witnesses.

CLAIM: Genuine faith works through knowledge and assent toward trust — with reason preparing the path and the Spirit sealing it.

CASE: Scripture consistently shows God providing evidence before asking for trust — Moses received signs, Gideon received confirmations, Jesus healed "so that you may know." Apologetics serves the same function: moving people from knowledge to assent. But trust cannot be argued into existence. As Lewis put it, there is enough probable evidence to produce a psychological exclusion of doubt, though not a logical exclusion of dispute.

CHALLENGE: Some say "you can't argue anyone into the kingdom," so apologetics is pointless. True — but an argument against abuse is not an argument against use. Others place blind faith above reason — but this makes Christianity indistinguishable from any subjective claim.

CONCLUSION: Reason without faith overreaches. Faith without reason is defenseless. Together, under the Spirit's power, they form the foundation for the confident, gentle witness 1 Peter 3:15 calls us to.

XIII. Session 13 | Set 3, Lecture 3: Postmodernism

Session 13 examined postmodernism — the cultural shift that questions whether objective truth is even possible.

The central definition: postmodernism is *incredulity toward metanarratives* — suspicion of any grand story claiming to explain all reality. Key thinkers and their claims:

- **Foucault** — History is fiction. Knowledge is power.
- **Derrida** — There is no fixed meaning. Deconstruct every text.
- **Rorty** — Ethics is mere sentiment. No neutral grounds exist to condemn even the Holocaust.

Where Lewis *agrees*:

- We are finite. Knowledge has limits. All reality is iconoclastic — it shatters our too-small ideas.
- Read old books to correct chronological snobbery — your culture has blind spots you can't see from inside it.

Where Lewis *disagrees*:

- Postmodernism is self-refuting. Saying "there is no objective truth" is itself an objective truth claim.
- It condemns oppression without any basis to call anything objectively wrong.

The big takeaway:

- Ask questions that surface tensions in the postmodern view — don't throw arguments in people's faces.
- Stories open more doors than syllogisms.
- Don't tie your faith to cultural fashions. Postmodernism is already fading. Truth outlasts every trend.

Argument — Postmodernism is Self-Refuting

CONTEXT: Our culture says there is no objective truth — only perspectives and power. This shapes why many people resist any claim that Christianity is universally true.

CLAIM: Postmodernism is self-refuting — and Christianity offers a better account of both the limits of human knowledge and the reality of objective truth.

CASE: Postmodernism rightly notes we are finite and culturally shaped. Lewis agreed — all reality is iconoclastic, and old books correct our blind spots. But postmodernism overcorrects. Saying "no objective truth exists" is itself an objective claim. Condemning metanarratives as oppressive assumes an objective moral standard — which postmodernism denies. Rorty admitted there are no neutral grounds to condemn even the Holocaust. That is a catastrophic moral failure.

CHALLENGE: Postmodernists say all truth claims are power plays. But the same suspicion applies to postmodernism itself — Stanley Fish openly admitted it: whoever spins best wins.

CONCLUSION: Christianity doesn't claim perfect human knowledge, but it does claim truth exists, can be known in part, and is found fully in Christ. Truth outlasts every cultural fashion.

XIV. Session 14 | Set 3, Lecture 4: Relativism

Session 14 tackled the charge that religion is evil — and turned it back with a more fundamental question: without God, how do you know anything is evil at all?

New atheists like Harris, Hitchens, and Dawkins paint all religion as intrinsically violent. Two quick responses:

- **Sinner vs. Hypocrite** — Every Christian is a sinner, but not every sinner is a hypocrite. Jesus himself was history's greatest critic of religious hypocrisy.
- **Christianity's actual record** — Abolition of slavery, hospitals, universities, human rights, and human dignity are all deeply rooted in Christian belief.

But the deeper problem: without God, there is no objective basis for calling anything evil. Three dead ends:

- **Says Me** — Ethics reduced to personal feeling. Your feeling vs. mine. No judge.
- **Says Us** — Majority rule. Might makes right. If enough people vote for it, it's moral.
- **You Can't Get Ought from Is** — No list of facts ever produces a moral obligation. Lewis showed this is philosophically impossible.

Atheist legal scholar Arthur Leff said it plainly: the only unchallengeable moral authority would have to be an unjudged Judge, an unrulled Legislator — and then asked: "What would you call such a thing if it existed?" The answer: God. Without Him, everything is up for grabs.

The big takeaway: unless God exists, there is no objective evil or good. There *is* objective evil and good. Therefore God exists.

Argument: Without God, There is No Objective Basis for Good or Evil

CONTEXT: New atheists claim religion is evil and should be abolished. But this charge contains a fatal flaw — it assumes an objective moral standard to make the accusation while denying any such standard exists.

CLAIM: Without God, there is no objective basis for good or evil — making relativism not just philosophically hollow, but morally catastrophic.

CASE: Every attempt to build ethics without God collapses under Arthur Leff's "grand says who?" challenge. "Says me" reduces morality to personal feeling. "Says us" makes it majority rule — might makes right. Neither can produce a genuine moral *ought* from mere facts. Even Leff — an atheist — concluded that only an unchallengeable, transcendent moral authority could ground ethics. He called it "Him with a capital H." Meanwhile, Christianity grounds human dignity in the image of God, giving Western civilization its foundation for human rights, hospitals, universities, and the abolition of slavery.

CHALLENGE: Critics point to the Crusades and church scandals as proof religion is evil. Acknowledge real failures honestly — but note that Jesus was history's fiercest critic of religious hypocrisy. And the very moral standard used to condemn those failures comes from the Christian worldview, not from atheism.

CONCLUSION: The argument that religion is evil ironically requires the very objective moral standard that atheism cannot provide. Unless God exists, there is no objective evil or good. But there *is* objective evil and good. Therefore God exists.

XV. Session 15 | Set 3, Lecture 5: Abolition of Man

Session 15 examined C.S. Lewis's most important book — *The Abolition of Man* — and his devastating critique of relativism's consequences for education and society.

Lewis starts with a school textbook (the "Green Book") that teaches students that value statements — like "the waterfall is sublime" — are merely expressions of personal feeling, not claims about reality. The danger: students absorb this as an unspoken assumption, never as an argued position. As Chesterton said: *education is implication*.

The result is what Lewis calls **men without chests** — people whose heads (reason) and bellies (appetite) have been disconnected because the chest (conscience, trained affection) has been hollowed out.

Society then demands virtue from people whose moral formation has been systematically destroyed.

Three critical observations:

- **Relativists contradict themselves** — They denounce racism, sexism, and injustice, but have given up any objective standard by which to call these things wrong. Derrida claimed "deconstruction is justice" — but denied any basis for judging what is just.
- **You can't explain everything away** — Lewis warned: if you see through all things, there is nothing left to see. A wholly transparent world is an invisible world.
- **Power without moral restraint is catastrophic** — Nietzsche, Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot all illustrate where relativism leads when the conditioners shape conscience without any higher standard.

The big takeaway:

- Ancient wisdom: conform the soul to reality. Modern error: conform reality to human desire.
- Find what people care about most — then show them their own relativism undermines it.
- Use parables, personal analogies, and irony — not just arguments — to hold up a mirror.

Argument: Results of Relativism Are Catastrophic

CONTEXT: Modern education quietly teaches students that moral statements are just feelings — not claims about reality. This assumption isn't argued; it's absorbed. And Lewis warned that once the chest is removed, society cannot demand the virtue it has systematically destroyed.

CLAIM: Relativism produces men without chests — and when power is untethered from objective moral truth, the results are catastrophic.

CASE: Lewis's "Green Book" example shows how relativism spreads through implication, not argument. The result is a culture that mocks honor and then is shocked to find traitors. Relativists contradict themselves constantly — condemning racism, sexism, and injustice with moral force they have no philosophical basis to justify. History confirms Lewis's warning: Nietzsche's Superman philosophy shaped Hitler; Marxist relativism fueled Stalin. When conditioners control conscience with no higher standard above them, there are no brakes on cruelty.

CHALLENGE: Relativists often say objective moral claims are just power plays in disguise. But the same accusation applies to them — and more urgently, they still use moral language. Find what they care about most and show them their own relativism undermines it. Sail by the stars or drift without direction — those are the only options.

CONCLUSION: There are only two choices: conform the soul to reality, or conform reality to human desire. The second option has been tried — and the twentieth century is its body count. Lewis called *The Abolition of Man* his most important book because the gospel requires people to believe sin is real. Relativism removes that precondition for faith.

XVI. Session 16 | Set 4, Lecture 1: Responding to the New Age

Session 16 introduced the New Age movement — what it teaches and how to respond with truth and love. Most important first: many New Age followers were once in churches and left deeply wounded. The emotional barrier runs deeper than the intellectual one. Listen before you argue.

The New Age core comes down to two phrases:

- **All is one** — All distinctions between God, creation, good, and evil are ultimately illusion.
- **You are divine** — Participating in the one makes you God.

Two more claims follow: the human problem is **ignorance** not sin; the solution is **altered consciousness** through meditation and psycho-technologies.

Three Achilles heels:

- **Can't be consistently lived** — The Buddhist who lost five sons still wept. Pain and loss refuse to behave like illusions.
- **Good and evil dissolve** — Hitler's gas chambers were "silly, not evil." No atrocity can be genuinely condemned.
- **Love collapses inward** — The philosophy drives people toward the self, not toward others. Senior New Age leaders were often deeply narcissistic.

The big takeaway: Christianity says creation is real, you are a creature not Creator, sin is the problem, and redemption is the answer. Many New Age seekers are looking for Jesus — they just haven't seen Him clearly through Christians yet.

Argument: New Age Worldview Cannot Be Consistently Lived

CONTEXT: New Age ideas permeate film, psychology, medicine, and spirituality. Many followers once attended church and left wounded. Engagement requires both clarity and love.

CLAIM: The New Age worldview cannot be consistently lived — and Christianity provides a more coherent account of reality, human nature, and love.

CASE: "All is One" dissolves all moral distinctions. When asked about Hitler's gas chambers, a Buddhist scholar answered "silly, not evil." A worldview that cannot condemn the Holocaust has failed morally. The philosophy also drives relentlessly inward — offering no foundation for other-centered love, which is why many senior New Age leaders proved deeply narcissistic. Experience-based claims also fail under scrutiny: TM's physiological benefits were replicated simply by stopping to rest twice a day.

CHALLENGE: New Age advocates point to powerful personal experiences. But experience is not self-interpreting — the same result can have a very different explanation.

CONCLUSION: Creation is real, you are a creature not Creator, sin is the problem, redemption is the answer. The most powerful witness to New Age seekers is the other-centered love of Christ — something many have never actually seen from Christians.

XVII. Session 17 | Set 4, Lecture 2: Neopaganism

Session 17 introduced Wicca — a growing movement in schools, colleges, feminist theology, and military chaplaincies.

Key facts: Wiccans reject Satanism entirely and want a framework without good vs. evil. Modern Wicca was assembled in the mid-20th century — it is largely a new religion despite ancient claims.

The core creed: *"Harm none and do as you will."* But if good and evil are illusions, what makes harming anyone genuinely wrong?

Three Achilles heels:

- **Good and evil dissolve** — "Harm none" becomes mere preference, not moral truth.
- **Logic is unavoidable** — Rejecting reason still requires reason to make the argument.
- **Ecology is undermined** — If all is one with no real distinctions, why does it matter whether a rainforest is trees or smoke?

The big takeaway: many Neopagans are the church's unpaid bills — wounded by Christians. Lead with love and listening. Then gently surface the tensions their worldview cannot resolve.

Argument: Neopaganism Cannot Sustain its Own Moral Commitments

CONTEXT: Wicca is growing in schools, feminist theology, and military chaplaincies. Many practitioners were once in churches and left wounded.

CLAIM: Neopaganism cannot sustain its own moral commitments — Christianity provides the only coherent foundation for what Neopagans care about most.

CASE: "Harm none" assumes harming others is genuinely wrong — but Neopaganism denies objective good and evil. This collapses their own ethic, their environmental activism, and their calls for tolerance. You cannot condemn injustice without a moral standard. Rejecting logic still requires logic.

CHALLENGE: Only theism grounds the justice, dignity, and environmental stewardship Neopagans passionately pursue.

CONCLUSION: Their deepest longings point toward the biblical worldview. But argue last — listen and love first. Many are searching for the Jesus they never clearly saw in Christians.

XVIII. Session 18 | Set 4, Session 3: What Is a Cult?

Session 18 asked: what actually makes a group a cult — and how do we use that word responsibly?

Three definitions, each with a different purpose:

- **Sociological** — Any group outside the cultural or religious mainstream.
- **Theological** — The most important: any group denying something essential to the gospel — Christ's deity, salvation by grace, the physical resurrection.
- **Psychological** — Authoritarian leadership, isolation, closed-mindedness, and control. Use this cautiously — unhealthy churches can show some of these traits without being cults.

Three ways cults work doctrinally:

- **Addition** — Extra inspired texts alongside Scripture (Book of Mormon, Divine Principle).
- **Subtraction** — Selectively ignoring portions of Scripture that contradict their beliefs.
- **Distortion** — Elevating a partial truth until it crowds everything else out. This is *false centeredness* — placing something other than the gospel at the center.

The big takeaway: cults are often the church's unpaid bills — recovering neglected truths but distorting them by making them everything. Keep the gospel at the center. Everything else must stay in proper proportion.

Argument: The Antidote for Cults is Keeping the Gospel Genuinely Centered in Your Life

CONTEXT: Jonestown, Waco, Heaven's Gate — cultic influence rarely looks dramatic at first. It begins with gradual distortion and misplaced authority. False beliefs wreck real lives.

CLAIM: A cult is best identified theologically — any group denying something essential to the gospel — and must be engaged with precision and love.

CASE: Theologically, denying Christ's deity, salvation by grace, or the resurrection places a group outside historic Christianity. Psychologically, warning signs include authoritarian control and isolation.

Doctrinally, cults add extra scriptures, subtract inconvenient biblical texts, or distort truth through false centeredness — displacing the gospel with something else, even something true.

CHALLENGE: "Cult" is easily misused. Prefer "aberrational" or "cult-like" when the theological line hasn't clearly been crossed. Precision protects both truth and people.

CONCLUSION: The antidote is keeping the gospel genuinely at the center. Cults are the church's unpaid bills — pay them by teaching the whole counsel of God with honesty and love.

XIX. Session 19 | Set 4, Lecture 4: Dealing With Cults

Session 19 moved from defining cults to responding — biblically, practically, and with love.

Three key passages frame the response:

- **2 Corinthians 11:13–15** — Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. You won't see the zipper on the sheep costume. Look beneath the surface at both doctrine and the fruit of a person's life.
- **Acts 20:26–31** — Paul taught the *whole counsel of God* for three years. The antidote to cults is comprehensive biblical teaching. False teachers draw disciples to themselves rather than to Christ.
- **1 Peter 5:1–6** — True shepherds lead by example, not compulsion or control. Watch for leaders who lord it over people rather than proving to be examples.

The big takeaway:

- Most people join cults for emotional reasons — love, belonging, certainty in crisis. Arguments alone won't reach them.
- State their position to their satisfaction before you critique it.
- Focus on root issues — the nature of Christ, salvation, Scripture — not peripheral branches.
- Currency experts study real money to spot counterfeits. Know the genuine article deeply.
- If someone leaves a cult, the work has just begun. It is easier to get someone out of the cult than to get the cult out of them.

Argument: The Best Defense Against Cults is Knowing Scripture Deeply

CONTEXT: Most believers feel unprepared when someone knocks at the door or a friend is drawn into a controlling group. Session 19 gives the biblical framework for discernment and engagement.

CLAIM: The best defense against cults is knowing Scripture deeply — and the best engagement reaches the whole person with truth and love.

CASE: False teachers come disguised as angels of light — attractive and apparently loving. Most people join cults emotionally, not intellectually, so arguments alone rarely bring them out. Paul's model: the whole counsel of God, taught systematically, applied individually — with tears. True shepherds lead by example, not control. Test both doctrine and the fruit of a person's life.

CHALLENGE: Focus on roots — the nature of Christ, salvation, Scripture — not peripheral issues. State their position to their satisfaction before responding. Lasting change takes time — one conversation planted a seed that bore fruit seven years later.

CONCLUSION: The goal is not winning arguments but winning people. Know truth so well that error becomes obvious. When someone leaves a cult, discipleship has only just begun.

XX. Session 20 | Set 4, Lecture 5: Argument from Agape

Session 20 presented the final and most powerful argument in the course — the Argument from Agape.

Agape is *sacrifice of self in the service of another* — forgiving enemies, giving without expectation, laying down life for others. The question: which worldview can actually ground and sustain this kind of love?

Three worldviews compared:

- **Pantheism / New Age** — If others are ultimately illusory, why sacrifice for them? The consistent thrust of Eastern philosophy is inward and upward, never outward. Hinduism and Buddhism in their classical forms show little concern for human rights — precisely because the other doesn't ultimately exist.
- **Materialism / Atheism** — Darwin admitted one truly other-centered act would annihilate his theory. Dawkins calls agape a "Darwinian mistake." Kin selection and reciprocity cannot explain giving your life for a stranger or enemy.
- **Christianity** — God is eternally triune. Love and relationship are at the core of reality before creation. "God is love" cannot be meaningfully said of Zeus, Brahma, or Allah. Agape as a noun appears only once in all pre-Christian Greek literature — Christians essentially invented the concept.

The big takeaway: love is both Christianity's greatest failure and greatest argument. Judy Lawson — a murder victim's mother — led her son's killer to Christ through ten years of letters. Only the gospel does that.

Argument: Genuine Agape is Christianity's Most Compelling Apologetic

CONTEXT: Every worldview claims to value love. But when an atheist said he wanted a loving, forgiving marriage, a deeper question emerged: which worldview can sustain that love when life gets hard?

CLAIM: Other-centered agape love is uniquely grounded in Christianity — and its existence exposes the inadequacy of both materialism and pantheism.

CASE: Darwin admitted one truly selfless act would annihilate his theory. Dawkins calls agape a "Darwinian mistake" — no evolutionary mechanism explains dying for an enemy. Pantheism fares no better: if others are illusory, sacrifice is groundless. Christianity alone grounds love in the eternal triune God who is love by nature. "God is love" cannot be said of Zeus, Brahma, or Allah. Christians essentially invented the word agape.

CHALLENGE: Non-believers do love sacrificially. But the argument is not about what individuals can do — it is about what worldviews can motivate and sustain under pressure.

CONCLUSION: Genuine agape is Christianity's most compelling apologetic. They will know you are my disciples by your love.

5C Argument Building

Context	Set the scene. Give your listener the background they need to understand why this question matters. Guidance - Briefly describe the situation or question being discussed. - Explain why this topic is relevant or important. - Acknowledge what your listener may already believe or think. - Keep it short — 2 to 4 sentences is enough.
Claim	State your position clearly and directly. This is the main point you are arguing. Guidance - Write one clear, direct sentence stating what you believe. - Avoid vague language — be specific about what you are claiming. - This should be something that can be supported with evidence. - Your claim should flow naturally from the context you just set.
Case	Build your case. Present the evidence and reasoning that supports your claim. Guidance - Give 2 to 4 specific pieces of evidence or reasons. - Draw from Scripture, history, logic, or science as appropriate. - Explain each point — do not just list it. - Connect each piece of evidence back to your claim.
Challenge	Address the strongest objection. Acknowledge a real counterargument and respond to it. Guidance - State the strongest objection someone might raise honestly. - Do not use a weak or easy objection — pick a real one. - Respond to it with evidence or reasoning. - Show that your claim still holds even after considering this challenge.
Conclusion	Bring it home. Restate your claim and leave your listener with the key takeaway. Guidance - Restate your main claim in fresh words — do not repeat it word for word. - Briefly summarize what the evidence shows. - Invite the listener to consider the implications. - End with something memorable or thought-provoking.

Check it out online. <https://srmatthews.com/tsg#tsg-extra>

The online tool has an easy argument to help you see the flow of the process. There are 6 topics listed on the builder tool to help you get started.

Also, from Set 2 Lecture 3, there are several 5C arguments for each chapter, located just ahead of the lecture transcript.

The screenshot shows the '5C's Argument Builder' web application. At the top, it says 'Apologetics Practice - Bible Study'. Below this is a progress bar with five steps: Context, Claim, Case, Challenge, and Conclusion. The 'Context' step is currently selected. The main area is titled 'GET STARTED' and 'Choose Your Topic'. It prompts the user to 'Enter the apologetics topic you want to practice arguing, or choose one of the suggestions below.' There is a text input field with the example 'e.g. The resurrection of Jesus is a historical event'. Below this, it says 'Need a topic? Try one of these:' and lists six topics in buttons: 'The resurrection of Jesus', 'God's existence from design', 'The Bible's reliability', 'Jesus as the only way', 'The problem of evil', and 'The universe had a Creator'. A 'Start Practice -->' button is at the bottom. At the very bottom, there is a link to 'See a Completed Example -->' and a note: 'A sample everyday topic showing how all 5 steps fit together.'

Argument Topic: _____

Context Set the scene. Give your listener the background they need to understand why this question matters.	
Claim State your position clearly and directly. This is the main point you are arguing.	
Case Build your case. Present the evidence and reasoning that supports your claim.	
Challenge Address the strongest objection. Acknowledge a real counterargument and respond to it.	
Conclusion Restate your claim and leave your listener with the key takeaway.	

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NOTES

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