

Episode-0

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the God Questions Podcast. We're titling this one Episode Zero. You might be asking, didn't we just do Episode 200 and something? So why are we doing an Episode Zero? There actually was an Episode Zero, but it was a really short kind of brief intro to what the Got Questions Podcast is all about. And as we've done over 200 episodes now, what we thought the Got Questions Podcast was going to be all about is it adapted, it's evolved, so to speak. So we just wanted to redo that episode to kind of give everyone a picture of here's what our heart and passion is for the Got Questions Podcast. Here's why we think it's unique. And here's why we think it's a worthwhile contribution to the many other excellent Christian podcasts that are out there.

Shea Houdmann

Joining me today is Jeff, the Managing Editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the Managing Editor of Got Questions Ministries. So as I think of what the Got Questions Podcast is, and there's a few other podcasts that I watch, what I think is most unique or different is that we are a ministry that answers people's Bible questions. If you read our articles, I mean, we try to answer the question as completely as necessary using as few words as possible. And that goal of being brief, of being succinct sometimes prevents us from being able to say everything we'd want to say. So answering a question audibly, like in a conversational format, you can dig deeper, you can spend more time. A 30-minute podcast, you can say a lot more than you can in a three-paragraph article.

Shea Houdmann

So for me, the main reason I enjoy doing the Got Questions Podcast and why I think it's a worthwhile contribution, along with the other formats where we have answers, is that it allows us to really discuss issues in depth. We just did a whole series on Calvinism where we're able to go through the issues, discuss the issues, but also give our own personal perspective. And even a conversation like this can be more practical where we can say, yes, here's the

theological, but here's how it actually applies to me, and here's maybe how I've personally struggled with it.

Shea Houdmann

So just having the podcast, I think, really helps us to communicate the answers in a different way, and also in a way that I think adds to the conversation, adds to the answer. The podcast can be powerful, it can be very practical, and it can be very personal. I like those three things about it. So Jeff, what would you say? What are some of the things about the Got Questions Podcast that you particularly enjoy and that you think contributes something unique to the world of Christian podcasting?

Jeff Laird

It's nice to be able to have more than a brief second to talk about these things. A typical article, you're going to be able to read in just a very few minutes. Even our longer ones, it's five, six, seven minutes to be able to read them. And some of these issues, if you really want to dig into them, take more than that. So I like the ability to say, we're going to take this one idea, this one issue, and get into it a little bit further.

Jeff Laird

I also like the ability to tackle things from many different angles or perspectives. I'm really big on analogy and comparison. And when you're writing, there's a limit to how much of that you can put in. You can give an example, you can give an analogy, but nobody wants to read an article that's just all analogies necessarily. But when you're having a conversation verbally, those things just flow a little more easily. So it's a good way to approach people with topics and ideas because it's different than what they have on there. I also like the ability to seeing how we get to coordinate with other ministries, other Christian believers kind of bounce the ideas and thoughts off each other. So for me, the two big ones are really that. It's a chance to be a little bit more clear and also to hit things from more than one angle.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I would second all of that. I mean, it's one thing to sit down and read an article, but it's quite another thing to listen to a conversation about the same subject, especially if it's very possible that the people that wrote that article are having the conversation. It's likely in some cases that one of the three of us have written the article that we're talking about or we've written on that

topic before. And so we get that perspective. And then the articles are designed to be rather impersonal. We don't want to insert our own thoughts and feelings into an article and share too much about our own personal opinions. But the podcast, it's very different. We do bring those things to the table and we share personal anecdotes and we're able to talk about our opinions and compare my opinion versus you guys' opinion and stuff like that. And it's just a different way to learn. And I think it's a very valuable thing.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, the articles, like you said, Kevin, are designed to be impersonal. Here's what the Bible says. With so many of the issues we cover, yes, the Bible addresses them, but doesn't necessarily explicitly come out and say, here's the correct view. That's why there are multiple interpretations of some of these issues. So sometimes on the podcast, I really enjoy the three of us, especially when we're not like 100% on the same page with each other on an issue to be able to discuss, here's why I hold to this particular issue or this particular interpretation. And Jeff may have a slightly different slant and Kevin might have a slightly different slant.

Shea Houdmann

So even I enjoy, both with the three of us and with sometimes having Nelson or Gwen or Atalia or MeLissa on discussing things, I enjoy the back and forth, the conversational aspect. And I enjoy being able to disagree agreeably to maybe to model that because there's not a whole lot of good models of doing that out there. And so GotQuestions.org, Got Questions Ministries is not a monolith in terms of everyone believes exactly the same about everything. No, there are some divergences of opinion. Even here as a ministry, we all agree on the statement of faith. We agree on the essentials, the core truths, but on the side issues, some of the things that we're discussing, because those are the ones that are often most frequently asked about, we're able to diverge from each other a little bit and do it in a respectful way. And I enjoy being able to model that and to display that, even how we disagree with each other on occasion.

Jeff Laird

I think when we do that, it's probably a little subtle in some senses, because I think for a lot of people, they're used to seeing what disagreement looks like, sounds like how people talk, react viscerally when they're having some sort of

a disagreement. And I would imagine that if you just had our podcasts on in the background and you weren't particularly paying attention to what was being said and somebody said, oh yeah, they don't agree on a particular thing, you might find yourself going, okay, because I think we do a good job of demonstrating that we can disagree on those things without the slightest bit of angst about that. We recognize that somebody else has a different opinion and it's just fine. There's nothing underneath that. We're not forcing ourselves to be overly polite or overly kind about it. It's just okay that we disagree on some of those things.

Jeff Laird

So that is a good thought that gives us a chance to model that. But I also know, as we say that, I can see some people missing it possibly a little bit, because what we would perceive as disagreements may kind of slip past them sometimes. Not realizing that, yeah, when you really pay attention, we're coming at this from two different angles. It's just that we don't invest so much personal emotion in it that we're going to get upset.

Shea Houdmann

The most popular podcast, the last time I checked, and I think it's still the case that we've done, is when the three of us hopped on an episode, recorded it really quickly on the conflict in Ukraine when it broke out, what is it, a little over two years ago now. So we were able to very quickly, hey, let's get on, talk about this. Does this have any connection to the end times? Is it Gog and Magog? All of that. So the hot button aspect of it is good, because we can obviously publish an article really fast, but the way the search engines work, Google especially, a new article sometimes takes months before people will start finding it. Or they can go directly to GotQuestions.org, but they may not expect there already to be an article. But on YouTube, there's a much better job of getting new stuff to the top of the results. A new video can show up and go viral, so to speak, much easier than an article can. So the hot button or the fast action aspect of podcasting can be another thing that I really enjoy about this is, we don't do it that often, because we're not all about, oh, let's just talk about whatever the newest controversy or debate is in Christendom. But occasionally, it's good for us to be able to do that, to get important information out quickly that can get in people's laps quickly.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, we recently just did one on the solar eclipse, and we brought in some end times issues there. A very, very timely kind of a hot button issue while that was all going on. We've also done Israel in relation to the end times, artificial intelligence, pro-life issues, gender issues. You mentioned the Russia-Ukraine war and critical race theory. We have a podcast on that. I think you did with Vadibakum, and just a lot of different issues that can, as you said, Shea, get published very quickly and be up and ready for people to be discussing.

Shea Houdmann

Let me throw out three things that I've noticed on other Christian podcasts. And in mentioning these, truly, I'm not doing it from a critical spirit, because I believe there's a place for these. But these are three specific things where, at least as of now, we don't feel like God is calling us to do them. I would like each of you, or maybe even just one of you, to explain why we don't do this sort of thing at Got Questions. The first one I call gotcha podcasting is whenever a prominent pastor or Christian leader, teacher, says something controversial or has a slip of the tongue, I can predict that within a few days, all of the popular Christian podcasts out there will be talking about it, will be criticizing him or her for something that they did. So Jeff, why don't you take this one? Why don't we do that sort of thing here at the Got Questions podcast?

Jeff Laird

I'd say it's for the same reason we talked about with the division or the unity sort of a thing, is you have to have a level of discernment to know what's important and what's not. And sometimes when somebody who has an established reputation says a thing, it's going to take a little bit to finally understand precisely what they meant and how did they themselves react to it. And I wouldn't call it yellow journalism for those who aren't familiar with that term. It's that idea of just taking something hot off the press and throwing it out there to scare people or make them upset. The whole ministry is based around giving people reasonable, understandable, sensible answers. And it's really hard to do that if you feel like you have to comment on what somebody said 20 minutes ago when there hasn't really been any time to figure out what it means.

Jeff Laird

Like you said, there's going to be times where some things are clear, some things are obvious, and they need to be addressed. But I would say that it just doesn't fit the model that we have with the ministry in general, which is we want things that people can go back and look at, say, a year later or two years later, and it's still relevant and it's still meaningful because we're not just talking about whatever was happening in the 10 seconds afterwards. And also, hopefully, something that we're not going to look at in six months and be embarrassed about because we stepped on our own toes or said something that was out of turn or out of line or judged too quickly.

Jeff Laird

So I think that's where that fits in with us. It's not that we're not capable of doing that when it needs to be done. We've had some podcasts where we've talked about leaders who have done things that we found objectionable, but that is just not our drive. And I think it would be a distraction from the way we typically try to approach the ministry in general. Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, you mentioned being relevant, and I think that fits well with the second one I was going to bring up. We want our podcast, as much as they can be, to be evergreen. We don't want it to just get, oh wow, it's going to get 100,000 views in the next month and then no one's ever going to watch it again because it's not an issue that they're thinking about anymore. We want to cover some of those issues sometimes, but by and large, we want an issue that will be as relevant tomorrow as it will be a year or five years from now. And so that's our goal with the articles. It's our goal with the audios we record. It's our goal with the regular videos. I mean, we want to publish something that's going to have a lasting impact, not just only a hot button or not something that's going to, no one's even going to be thinking about a year from now. And then the third one, because Kevin, I'll ask you this one. Why on the Got Questions podcast, why do we not cover politics more often than we do?

Kevin Stone

Well, I think one reason would be what you just mentioned about being evergreen. Politics can change so much, the whole political world. And so we don't want to be focused a whole lot on current politics because those kinds

of things change. We'd rather focus on biblical principles because those are unchanging.

Kevin Stone

But also because when it comes to politics, there are so many different ways of looking at it, and there are different believers and different groups who kind of lean one way or the other, but we're still believers. We're still in the body of Christ, and we don't want to go down the path of alienating half of the body of Christ because of things that we say on a podcast politically.

Kevin Stone

We do want to address moral issues, and sometimes there's an overlap. People might say, well, why are you talking about that issue? It's a political issue, but we might see it as a moral issue. The abortion issue, for example, pro-life, that has political ramifications, but we talk about it because it is at its root a moral issue. The issue of the sanctity of life, God's creation, being made in the image of God. And so these are moral issues that we do need to address, even though there are political ramifications and political reverberations from issues such as that.

Kevin Stone

But all in all, we would rather rise above politics in this way, that we should be praying for our elected leaders, whatever their political stripe. We need to be praying for elected leaders. Easy to criticize elected officials, and Lord knows that I do my share of criticizing elected leaders in my personal life, but I want to always stop and ask myself, am I praying for these leaders? And really that rises above the whole political skirmish that we see going on. And it's what I want for my congregation in my church as well, is that we'd be rising above the politics of it all and praying for them. These men and women need prayer, and we need to be asking for God's blessing.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, you mentioned Votibakam earlier, and I'm going to ask the two of you what some of your favorite episodes are. I've really enjoyed the, I think, two or three episodes I've done with him. And the one where we discussed apologetics, and he focused on the goal of apologetics is to win the person and not to win the argument. And it's like, I knew that, but the way you said it so succinctly, I was like, oh, that's perfect. And so that's even changed how I write when I write answers for GotQuestions.org or for the blog or so forth, or

even when I'm engaging with someone like, okay, is my concern is winning this argument or in actually helping this person? And so that's been powerful to me.

Shea Houdmann

And whenever you bring politics into it, I mean, I take strong political positions. And personally, if someone asks me, I'd be happy to share those. But the last thing we want is for a political issue that ultimately has little to no eternal ramifications to push people away from the gospel, to not want to listen to what we have to say on more important issues because we're of a different political persuasion than they are. So how about you, Kevin? What are some of your favorite podcast episodes, either that the three of us have done or that are the ones that you've watched?

Kevin Stone

Well, I don't usually watch the ones that we do because I just don't like to see myself on video. So, but I do have some favorites. I was coming through some of the archived podcasts the other day. I saw some that I remember really enjoying seeing and I want to go back and watch them again. Actually, one with Frank Turek was just really cool. He has such an energetic presentation of truth. And then what he says is really good, too, the content of his work. Melissa Dougherty was a really good interview. Also, Jay Warner Wallace with the Cold Case Christianity and his approach to apologetics. And then Elisa Childers was another really good interview.

Kevin Stone

And I got to say, Shea, you do a really good interview. You ask great questions of these guests. And so they're very enjoyable to listen to and to watch. And I guess the four that I picked as my favorites are all kind of having to do with apologetics. So maybe that's kind of a favorite subject of mine in the podcasts.

Shea Houdmann

How about you, Jeff? What are some of the favorite episodes, whether it's like the ones that we've done together or other ones that you've watched or listened to?

Jeff Laird

Well, you did tell me beforehand that I'm not allowed to answer. Anything with me in it, I like. So I will not say that. I do think that the things that I tend to gravitate toward that I like that we've done are when there's a chance to

present a challenging perspective in a very reasonable way. So the interviews that you did with Sandra Glahn, I think were interesting to me. I can say that I don't, I personally don't necessarily agree with the conclusions that she has come to on some of those issues. But I really like to be able to hear somebody who's articulate, educated, informed, reasonable, talk about those things in a way that can challenge and push back on the things that I think. And I feel body back them a little bit of that. And some I like just because I appreciate the people in their work. John Lennox, we had William Lane Craig, Greg Cockel, people like that. They're fun to see because you just you like to be able to put those names in front of people to realize that they're there.

Jeff Laird

Another one I remember that I thought was good when we talked about revival, when there was the revival on Asbury. That was one of those where it was a hot button topic, but at least it was a subject that also has relevance basically all the time for what does that mean and how do we interpret this and how do we go about it?

Jeff Laird

And then I've definitely really enjoyed personally doing the Calvinism series because it was really nice to be able to go that level of depth into something and to be able to take time to really dig into different issues. So I guess the summary for me is I like the ones that challenge the perspective or give me a chance to dig a little bit deeper when we're going through it.

Shea Houdmann

I'm actually going to answer this like the opposite of Kevin. Trust me, I truly do enjoy doing the interviews as well. I wouldn't be doing them if I didn't think they were worthwhile contributors to the podcast. But I truly enjoyed the most the ones that the three of us do or the ones I do with Gwen and Nelson or having MeLissa or Beth or Atalia on because to me, that's a different level of intimacy is the right word, but the three of us, we're friends, we've been coworkers for Kevin and I. It's been over a decade. I mean, Jeff's been involved in the ministry for approaching 20 years now, but I've been an employee for several years now. So like we know each other, so it's easier for us to read each other, to bounce questions off each other. There's just like a comfort level that different than when you're interviewing a stranger. Even if you know, I agree with this. I love this person's book or podcast or whatever show or

whatever else they're doing. But when you have the friendship, the established relationship with other people on the show to me, that's it's more comfortable. I don't get as nervous. I find them to be more fun and I find them to be just as valuable in terms of answering a question as interviewing a quote-unquote celebrity Christian or an expert on the issue. So no, the episodes with the other Got Questions staff are my favorite.

Shea Houdmann

And like Kevin, I don't particularly like looking at myself either, but every time I hear my voice, I'm like, is that really what I sound like? Like, yes, it is Shea. But no, I enjoy these conversations because you along with me are serving in Got Questions. You experience some of the things I do. You deal with the same people I deal with. You've dealt with the same difficult questions and that's for sure. I enjoy all the episodes, but the ones with the Got Questions staff are definitely my favorite. And that's why predominantly most of the episodes involve either the three of us or other Got Questions ministry staff.

Kevin Stone

And just to be clear, I love working with you guys. The reason I don't usually watch what we produce is, like I said, it's just my own image that I'm trying to avoid. But no, I love working with you guys and these are good times I look forward to as well when we get together.

Jeff Laird

See, and I have a sort of a third thing on that. The system that we use to record these podcasts lets us pull down on MP3 of our own information so I can listen to it. And I always listen to that afterwards. And the reason is because I don't come in with a script. I don't come in with notes. It's another thing I like about the podcast. We agree beforehand on the general topic and sometimes we'll talk about outlines, but we don't script the podcast in the sense that we know exactly what's going to happen. I literally don't know what I'm going to say until it's over. And then I go back and go, okay, am I going to get fired this week? Or do we do a pretty good job with that? So it's part of the learning curve that you get into when you do this for a little while. But for me, it's been fun to do. But I do find myself like as soon as we're done with this one, I'll go back and listen and go, oh, okay, I did say that. So I need to be ready, need to be prepared. But I like the approach that we take in that we

allow that openness just to say exactly what we're led to based on the experience we have.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, like the three of us, I'm guessing we've done maybe 150 episodes together. And we have that comfort level with each other that generally we have a topic and sometimes we'll send out an outline or you'll send out some scratch notes. But yeah, none of us are scripting this. I mean, we have some ideas of what we want to say because we don't want to waste anyone's time with rambling or so forth.

Shea Houdmann

But even with some of the guests, it's interesting how some of them want to know. I want to know every question you're going to ask me so I can prepare ahead of time. And other guests are like, okay, as long as we're talking about this topic, you can ask me anything you want. And they don't even want the questions ahead of time. So even on the Got Questions staff, some of the staff want to have a session. Okay, let's talk about what we're going to talk about. And that's fine, too. But the three of us were like, no, let's agree on a topic, agree on maybe a flow. But we don't want it to be scripted because this is a different format than other ways that we answer people's questions. So yeah.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff and Kevin, thank you for the many hours we spent together staring at these cameras and talking about these issues. I truly do enjoy it. Got Questions podcast has become an important part of the ministry. It makes me wonder why we waited so long before we started. I know that's ultimately my fault. But I think it is a worthwhile contributor to Got Questions ministry. So I'm glad we do it.

Shea Houdmann

So this has been Got Questions podcast episode zero. Kind of a redo of what is the Got Questions podcast all about? How is it unique? How is it different? How is it a worthwhile contributor to Got Questions ministry? Got questions? The Bible has answers. And we'll help you find them.