

Transcript 195

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Joining me today is my wife, MeLissa. She is the managing editor of GQkids.org. And two of us are gonna be tag teaming and interviewing Elizabeth Urbanowicz of Foundation Worldview, who's the author of a new book for kids called What is Truth. So, MeLissa, Elizabeth, thanks for joining me today.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Thanks so much for having me.

Shea Houdmann

So just to start off, what really all the questions are going to be easy, friendly. We love your book. We love the concept. But what led you to write What is Truth? And just out of curiosity, do you plan on this being a series of books for kids or is this kind of a one shot?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yeah, good question. So the first question with you know what led us to create this book at Foundation Worldview on the concept of truth is this is a concept we cover in almost every single one of our curriculums because it's so foundational. And we thought, you know, why don't we have, you know, help us have a broader audience we can reach even more kids. You know, for some parents that might not want to purchase a full on curriculum, to be able to purchase a picture book to lay this foundation of truth. And the reason that truth is so important is we live in a culture that just teaches our kids and to us that the most reliable guide to reality is our internal subjective feelings. And so if we want our kids to understand who God is and his character and his nature and the reliability of Scripture, we first have to start off with a concept of truth so that they understand that truth doesn't change with their feelings. It's outside of them, it's objective.

And so when we're talking about God we're talking about being, the most highest, the most high and powerful being who is outside of them. So that was really our motivation for writing this book at Foundation Worldview. And then as far as is this going to be a series or is this just a one off book? We actually as we're recording this podcast, we just finished the illustrations for our second book, which is called Our Feelings Truth. So Lord willing that will be released in the summer of 2024. So we don't know how far we're going to go with the series, but we at least know that there is one book out. And there's another one on the way.

MeLissa Houdmann

So that's awesome, Elizabeth.

Shea Houdmann

It's fantastic.

MeLissa Houdmann

A couple days ago, we had a four year old come through our office. She was visiting her dad at work. And her name is Selah. And I asked her to read through your book with me. And I we haven't showed the cover yet. It's called it is, What is truth. And of course, it has a great definition of truth, which is, truth is what is real. Truth is what is real. Isn't that just so simple? We make it so hard, don't we? Well, I asked her to read through the book with me, and she eagerly agreed. And we got to the point in the book where you encourage the kids to learn what truth is by playing a game. And for our listeners, just so you know, the game is ask kids to determine whether something is true or not true and on the items that are true, they're to throw their arms open and say true. And what's if it's not true if the statement is not true, they're make an X and say not true. Well, Selah really thought this was like, you know, she was gonna get an Academy Award for this performance. And so she really got into it. So I thought it would be fun today to actually play the game with you two. I expect you to be just as enthusiastic as my little friend Selah.Ok, Shea, I'm looking at you here.

MeLissa Houdmann

OK. Ready? Ready? OK. True. What do you do if it's true? True God is always good.

Shea Houdmann and Elizabeth Urbanowicz

True.

MeLissa Houdmann

OK, right. God's word is truth?

Shea Houdmann and Elizabeth Urbanowicz

True. True.

MeLissa Houdmann

Shea, I'm not sensing the passion and enthusiasm of a four year old in your answers.

Shea Houdmann

True.

MeLissa Houdmann

OK, oranges are always purple.

Shea Houdmann and Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Not true.

MeLissa Houdmann

Alright. This one's for Shea. This one's just for Shea. Shea is going to take his wife out for dinner tonight.

Shea Houdmann

True.

MeLissa Houdmann

Good answer Shea. I think my first question, you guys are great. Thank you for participating. Why do you think it's important for even toddlers, my 4 year old friend Sayla, why is it important for her or a young elementary student to get a foundation for just this basic concept of truth. It's such a crucial building block. So can you speak a little bit into that?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yes, well, we know that, especially at the younger years, kids are just figuring out how the world works. And they take one thing that they learn and they kind of turn it into a rule. Like, for example, little kids, you know, they notice that an e d goes on the end of a word when it's in the past tense. So a lot of times, if there's a word that does not have an e d at the end when the past tense still still do it. Like for example, instead of saying yesterday I ran most little kids will say yesterday I runned because they take that rule and they apply it everywhere. And while in the in the case of language it doesn't always apply. In general, it's good that God has designed little kids this way. Because when we teach them things like you need to look both ways before you cross the street. We want them to do that every time, even if there isn't a car on the road. So that the time that there is a car they're prepared for that and they're safe.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

And so it's the same with the concept of truth. What we want to train little ones to do is to always be asking themselves, hmm. Is that true or is that not true? And so if we can teach them from this young age to have that paradigm in their mind so that anytime they encounter something, they're asking themselves is that true or is that not true? We're setting them up on a trajectory to seek and hopefully follow truth all the days of their lives. Where if we don't train them in this way and they're just bombarded, you know, with so many messages each day and our cultural tide is just teaching whatever you feel inside, that's your truth. They're not going to be asking themselves when they hear something, hmm. Is that true, or is that not true? They're going to be asking themselves, how do I feel about this. Now, asking ourselves how we feel about something isn't an inherently wrong question. However, if we're asking ourselves that question to determine whether something is true or false, that's the wrong question to be asking. So that's why, you know, even from this toddler age of 3, 4, 5, we want to train kids to constantly be asking, hmm, is that true or is that not true?

Shea Houdmann

So MeLissa as the editor of GQkids.org I'm I'm curious, I know GQ kids.org our site for kids is kind of targeted for 3rd graders, so a little bit older than what Elizabeth is referring to, but what are some of the most frequent questions we get at GQ kids that are related to truth?

MeLissa Houdmann

You know, I was thinking about that when I was asked to be on this podcast. And I think a lot of it comes down to the verse of John 17:17, your word is truth. And a lot of times our questions are revolved around that. A little bit older than what Elizabeth is talking about. But we do get questions from kids who are the same age as this book was written for. Why should I trust it? Is the Bible real, or is the Bible a fairy tale? You know, how do I know what in my life is true and what isn't? And like you said, the whole concept of feelings is very confusing. So, Elizabeth, can you talk a little bit about why it's important for our kids, even the youngest of them to understand that God's word is true. Like, why is that so important?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yes. Well, we know as Christians that God is truth. He is the source of truth, that everything that we know that is true, it stems from him, because he's the creator and sustainer of reality. And so we want our kids to know that one, their feelings are not the most reliable guide to truth, so they shouldn't depend on that. But even because we're living on this side of Genesis 3, there are even times when our minds are not a completely infallible guide to truth. You know, there are times where our reasoning needs to be corrected. You know all of these things, our intellect, our will, and our emotion or, you know, like our thoughts, our feelings and our actions need to be corrected. And God's word is that plumb line. And so the one of the reasons why we even created this book or talk with kids about this definition of truth, that truth is what is real, is we want to help even give them a foundation for understanding why God's word is true. Because obviously we want to teach them that God's word is true. But if we just always teach them God's word is true, God's word is true. God's word is true and never give them any reasons why they should believe that.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

You know, once they get to around like 9 or 10 years old, as they're starting to question things and they no longer view their parents or, you know, whoever their caretaker is as the ultimate authority and they're starting to question things and be more drawn to their peers, they're going to start to wonder, you know like well, well, you know, like, can I really trust the Bible? You know why? Why is it that I should or is it just what I've been told my whole life? Where when we start off with this definition that truth is what is real then we can help our kids see that the Bible gives the most comprehensive guide to reality, that there is. You know, when we start to look at other worldviews and what other world views teach and we evaluate them, we can start to see the ways in which they fall short.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

You know, for example, just see them thinking of morality. What is right and what is wrong and how we determine that. Other worldviews teach vastly different things than the biblical worldview. The Biblical worldview teaches that right and wrong stems from God's character. That anything that aligns with who God is is what's right, and that is what God commands us to do. Where anything that goes against God's character, that is wrong. And so there is this objective standard of truth and for morality. Where other worldviews, and if we look at the naturalistic worldview, which teaches that only the physical realm is real. Nothing spiritual or metaphysical is real. Well, you can't hold morals in your hand. You can't hold justice. You can't hold fairness. You can't hold kindness. You can't hold love. Those are, those are intangible things. They're metaphysical. And so, according to the naturalistic worldview, those aren't really real things. There is no such real thing as right or wrong. What it is as humans, as a society, we've collectively seen, you know what helps us survive the best. And those things that help us survive the best and live in harmony, those things we label as good, the things that don't help us do that we label us bad. If you look at, you know, more Eastern religions that have been kind of morphed in the West. You know, we've adapted little pieces of them here and there. Well,

Eastern religions teach that the spiritual is what's most real and that we are all connected through the spiritual. And so therefore, how do we determine right from wrong? We look at our heart and our heart always guides us in the right way. Well, then we see very clear examples of people who follow their heart that we would say you're actually wrong. So anyway, I know, I know, I'm digressing a little bit here, but just to say, you know, we want to lay this foundation of truth to help our kids see that the Bible provides the best guide to what is really real. And that when we compare what Scripture teaches with what other worldviews teach, teach, we consistently see that what Scripture teaches is actually what is real.

MeLissa Houdmann

Yeah. Oftentimes in the the first day of a class with kids, I often bring like a a book of fairy tales and a book of the Bible, a book of the Bible. I bring the Bible. And and I ask them to tell me what the difference is. And some of them just stare at me like, wait a minute. Is there a difference? And that brings me to a question that you guys actually discussed on your Facebook page or social media pages this week about how when you have a class full of kids and some of them have no foundation for the Bible being true, and you have others who are being raised in an environment where their parents love Jesus and are fully devoted followers of Jesus, and they want their kids to have that worldview as well. How do you, as a teacher or maybe even as a foster parent or some other situation, a teacher, how do you, how do you teach in that sort of environment where it's such a different, the foundation is different for various kids.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yes, that is a tricky situation and I spent the first decade of my professional career as an elementary teacher in a classroom, and so I knew I know how challenging this is when you have kids of varying different abilities and levels and skill sets. Well, when we're thinking about specifically about, you know, a Sunday school setting or kids ministry setting, our recommendation at Foundation Worldview is to aim high. Because a lot of times what we do is we aim really low and we're like, well, those kids whose parents are discipling them well, they'll

get that at home. Let's help out the kids whose parents aren't discipling them well. And do we wanna help those kids out? Absolutely. You know, we want to love them. We want to help them out.

MeLissa Houdmann

Of course, yes.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

But if we just dumb everything down to that really, really low level, every child in that classroom, whether they have high biblical literacy or low biblical literacy, is going to get the false impression that the biblical worldview teaches us to turn off our minds. Oh, this is so much easier than what I get in school. You know, this is so much easier than the classroom. You know, I even saw this in my own teaching in Sunday squad. This was about a decade ago. I was teaching Sunday school and I would rotate, you know, in and out weeks. Like there was a couple different teachers and one time one of the students from the class saw me in the like the foyer area of the church. And he goes, oh no, it's you. And I was like, well, I'm really happy to see you too today, Samuel. I know I was like, why are you not?

MeLissa Houdmann

Thanks for the encouragement.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

I know, I was like, why are you not excited to see me? And he's like ohh seeing you means you're probably our teacher and I can't stand it when you're our teacher. And I was like, well, why is that? And he's like because when anybody else teaches, I just say Jesus as the answer and they're fine with it except for you. You ask me why and you make me think and you're not supposed to think at church. School is the place you're supposed to think. And so now I quickly told him I was like Samuel, I know you didn't mean that as a compliment, but that's one of the best compliments a child has ever given me. But what he was able to articulate that most 8 year olds aren't able to articulate is here to have this paradigm. You go to church, you

shut your mind off, you go to school, you turn your mind on. So in our kids ministries or any kind of instruction in a church setting, we need to aim high. And I don't mean aiming high expecting 3rd and 4th graders to be able to do college level stuff. But I do mean that we're still within the realm of what's developmentally appropriate, but aiming high so that the kids who already have a solid foundation, they're challenged. And so the kids who lack that foundation realize that they're lacking something and they want to be able to catch up. Because we can provide that support for them. But we we need to make sure we're aiming high rather than dumbing things down.

Shea Houdmann

Elizabeth that raises an interesting question along the lines about what MeLissa shared as well. Something I've often wondered. I've seen a lot of Christians who older kids get exposed to in middle school, high school, or even college, or for the first time of their life, they're exposed to some of the challenges with scripture or some of the challenges with Christian theology. And the fact that they were never exposed to it in the church, in youth group, with their parents, it's like, oh, you mean there's difficult passages in the Bible? There's passages that seem to contradict? So what would be your advice regarding at what point do you start preparing kids for the fact that there are difficulties in the Bible? There are difficult to explain passages. And there are aspects of the Christian faith that are really, really tough to understand. So what's your advice with that of how to bring that in as part of the process?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Oh, I love this question. Thank you for asking it because I love, I love helping prepare people for these things. And you're absolutely right, we don't want to shelter our kids from all of the, you know, quote on quote difficulties in scripture. We want to prepare them to understand them and when they have questions that they haven't encountered before, that we haven't even encountered, that they have some skills to actually go out and seek the answers. So I have a few recommendations. First recommend just from a very young age, have kids in scripture.

Because a lot of times we think, you know, oh, it's not until they're like, eight or nine years old that we can kind of, like, put the children's Bible to the shelf and bring out the real Bible. You know, the actual Bible, where there are some really great children's Bibles out there. So I'm not saying ditch the Children's Bible completely, but I am saying, you know, from even three or four years of age we should be reading scripture to and with our children so that they can ask questions. They can hear what God's word actually says. And is a three-year old going to catch everything in a pass? No, you know, like a lot of times, even a 33 year old, you know, doesn't catch everything in a passage. But we want to make sure that we're immersing them in scripture. Because when we immerse them in scripture, these challenges are naturally going to come up. And kids ask some of the greatest questions.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

I remember back when I lived in Chicago. One evening, I was babysitting for my pastors kids. He and his wife went out on a date and I was babysitting for them. And as part of their bedtime routine, they would read through a chapter of Scripture together. And so I was they were reading through the Gospel, John. So, you know, I just took that over as I was tucking their kids into bed, and we were reading through Jesus when he was praying in the garden. And their four year old goes, wait. Jesus is God. So Jesus is praying to himself? You know, like and she just asked this question and we were able to talk through. And they had, they happened to be working their way through the New City Catechism. So I knew they had memorized this question. So I said, wait a minute, how many persons are there in God? And their three-year old goes, there are three persons and the one true and living God, God the Father, God the Son and God Holy Spirit. And we talk through you know who is Jesus? Jesus is God the son. And now that isn't a problem passage in scripture.

MeLissa Houdmann

I love it.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

But it is a difficult concept that she their, their three and four year old, wouldn't have had to wrestle through if they weren't actually in the Gospel of John. So that's my first recommendation, you know, to actually be in Scripture with our kids so that these things are just going to naturally come out.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Then my second recommendation would be to have a mind shift. We tend to think as parents or Christian educators or church leaders that we have to have all of the answers. And when we do that, when our kids come to us with questions and we think ohh, I have to have the perfect answer. What we're doing is we're training them to view us as the expert and them as someone who's not the expert. And so then they're just gonna be completely dependent on us. Which once they get older and they don't really care so much what we think, and they care more about their peers or the tick tok star, you know, or some college professor, they're just going to go to that person and be completely dependent on that person. So what I recommend is that we have this mindset shift. And rather than viewing ourselves as the expert, we view ourselves as the guide. How can we train our children to find solid answers?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Now on the Foundation Worldview podcasts and on our webinars, we are constantly recommending your guys site because it's so helpful for finding solid answers, but also pointing people to Scripture. So it's not just like, oh, you know, this is Shea's idea of the answer to this question. It's like, here's what Scripture says. And so that's a resource that we can train our kids to use. We can say, you know what, we don't have the answers to all this. But you know what? Let's go on the Got Questions website. Let's read a few articles and then let's dive into the different passages of Scripture in those articles. So that's what I would recommend. One, get our kids in Scripture so that these things just come out naturally and then two shift our mindset from having to be the expert to actually being a guide who's helping our kids learn how can we find solid answers to difficult questions?

MeLissa Houdmann

Elizabeth, I love that. That's like the premise of GQ kids. We never want a child to feel like he or she cannot ask a question. And so we allow kids to come on the site and ask questions. And we have people who answer them for them at that age appropriate level. And Shea and I had a pastor one time, many years ago that his parents discouraged him from asking questions all the way through. And because it was a lack of of faith, of not having it all together of of, you know, you're supposed to present yourself as someone who understands, right? What a horrible thing to do to a child, to anyone, really. But so we always want a child to be able to be curious. And what, a what a better place to do that through GQkids or with your worldview curriculum.

MeLissa Houdmann

So I would love for you to share, one thing I love about the book is that it's a simple way to, it's kind of an organic way to talk about truth and then the game makes it fun, right? So what are some other ways for parents to be able to teach their children about truth even when they're, you know, my little friends Selah's age, 4? Do you have some fun ways? Or maybe stoplight conversation type questions that you that they can ask their kids about that?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

That, yes, well, kind of what you just modeled. You took the game from that book, and then you asked Shea and me questions, and we had to answer. And so one of our goals with this book is that as kids and parents learn this game, that it will slowly replace the, I'm thinking of an animal or I spy game in the car. You know that it will be a fun game that they'll enjoy coming up with sentences for one another. But then that that will organically work into conversations that you know, when kids are watching a show, you know, and a character says something they'll they'll say, oh wait, that wasn't true. That wasn't true what they just said. Or, you know, a mom can pause the show, you know, and ask him, was that true or that not true. So we're hoping that it will turn into a game. Yeah, that's true. And not true. We're hoping that it will

turn into a game that families will just love to play, but then that they'll implement when they're watching shows, when they're having a conversation on the playground, you know, when they're doing homework or if they're home schooled, you know, when they're doing their math or their history, so that's really our goal. One activity we give for older kids, you know, an 8 year old might still be OK with raising their arms and going true, but it depends on the 8 year old. Some some 8 year olds are too old for that.

MeLissa Houdmann

I mean, Shea enjoys it, so maybe maybe the.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yeah. So, I mean, it could just last for life, but what activity we recommend for older kids to get across the idea that truth is what is real is you can just have, like, a family treasure hunt. You know, figure out something that your kids would enjoy, like, you know, like a piece of chocolate or stickers or, you know, like, maybe like a date with Dad coupon or something like that and hide it somewhere around the house. Then write out two or three different sets of instructions for finding that prize. But only have one of them be true instructions, have the other ones send the kids on a wild goose chase. Now take it from someone who learned this the hard way, you have to explain to the kids beforehand that the directions may or may not be true. If you don't explain that beforehand, most people end up crying and nobody learns anything, so make sure you explain that beforehand. And then send your kids out on this treasure hunt. If you only one child you know, you can have them pick a set of directions. If it doesn't lead to the truth, you know where the prize is, have them pick another one. And then debrief afterwards and talk about, you know, like, why did it take you three times to find this? You know, like or why did only one of you find this prize? And then talk about you know what two of the sets of directions did not tell you the truth. They did not tell you where the prize really was, and then you can introduce that definition. Truth is what is real. So just any activity that you can do to help your kids determine you know like OK, this is what is true. This is what is real. This is what is not.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

If you have even older kids, if they don't, if they think a treasure hunt would be lame, give them a recipe for your favorite family dessert, you know, and alter one of the alter the recipe you know. And then have them try to create this favorite family dessert. Just as a little disclaimer, make sure your children do not get salmonella. They don't burn the house down. Be careful with this, OK? But you know, like with the altered directions, then asking them why did we end up with this sticky mess? Or like, why did we end up with this really salty cookie, you know. Because the directions did not tell us what was true. They didn't tell us how to really make this dessert. So those are just a few different ideas can do with kids of different ages just to help them understand this concept, that truth is what is real.

MeLissa Houdmann

It sounds like something that would be fun in a classroom, too. In a Sunday school, right? Can you, you know, everybody brings their their parents a cookie at at at church time and horrible. You know, I I don't know. I think it.

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yeah, absolutely.

MeLissa Houdmann

Could be really fun.

Shea Houdmann

Elizabeth, obviously, we love what you're doing at Foundation Worldview. I think this is the third time we've had you on the podcast. So we're big fans of your ministry. Being 100% on board with the need of communicating truth and worldview to kids at a young age. I mean it makes a a huge impact for them to be prepared as they get older to already be thinking about these things. So keep doing what you're doing. Again, we at Got Questions are big fans, and thank you for the encouragement about Got Questions as well. So just briefly, what else is new

going on at Foundation Worldview and what is the best way for people to acquire the What is Truth book for their kids or grandkids?

Elizabeth Urbanowicz

Yes. So our latest project, Lord willing, next week we're going to be filming videos for an upcoming curriculum called God's Good Design, and it's on the goodness of God's design for embodiment, gender, marriage and family. And believe it or not, that's going to be for kids ages 4 on up. So kids roughly ages four to seven or aged 4 to 8, just to build the positive Biblical theology of God's good design. So we're really excited about that. And then to find out more information about that or other curriculums or the book if people go to foundationworldview.com, you can find out all of that information there on our website.

Shea Houdmann

Well, fantastic. I think MeLissa and Selah firmly endorsed the book. They both loved it. This one for us to read it. Highly recommended. A really good first step for helping kids to understand the concept of of truth. That truth is what is real. So Elizabeth, thank you for joining us today. Again, MeLissa, thanks for joining me in the interview. And I've just one question for you, where am I taking you for dinner tonight?

MeLissa Houdmann

I don't know. We'll see how the rest of the day goes.

Shea Houdmann

All right, sounds good. This has been Got Questions podcast with Elizabeth Urbanowicz on her new book for kids, What is Truth? Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.