

Episode-202

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the God Questions Podcast. Joining me today is Kevin, the managing editor of gotquestions.org, and Athalia, the managing editor for compellingtruth.org, gqm.one, and also the author of our Bible study program. Today, we're actually going to be focusing on the new Got Questions book that was just released, titled, *The 100 Most Asked Questions About God and the Bible*.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin and Athalia are joining me today because they were the primary editors of the book. So, Kevin, Athalia, thank you for joining me today. We don't want this to be a 30-minute promo on the book, because we're not a ministry that publishes books. We're a ministry that answers people's questions. And part of our passion is anywhere where people are searching for answers to questions about the Bible, we want to be there with content. So to us, it makes sense for us to have this available in book and ebook format for those who want to read the content in a little more long form than just an individual article or two on the site.

Shea Houdmann

So number one question that I've been asked about the book throughout this process is, how did we decide which articles we're going to put in the book? So are these really the top 100 questions? So can we use two data sources to determine this. First, in our 22-year history, we've been asked over 750,000 questions. That's a lot of questions. So these are the questions that we find that people are asking again and again and again. Not always worded exactly the same, but the gist remains the same. Then also beyond that, in our 22-year history, and this is a stat we just recently put together, our website has received over 2.5 billion page views. So these are the questions that people are searching for on our site, and even more so questions that people are searching for on Google and landing on our site. So taking the questions that are submitted to us and the popularity of various articles on our website, we tried to put together what are the 100 most frequently asked questions that have been asked in our 22-year history. So that's the basis of the book. Truly, these 100 questions are questions that a lot of people have. There's a verse in Corinthians that says that, no temptation has taken you except what is common to man. And I like to paraphrase that a little, no question has overtaken you except what is common to man, because these 100 questions in this book are truly questions that millions of people have asked either us or wondered themselves. So we're going to kind of walk through some of the thinking behind the book, and also we're going to answer a few of the questions in the book.

Shea Houdmann

So to start off, Athalia, why do you think the questions in this book are the most frequently asked? What are some of the commonalities you see? What are some things that stand out, some maybe consistent threads in the questions?

Athalia Bufano

That's a really good question. It's a reminder to me, looking at all these questions in the book and our most frequently asked questions, that people ask great questions and they want answers. I love that God can be known and He wants us to know Him through His word. And so first of all, this is a reminder to me that people want answers. And so I think people are asking the essential questions like, who is God? Is Jesus God? Why does it matter? Why does it matter for

me? I think also they want to know what the Bible says on various given topics because the Bible is true and God can be known through His word, then it matters what He says.

Athalia Bufano

And I think another common thread is that they want to know how it applies to their lives. So if you're looking at their pets going to heaven or sexuality questions or is gambling a sin, they're asking because they want to know what God's word says and how it applies to their lives personally.

Kevin Stone

Yeah. I see a lot of the basic questions are very common, some of the basic doctrinal questions, but also a lot of the controversial topics, those things get asked a lot.

So Athalia mentioned the sexuality questions and a lot of those ended up in the book because we get a lot of questions about sexuality. And then some of the more controversial doctrinal stuff or how it applies to churches, like the women pastor, does the Bible support women pastors? That's like number one question. And of course that one ends up in the book. But it's surprising how many people are really searching for answers on all of these controversial topics.

Athalia Bufano

And I wonder how much of it is, well, if the Bible can be trusted with this topic that I have a question about, then what does it have to say and why does it matter to me on another topic?

Shea Houdmann

When you find that the word of God has answered your question and proven to be true again and again and again, it makes it a lot more easier and even more attractive to go back to God's word for the answers to the new questions. So that's excellent point. Kevin, let me ask you this because one of the things that I hear most often when people compliment gotquestions.org is that we're able to answer the question so briefly or so succinctly. As an editor, I know often the answers that I write or other people write and send to you, sometimes they require a lot of work. What for you is the most difficult part of editing answers, especially editing them so that they are succinct, so that they answer the question as completely as necessary using as few words as possible?

Kevin Stone

Well, how much time do we have? Because now you're asking me a question about the writing process and about the editing process. And I could talk a long time about all this stuff, but I'll try to keep it succinct, right? Try to keep it concise. One of the very best things that any writer can do to improve his or her writing is to be concise, to cut out the extraneous words. But this is very difficult, as you mentioned. It's very difficult for all of us. We don't naturally write this way because we don't naturally think this way. I mean, it's being concise. I think one of the reasons is that writers tend to have the wrong idea that using short sentences is somehow too simplistic, that it would be more sophisticated to write longer sentences, you know with a lot of clauses all attached and all of that. But that's a fallacy. Being able to write in a simple, short sentence can really help clarify your points. It can help to really bring focus to what's the most important. So writing short and simple sentences is not natural to us, but it really does help the writing.

Kevin Stone

Also, we tend to really keep track of our pet words. We have these fluff words we like to add. Everybody, every writer has pet words, and mine is the word well. I write plays, and so I write a whole lot of dialogue when I'm doing my writing. And so I was going through a script once, a second time through, just proofing my own work, and I saw that every fourth or fifth line, I was

starting it with the word well. It's like, where did this come from? So I made it a point just to cut out, I slashed every single instance of the word well in the whole script. I said, I'm not going to fall into that trap of having these fluff words that show up. But a lot of them, like the word really, the word very, I've sometimes said this to my writers when I'm proofing them. I say, I'm going to almost always, guaranteed, cut out the words very and really. We just don't need them. I also take a hard look at the word that and some other words that we like to, like to put into our writing unnecessarily.

Kevin Stone

It's hard to avoid rabbit trails. This also fights against conciseness and clarity. This topic reminds me of this, so I'm going to discuss it here. Oh, and this reminds me of this, and so I better mention this as well. And we lose focus of what the title of the article is, which is a question that needs to be answered specifically. Maybe some of those other rabbit trail topics can be answered in another article, in another webpage. But that's one of the things we fight as well.

Kevin Stone

Repetition, sometimes writers like to emphasize their point by repeating it. So they'll end up, after writing a really good article, at the end, they'll say, again, and then they'll say, or they would say, as previously stated, and then they'll state it again. And I think we need to get to the place where we trust our reader and trust our own writing enough to make our point once and allow the reader to get it from there.

Kevin Stone

And it's just really hard work to write concisely. And sometimes the hard work is what we balk at. There's an old saying that goes like this, I would have written something shorter, but I didn't have the time. And that's really true. If you don't care about conciseness, you know I can splash a thousand words on a sheet of paper or on a, or on a webpage pretty easily. But if I want to cover the same topic in 300 words, I'm really going to have to work at it. It's hard work to cut things down. It takes time to identify extraneous words. It takes effort to think of shorter, pithier, more vigorous ways to communicate. And it takes courage to slash your own writing because that's what it comes down to. You got to be like your own harshest critic when it comes to going over your own work. And you have to be able to cut out the stuff that you don't really need. And that takes courage.

Shea Houdmann

Well, Athalia, I'd really like to know what you think is difficult about the editing process.

Athalia Bufano

I think that's so true. We think that we equate short and concise words with short amount of time. And that's not the case. It takes time to really think through what we're trying to say. And I think what we're trying to do as editors and as writers is to give a comprehensive view of what God's word says on any given topic, but in a way that isn't confusing. God's word is true. God's word is applicable. God's word is clear. Now it's not comprehensive. It's not going to cover every single topic. You're not going to find anything in there about quadratic formulas and other modern things that are not meant to be in God's word. But what we're trying to do is understand what God's word is saying and what we can take to heart in order to come to a certain answer, and then communicate that in a clear, concise, compelling way.

Athalia Bufano

And that's funny to think about what words we use often. I think my word would be however. You put in a little semicolon, however, and a comma there, and that shows up quite often, but it

is really good for us as any kind of writer to look at our writing and to think through what are our habits? How do I come up with answers and how do I communicate that? And then how can I communicate it better so that God's word can be clear to the person I'm trying to communicate it to?

Shea Houdmann

It started pretty early on with the succinctness being a priority for the ministry when trying to answer some questions and someone asked a question about this, and then not necessarily rabbit trails, but like explaining everything there is to know about that actual issue. And it turns out the person loses attention pretty fast. So we tend to start approaching it, okay, let's answer their question, but then provide them opportunity to submit a follow-up. So even in the personal submitted questions, that then transitioned into how we write the articles. Rather than trying to cram everything about an issue into one article, we write a relatively succinct and concise article and then publish the related topics and other articles like Kevin was saying earlier. A lot of people complain about people today just don't have the same attention spans. And I agree that that can be an issue sometimes, but rather than complaining about it, it's okay, how do we actually reach the people with where they're at now? How do we answer this question to catch their attention really quickly and answer the question towards the beginning of the answer and then give more details later? So it is definitely a challenge and it's not something I'm very good at. I love having really good editors on our team. And almost everyone at Got Questions is either a writer and or an editor. And that makes the content better when it comes primarily to hopefully the Holy Spirit leading one person, but then also the Holy Spirit leading other people to make refinements to that. And so hopefully the articles in this book as they've been edited for the website and gone through a whole nother process, as you two know, before being published in the book to really fine tune them, make them as good as they possibly can be.

Shea Houdmann

So Athalia, let me ask you, as you're reading these articles and editing them, what were some of your favorite articles that ended up in the book?

Athalia Bufano

Ooh, I'm glad you didn't ask me for just one because I can't give just one, but let's see. I really like the answer to question 25. Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? When people ask questions, they're asking for an answer, but there's a lot that gets factored into what they're asking and why they're asking it. And so if someone's asking, for example, when the end times are coming, there's maybe fear that's involved in there or a confusion because God's word has stuff that talks about the rapture or talks about different elements that aren't specifically spelled out. Like the rapture concept is in there, but the word isn't in there. And so there's just a lot that gets factored into people asking that. So when people ask, why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? They're looking at the depravity and the sin of the world and the difficulties that we encounter. And they're experiencing things. They're seeing people experiencing things and they're trying to reconcile how a good God can allow that. And our articles don't just answer their questions, but it helps them give a view of who God is and what we can lean on and what we can know, what we can be united on. And so I love that this answer points people not just to an apologetic answer of like, well, this is just how it is because sin came into the world. This is true, but it says God allows things and shapes our character. Ultimately, God is in control. The worst things happened to the most innocent and the

best person. I mean, it really challenges our thinking and points us to action and to things that we can ground our hope and our faith in.

Athalia Bufano

Another question that I really like is question 87. What does the Bible say when it says do not judge? And again, our articles do a great job of balancing, giving truth, and also holding the weight of what's behind a question and pointing them to things that they can stand firm on, on their faith.

Athalia Bufano

And I guess in general, I really loved the questions on sexuality because there's so much these days that confuse our identity and our relationships. And our articles point people to God's word. They point to God's character. They point to his plan for us as people and as people in relationship. And so it's not just a list of do this, don't do this, but it gives a fuller view of who God is and what his plans are for us.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, what about you? What are some of your favorite articles that found their way into the book?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, out of the 100 articles that are in the book, I kind of narrowed it down to my three favorite. Couldn't pick one favorite, but three. I like number 14, which is can a Christian lose salvation? And I actually find myself looking up this article quite often because I like its presentation and I like the information that it has. And so when issues concerning eternal security crop up, I often go to this article and make it a reference point as well. But I like how it starts off defining the word Christian. So everybody's on the same page. We know what we're talking about. We define the term. And then we move on to going through what the Bible says a Christian is. And then it makes the logical step into saying if a Christian then, as we have just defined him, were to lose salvation, then all of these other things have to be true as well. And these other things would not be biblical because of who God is, because of what Jesus has done. And so it shows the impossibility of a Christian, a true Christian losing salvation, you know slipping through God's fingers. So I think it's just a very, very good way of supporting eternal security. Then, of course, it deals with the fact that there are some professed Christians that fall away. They turn their back on Christ. And so there is an explanation for that as well in that article. So I think it's very thorough. It covers a base as well.

Kevin Stone

I also like question number 51 in the book. What is the meaning of Jacob wrestling with God of all things. Why did I pick that one? It's not like a topic that is a hot button issue or anything, but I think it's a very well-written article. I don't remember who originally wrote it. I worked on it a lot, but I don't remember who the author was. But it's a very well-written article about what happened at the River Jabbok, and then also an explanation of why it was happening in Jacob's life, what this meant in his history, what led up to this. It was like a climactic moment in Jacob's life. But then there's also a great application to modern-day readers in this article, namely that there are struggles in life, and in those struggles, God is always with us. And when we choose to wrestle with God, we choose to wrestle with His will for us or whatever the issue is, we can know that we will be defeated, but that defeat will be the very best thing for us.

I just think it's a beautiful article.

Kevin Stone

And then number 62. What is the meaning of the parable of the prodigal son? This is actually one of our lengthier articles, but I really like how it does a great job of explaining the parable. And it's divided into three sections, one for each of the main characters in the parable. So we have a section on the prodigal himself, and then the father, and then the older son, which is sometimes the forgotten character in that parable, but so important in making life application. And so I think it just brings everything together with explaining the parable and what Jesus was teaching, and also modern application. How does this affect our own lives? Where do we fall in these two sons? Which one are we more like? And then the father, of course, representing God. What do we learn about our heavenly Father through the actions and words of this father in the parable? And I just feel every time I read that article, I learn something. It's like, wow, I think it's very good. So those would be my three that I picked as favorites in the book.

Shea Houdmann

I love those articles. And I think even reviewing the book and seeing how I can tell that multiple different authors contributed to this book. I know some of them, the ones that I wrote, but some of them were written over 15 years ago. So I'm not even sure, did I originally write that? Kind of sounds like me, but I know it's been thoroughly edited by you and others over the course of the past 15 to 20 years. But I'd say my three favorite, just because they're the favorite questions answered in the first section on questions about salvation, three different articles that are just dedicated to presenting the gospel. So we have, what does it mean to be a born-again Christian? What is the Roman's road of salvation? And also, do you have eternal life?

Shea Houdmann

So I remember the very first time someone asked us a question directly related to salvation, and I believe they worded it, how can I know for sure I go to heaven when I die? Remember I was on my computer, MeLissa was in the other room and I asked her, MeLissa, can someone get saved on the internet? Because at that time we had viewed Got Questions as a primarily discipleship-focused ministry. The idea that people would be asking questions directly related to how to be saved didn't really cross our minds. But from that point on, as you two know, we're asked questions directly related to the gospel all the time. And we have over 50 different articles on gotquestions.org that just present the gospel using a different way of answering the question. So when you're presenting the gospel, it's one of those, it's really difficult in that you want to make sure you include all the essentials, which can turn into a really long article. But when you really boil it down, so to speak, you're like, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Because of our sin we're separated from God and deserve to be separated from God eternally. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus was resurrected to demonstrate that his victory over sin, that his payment for our sins was indeed sufficient, and that through faith in Christ, trusting in him as our Savior, we can have our sins forgiven and be promised an eternal home in heaven. So that's a very succinct way of saying it, but on something as important as the gospel, which truly impacts very directly people's eternal destiny, you want to make sure you explain everything well. And the fact that we have 50 articles on the website dedicated to presenting the gospel based on different themes, but all presenting the same gospel.

So it's always my favorite questions to answer. So I'm glad that there are three of them in this book as well.

Kevin Stone

I'm thinking that we need to have an article online about what you just said. Is it possible for a person to get saved on the internet? I just, I think that would be a great addition.

Athalia Bufano

Great. Will you write it or edit it?

Kevin Stone

I'll write it and you can edit it, Athalia. How's that?

Athalia Bufano

Sounds great.

Shea Houdmann

I want to play too. So yeah, the title of the book is *The 100 Most Asked Questions About God in the Bible*. The subtitle, *Scripture's Answers on Sin, Salvation, Sexuality, end times, Heaven, and then of course the and more*, because there's some articles in here that don't really fit into any of those categories. So we're excited about this book. We love that it's out there and Bethany House Publishers is helping us to promote it because people need the answers to these questions.

And these are questions that people all around the world have had throughout church history, 2000 years almost since Jesus died on the cross and the founding of the church. These questions are, some of them are extremely important. Others are not as important, but every question deserves a biblically based answer. And that's what we strive to do. And the answers we send to people who submit questions, answers, articles on the website, and then also answers in this book as well. So Kevin and Athalia, thank you again, like so much for your hard work in editing this book, making it as good as it possibly could be. I truly appreciate your effort and just even the conversations we had about what articles to include and how to best edit. It's truly helpful for me to even continue to learn how to improve my writing, how to answer questions biblically and succinctly at the same time. So thank you both.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast, just doing a quick promo on our new book, *The 100 Most Asked Questions About God and the Bible*. Got Questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.