

Episode 226

Shea Houdmann

As you know, we occasionally like to invite a guest on today, and today is someone I've been following for a really long time. So, Bobby Conway has been doing shorts on YouTube long before they were popular. Kind of the OG of doing short, one-minute apologist-style videos, and he's the originator of that ministry. I've been a fan of that for a really long time. And more recently, he's written the book, *Does Christianity Still Make Sense? A Former Skeptic Responds to Today's Toughest Objections to Christianity*. It's a book that fascinates me. Obviously, I'm very interested in apologetics, and the questions in this book that he addresses are all very common questions we get at Got Questions. So, Bobby, welcome to the Got Questions podcast.

Bobby Conway

Shea, it's great to be on with you, and thank you for having me.

Shea Houdmann

So, what I'm curious about, I've actually not heard a whole lot about your story, your background. So, how did you go from being a former skeptic to someone who answers objections from skeptics?

Bobby Conway

Yeah, what I do in my book is I kind of talk about going from, you know, non-belief to belief in God to kind of skepticism and to belief again. And I grew up not going to church, not in a Christian home in California, and I became a Christian at 19, and really just went all out for Jesus as a new believer. I found myself wanting to tell everything that moved about Him, and I was looking to get two questions answered. What do I do with my guilt, and what's the purpose of my life?

Bobby Conway

And I got saved under an evangelist by the name of Greg Laurie, where I went to Chuck Smith's church at the Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa in Southern Cal on a Monday night, and I just resonated because I felt like the answers that I was looking for were found in Jesus, who could eradicate my guilt, and He said, I've come that you might have life and life abundantly. So, I placed my faith in Him, and really not knowing what questions to ask, except, you know, I had other types of questions.

Bobby Conway

But what would happen along the way in my journey, I would go to Bible college, and then in seminary at Dallas Theological, I would have my first wave of doubt while I was taking a class on the gospels and while studying

the synoptic gospels. And I really met my first challenge, and that was very difficult because up until that point, my faith was just absolutely unwavering. And then I would work through that set of doubts, and then they would make a complete onslaught into my life again as a pastor working on my first doctorate in apologetics.

Bobby Conway

And then by the time I was in my second doctorate in philosophy of religion, I was in the throes of doubt, wondering if I was going to be an apostate. It got so bad. Ended up on antidepressants and counseling, suicidal ideation. Felt like at times that might be the easier thing just to take my life. And it was so agonizing directly because of how close I was to Jesus and to think that maybe I had been duped. It really put me in a tailspin.

Shea Houdamnn

Wow, that's powerful. Like I said, I wasn't aware of that aspect of your testimony. So obviously, does Christianity still make sense is a huge question you have to answer. So many people today, I've run across someone recently and they were like, church, is that still a thing? So our culture is definitely going further and further away from God, further and further from the Christian worldview. So a lot of people just really think it doesn't make sense.

Shea Houdmann

So from that background, and I didn't know you were a Dallas Seminary alum, so we're brothers in that as well, fellowship of the suffering there. Truly joking, I'm extremely grateful for my time at DTS and actually still in the doctorate ministry program there. So I'm hoping to finish that up soon, but sorry, rabbit trail.

Shea Houdmann

The journey you went on from having severe doubts to now being someone who answers that. Describe a little bit more of what were the key questions that you had answered or what were the key realizations you come to or what is the work that God did in your heart to help you to overcome those doubts and to lead you and to be one of, like again, the one-minute apologist. Hugely influential in a lot of people's hearts and minds, helping them to understand and trust more. So how did God bring you through that time into what he's called you to do today?

Bobby Conway

So a lot of the doubts that I was going through, it was in the midst of one-minute apologist while that was growing. The thing is Shea, I hated my doubts. I wasn't like a progressive Christian looking to get out of Christianity. I hated them. The problem is for every book I read to trace down some answers to my questions or even deeper existential doubt, I collected another

10 books that I needed to read. And so what was happening is my relationship with Christ began to shift into a Q&A session. So my relationship was kind of becoming a lifelong Q&A session with him and I just couldn't settle anymore because that childlike simple faith that I once had was disrupted.

Bobby Conway

And part of the reason it was disrupted is I think what happens to some Christians is they believe in Jesus and depending upon the denomination or the Bible college you go to, you get put in a small, medium-sized or big box of Christianity. But if you get in a too tight of a box that is theologically suffocating, that teaches this is the way to see it without presenting the alternative views, then you prematurely commit the theological positions without considering the alternative views. And then you, in a way, set yourself up for a future crisis of faith the moment you come in contact with these other views.

Bobby Conway

And so even thinking through discipleship in the church, I think to get somebody to come to the church, get saved, and then a week later go to your membership class, sign off on 20 doctrines, and then tell them that's what it is and then down the road they learn, well, there's other ways. Well, you go through that process enough times, you can start questioning the whole enterprise. And so that was one thing, being put in so tight of a box that I didn't realize that the box of Christianity was bigger.

Bobby Conway

Not only that, world travel was very challenging to me. Going into the 1040 window, trying to think through what I was taught on the exclusivity of Jesus and moving from a hard to more of a soft exclusivity position was a way that helped me out of that. But just wrestling with people just died and go to hell without ever hearing the gospel. So that was challenging. I found myself, as you know, struggling with the synoptics.

Bobby Conway

Another thing that was very challenging was struggling with what I would call the bizarre things of the Bible. I would hear us talk about Mormonism and the things that they believe in, and I would be thinking, yeah, but what about the stuff in our own Bible where Ezekiel lays on his side for 390 days, flips over and does another 40 days while playing with pots and pans, or Shamgar taking out a bunch of people with an ox gode. So I found myself needing an apologetic for how to relate to a world that was so foreign to me where I felt like I was checking my intellect at the door.

Bobby Conway

And so when I became a believer, I was looking to get my sins forgiven and I want a purpose in life. And then later I would learn that, well, there's this thing called the rapture and he's coming. And I thought, well, oh my goodness. So I got to incorporate that in, and then I got to incorporate this in. And so then I had to go through all kinds of rethinking my faith. But the good news of this, Shea, is doubt can be the making of an apologist, because what it did is it sent me on a fast track and it made me desperate to have answers. And I also think it made me more compassionate as a pastor to those who are suffering, so that I could apply Jude's challenge to be merciful to those who doubt.

Shea Houdmann

When I launched Got Questions back in 2002, fresh out of Bible college and seminary, I never went through a time of doubting my faith in terms of faith and trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior. But definitely to use a current term, deconstructed a lot of my other beliefs in terms of I've been taught everything in this very, very tight box, very similar to you. Ended up coming out very similar beliefs to what I went in, but held with a much more open hand and not as dogmatic on some issues. I still, I mean, at Got Questions, hey, we're a ministry, answer these questions. He asks the question, we're going to give you, here's what we think the right answer is. But even the spirit, the attitude, the humility in which we strive to approach that is very different coming out of a very, these are the right views. None of the other views are even worth considering. I don't know if that was purposefully communicated, but that's definitely kind of the message I received in Bible college. So getting to discuss, debate, engage with people of other beliefs within Christendom was very powerful and life-changing and helpful for me.

Bobby Conway

So again, none of the views I was raised in Bible college radically changed, but hopefully they're more biblically informed and more formed on reality and with humility. And that was definitely a struggling time. At one point I was like, I believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. I believe in the Trinity. I believe in eternity with God or separated from God. Other than that, I don't, everything else was kind of threw up in the air, but thankfully God settled it all back down fairly quickly. I've also been through some struggles in somewhat on my background, but also in just being challenged for the first time when I was never, all through Bible college, never really exposed to objections to altering viewpoints. I think that's unhealthy. So I can definitely see how going through a difficult time like that, it's prepared you to be able to answer these objections so well, to be able to understand

where people are at when they express these concerns. So that's really cool for me to hear just that part of your background.

Shea Houdmann

So specifically, pretty sure you're still doing one minute apologies videos, but what led you to focus more on does Christianity make sense in the sense of the primary focus of your ministry right now?

Bobby Conway

You know, I got out of the algorithm, Shea, like you said, I was kind of like the OG of the short apologetic videos. And it really didn't even know what we were doing when we started it. I just thought, Hey, wouldn't it be cool to put these short videos together on YouTube in a black and white setting with some cool music. And so we started doing it and, you know, I knew nothing about YouTube and then, you know, went through some really difficult times of depression and struggle. And I checked out for a while. And then when I tried to check back in, the algorithm passed me. And just a lot of people have really figured out how to work YouTube.

Bobby Conway

And my thing was like maybe a missed opportunity. Like it was growing, but I didn't realize what I had and I didn't put the kind of investment in. That looking back, I wish I would have. I was more obsessed on wrapping up the PhD. And, you know, I looked back and no one knew what YouTube was going to become and what that could have meant.

Bobby Conway

And so as I thought about that, I felt like I was put in a box a little bit by a woman apologist because I love doing those kinds of videos, but I wanted to do other things besides short videos. And so the rebranding was about, it's a broader ministry. So what I really do love to do, Shea, I'm a pastor full-time, a nationally syndicated radio host for a call-in show called Pastor's Perspective. And then I love helping doubters. And that really is kind of the ministry that has been born with Christianity still makes sense. And I wrote, does Christianity still make sense? Because I believe that that's the biggest apologetic question of our day, whether people can articulate it that way or not. Anytime somebody's on the fence, they're asking, does Christianity still make sense? Does it make sense to stay?

Bobby Conway

When a non-believer is considering it, he's asking, does it make sense to believe? And so I wanted to answer that because I was somebody that went from thinking, this is beautiful. It makes sense to, it doesn't make sense to, it makes sense again. And yet there are some things that don't make sense as well. But I came to the place where I realized a walk away from Christianity

would only be to walk into another worldview where I inherit another set of doubts, some unforeseen and some foreseen. And I would just take the apologetic issues. And then I would think about the worldview alternatives and go, well, what are they going to do with these objections? And I just realized that doubt's not a Christian problem. It's a human problem.

Bobby Conway

And then the absence of certainty, there's always going to be room for doubt. The question is which worldview best closes the doubt gap. And for me, I think Christianity makes the best sense of life's biggest questions. And so the interesting thing about the book is I share my journey and then I deal with the biggest objections, but then I go back to how I kind of came out of this snag. And the funny thing is, is it wasn't through getting another question answered. I was trying to solve my angst with doubt through getting answers to my questions and doubts. And while that was good, I was on a bigger quest. It was like a quest for omniscience and it was just never going to happen. I had to learn to live with doubt and unanswered questions.

Bobby Conway

And the way out of my doubts was the very way in to Christianity to begin with is I had to have faith like a child in the simple gospel. And I believed in the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. And I believed that if Jesus really rose from the grave, then he really did die. And if he really did die, he really did live. And when he really did live, he validated the Old Testament and he said more is to come. And so I thought, well, if the Old Testament was good enough for Jesus, if he rose from the grave, then he died. And if he died, he lived. And when he lived, he validated that. And I go, I can roll up all of my issues from the Old Testament into the resurrection of Christ. And then I could also trust that in his first coming, if he validated the Old Testament, I can trust that in his second coming, he'll validate the process that took place there because he promised that the spirit would guide them into all truth. And so interestingly enough, I could go back and deal with the Old Testament, the New Testament and have faith like a child.

Bobby Conway

And it's not that I don't have doubts or questions. I just don't panic about them the way that I once did. And I've also influenced the way I pastor and parent where I taught my kids when I came out of that, as I said, look, I want you to love God, love people, celebrate the gospel, love God, love people, great commandment, celebrate the gospel, great commission. And then I said, I want you to enjoy learning. Don't try to conquer it. Know that there's lots of views out there. Take your time before committing. And I said, if you just focus on the great commandment and the great commission, that's all the early

church had to go on. They didn't even have the first book of the New Testament for 15 years after the resurrection with Galatians in about AD 49. So a lot of the things we're having these existential crisis of faith about weren't even privy to the early church. So I said, just love God, love people, celebrate the gospel. And then, hey, if John the Baptist is a cousin of Jesus could doubt or Adam and Eve could doubt in the garden of Eden, how much more are we susceptible to doubting in paradise loss, 2000 years removed from the resurrection of Christ in a world filled with denominations? Hey, keep it simple. And it's been the advice I give the church as well, while also rigorously contending for the faith.

Shea Houdmann

That's powerful. And a ministry that God seems to repeatedly give me, whether it's like someone I'm discipling a person or questions is a lot of people like you, they want omniscience. They want, I want to be able to figure everything out. I want to be able to explain the perfect explanation for all of these things, whether it's the problem of evil, whether it's Calvinism versus Arminianism. I want the perfect explanation of how Jesus can be God and man at the same time. And there's all these things like you need to live with the fact that you're finite, that only God is infinite and eternal and omniscient and omnipotent, that it's okay to not perfectly understand some things, but the key is learning to trust God, even when you don't understand, whether it's a theological issue you can't perfectly understand, whether it's an apologetics issue, whether it's a worldview issue, whether it's a personal issue, a tragedy or something terrible to happen in your life, you don't have to perfectly understand it in order to be able to trust God.

Shea Houdmann

In a sense, I speak to that in relative ignorance in the sense that I've never had a lot of the tragedies that other people have experienced. So I counsel in the sense of, look, I believe there are answers. I believe God is trustworthy. I believe that God's word is true and reliable, but you don't have to perfectly understand everything to be able to trust in God. And to me, that can be the answer to a lot of different questions. Obviously, at Got Questions.

Here's what we think the best answer is, but ultimately it comes back to faith. Like in Hebrews 11, even believing that God exists is something that we accept by faith. So if that's the very first step is a faith step, then everything else should be able to follow that as well.

Shea Houdmann

So not that there's not evidence, of course there is. I mean, both of us, we are apologists. We believe that there's evidence. We believe there's explanations for the Christian faith, for the resurrection, for God's existence, et cetera. But

ultimately it does come back to faith and recognizing that we're, as you said, that we're not omniscient and surrendering that to God.

Bobby Conway

Yeah, that's well said. I mean, I suppose when I was in the deep seas of doubt, I mean, the one thing that didn't make sense was atheism. I mean, that just seemed more absurd, right? Nothing taking nothing and making all this, or listening to the objections, I can't believe in a God that didn't intervene in the Holocaust or whatever. And I would say, as I thought about it, well, he might not have intervened when we wanted him to, but on atheism, there's no justice at all for Hitler. He just gets off with it. So while we would, as Christians recognize it had been nice to see him judged sooner, he'll have his day. And so to exchange my belief for atheism on account of something like the problem of evil didn't make sense.

Bobby Conway

I suppose probably the most attractive thing that appealed to me was agnosticism just to sit in critic's corner. But then I found myself even thinking like this, well, even the agnostic is not agnostic about the fact that there is an explanation for how we got here. The agnostic is just agnostic about what that explanation is. And I thought, wouldn't I rather give my life to the best explanation than to just fold my hands and say, I'm not going to give my life to any explanation because I'm still giving my life to the explanation of agnosticism. So I found myself going, hey, I'd rather err on the side of trusting in things that I just don't understand than saying, as I sit as a magistrate over all of Christianity and say, it can't be true.

Bobby Conway

So for example, take things like inerrancy. They go, hey, I have no problem. I'd rather take inerrancy than sit and say, this is in, this is out. So I'd rather give the benefit of the doubt to inerrancy. And if I get to heaven and find out that there were some dates that were off or whatever, well, okay. I just didn't know where to begin that process of saying what's right, what's wrong. So I just chose to give the benefit of the doubt. And I think that that is the way that my head started reasoning. And like you, I ended up back with very similar beliefs, but I just needed to kind of go out and think through it all a little bit more clearly.

Shea Houdmann

And I love that explanation in terms of Jesus asked the disciples, are you going to leave too? And I think it was Peter who responded, where are we going to go? You have the words of life to having, and probably not as thoroughly as you have, but having examined all the alternate worldviews out there, whether they're the pseudo-Christian ones or the completely anti-

Christian ones, I find them to have even greater problems than Christianity does. So recognizing that there are difficult things to explain in the Christian faith to me is not a challenge. It's like, no, there are things we don't understand, but all the other worldviews, at least as far as I've been able to examine, cause even worse problems. So I'm going to stick to it. I'm not just because I'm naive, but because no, I think Christianity offers the best explanation for what I observe in the reality of what humanity is like, the longing I have for something otherworldly, something beyond this life, all those things, Christianity seems to fit both my experience, my intellectual journey and everything that I've searched for far better than anything else I've experienced. So that's just so cool.

Shea Houdmann

Our journeys are definitely some similarities there, but let's jump into the book here, but obviously not enough time to go through all 25 sections of the book. That'd be a multiple hour episode, but just going through here, what area do you find people are struggling with the most? You have it divided by scandals in the church. The church is non-accepting the problems of evil and suffering, the only one way to salvation issues and issues related to science. When you meet average person on the street or person with doubts or whatever, which of these are you finding to be the most common?

Bobby Conway

Well, I think that there is the age old apologetic questions like the problem of evil, the one way issues, like what about those who've never heard? Those continue to be classics, so to speak, and that's what makes them classics is they stand the test of time in that they've caused a lot of existential angst for people. I would say that on the current scene, I think that the biggest struggle for people both inside and outside the church is the LGBT issues that we're up against, and this is tough because the enemy has worked the narrative in such a way that the greatest tool that we have to demonstrate the gospel to the world through love has been the tool that he's used to weaponize this teaching of marriage between a man and woman against us. And so it looks like this, we've been love shamed and we're told that if we don't love or if we don't agree with all things LGBTQ, then we don't love.

Bobby Conway

And the problem is, is if somebody hasn't been taught to think logically, then they might not know how to think their way through such an objection. And so I think many Christians, they feel torn, like their conscience might be saying, okay, but this is what the Bible says, but yet I'm also told I'm supposed to love, but we need to step back and realize that it's not any particular community in

the world that gets to define what love is, number one. And number two, it's a straw man argument.

Bobby Conway

I've been a Christian for 31, 32 years. I don't think I've ever met a Christian, and I'm not saying they're not out there, they are. I'm just saying that it's not the general experience of Christians that Christians hate LGBTQ people. They disagree about that as a lifestyle choice, but if anything, the church has went to great lengths, even compromising on the truth of Christianity to show love, and it's still not enough. And so I think that this is very problematic. And I think part of the reasons it's tough is in a culture that values sexuality so much that what's happened, and I think that our apologetic needs to be to show people that bring this as an objection up, that the reason that people are mandating that we agree with them is because they've reduced their identity down to their sexual preferences. And if you reduce your identity down to your sexual preferences, you won't be able to cope until people accept you.

Bobby Conway

But as Christians, our identity is so much bigger than our sexual preferences. Our identity is in the image of God. We're rational beings. We're volitional. We're sexual. That's just one component of it. So we have a bigger identity to offer a world than just one's sexual preferences.

Shea Houdmann

I think you're exactly right in terms of even the questions we get, questions related to homosexuality and now transgenderism have been huge for our entire history, and that's becoming more so. And just even trying to give, here's what the Bible says, whether it's classified as hate speech or just seen as unloving or how could you possibly, why is God so interested with what I do in my bedroom, all those types of questions. It's huge, and it's a cultural divide.

Shea Houdmann

And if Got Questions where do you get in trouble legally or get banned from the search engines or the app stores or those type of things, my prediction, it's going to be this issue that could eventually result in that. So try to do this, speak the truth and love as much as we can, but recognize the way the culture views identity now, other than 100% full agreement and even endorsement and celebration, anything short of that is not acceptable. So I think you hit the nail on the head with that.

Shea Houdmann

So obviously I would love to go through all these with you, but the book is *Does Christianity Still Make Sense? A Former Skeptic Responds to Today's Toughest Objections to Christianity*. I highly recommend the book.

It's a great resource, goes through. All 25 of them are legitimately big questions we get at Got Questions, and I love how you handle them. And I love how you tie it all together into a Christian worldview, not just putting out little fires here and there, but no, here's how to think through these things in such a way to be consistent with the message of the Bible, the message of salvation, and putting it all together. It's different issues that could seem disconnected, but you tie them all together very well. So I highly, highly recommend the book. So before we sign off, Bobby, what else do you got going on? What would you like to make our audience aware of?

Bobby Conway

Yeah, I would just say they could get the book. I would want them to know that there's also a study guide that they can get. They can get these at any Amazon or Barnes and Noble or whatever. And then if they went to Tyndale Publishers online, they could type in Dawson Conway and Bobby Conway, Dawson's my son, and we have a six-part video series where he's the Gen Z interviewing his dad. And we're talking about kind of Gen Z doubts and stuff. So this can be used for small groups. It can be used for moms and dads to just walk through the questions with their kids. I think the takeaway for the book is it will help people to know what the big objections have always been, what they are today. It will also help them to understand a forward, and it will allow for some good conversations to take place. And so that's the point, just wanting to help people, whether they're struggling in doubts or whether they might someday, or they know somebody that is, hopefully this will be a resource for them.

Shea Houdmann

Amen. Well said. We'll definitely include links to the book and the study guide and your YouTube channel and your website and the show notes when this episode goes live on the description on YouTube and also at podcast.gotquestions.org.

Shea Houdmann

So Bobby Conway, thank you for joining me today. I truly enjoyed our conversation. Wish we had more time. Maybe we'll hop on a call again sometime in the future. And again, I've been a huge fan of his from the one-man apologist, and he was, as he said, he was the OG of doing short videos far before they were popular. So Bobby, thank you again for the great conversation. It's been the Got Questions Podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.

