

## Transcript 96

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Question podcast. We receive a lot of questions from people who for different life circumstances have been wounded by the church, whether it's the specific church or Christians in general. Just have been either abused or insulted, or is hurt in various ways by Christians or by the church, and that has caused them to varying degrees to either want absolutely nothing to do with the church or Christianity in general, or at least to never fully commit or engage with the church out of fear of being hurt again. And we think this is not at all God's plan. That God desires to be a part of community. And that we're all sinners. We all make mistakes. We all do things that should not prevent us from forgiving from finding a loving community where we can plug in and be a part of.

Shea Houdmann

So our guest today is Colette Aikema. She is a staff speaker at Faith Beyond Belief and her dynamic talks focus on topics related to sexuality and apologetics. Faith Beyond Belief, she's our good Canadian friend from a little up north from here, so Colette welcome to the show

Colette Aikema

Hi, thank you so so much for having me on.

Shea Houdmann

And also joining me today is Gwen. She is the administrator for [compellingtruth.org](http://compellingtruth.org) and also our resident counselor on staff and handles all of the difficult questions in that realm that the rest of us are ill equipped to know how to deal with. So Gwen, thank you for joining me today.

Gwen Sellers

Thank you for having me.

Shea Houdmann

So to start Colette, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, your background and just the journey that God has brought you through.

Colette Aikema

I always was. I was raised a Christian and I was raised very conservative, very reformed, and I had the most amazing. I had a lovely, a good upbringing. I had a really good good life, you know, and I was very much in love with God so anytime there was something new that I had to learn about Him, I would really wrestle with it and take it seriously.

Colette Aikema

For example, I remember being maybe five or six and sitting in church and just beginning to cry and I couldn't stop crying and my dad asked me what's the matter. Why are you crying? And I said, what if it's not true? What if it's not true and it just opened up amazing conversations, but that just illustrates that I was very invested.

Colette Aikema

And so when I was a teenager, I struggled with all kinds of sexual issues. Actually I started struggling with that when I was when I was a child already with issues of masturbation and as I got older it turned to not just masturbation but issues of pornography and not just you know what people think as like well that's what girls do right? Erotica. Or reading novels. No, it was the same porn that anyone would find when you search that word into Google. So I became very very addicted to it and it wasn't until I was in university that I realized that I was really actually struggling with this porn and sex addiction and it was a very difficult moment, but at the same time it was a beautiful moment because I was able to realize that I couldn't just try harder and expect it to go away or to get better. I really actually had a problem and I really needed help because I was sick. And so that was a really powerful moment.

Faith Aikema

But one of the things that happened was that I was sexually assaulted by members of our church community. And because of the circumstances of the way that we grew up, and the situation that I was in, the Community that we were in, I was not able to disclose and process any of this until I was older, actually, until right after our youngest daughter was born.

Faith Aikema

Part of what makes my story unique is the fact that when I came forward to the church, I was not shown Christian love in the way that God calls us to be shown in the Bible, and that really did a number on my thinking and on my theology, because I I really wanted to believe that God wanted people to do the right thing and so I wanted people to just do the right thing and so I kept trying that and I learned a lot of lessons. I learned a lot of lessons and I'm glad that God put me on this interesting journey so that I can share share who I am and share what's happened to me.

Gwen Sellers

So how would you say that those experiences affected, I mean, kind of affected you in general, but I'm thinking specifically your relationship with the church, your relationship with the family and your relationship with God.

Colette Aikema

That's a very loaded question, you know I, I think the fact that I was always intellectual is part of the reason that I'm now an apologist, right? And so I work for Faith Beyond Belief an apologetics ministry that teaches Christians how to have effective conversations just in everyday life, so we're all called to be ambassadors of Christ and we need to be equipped in how to do that well, because the culture has simply simply doesn't understand the Christian worldview and we have not been taught how to effectively communicate it in a way that the culture can understand.

Collete Aikema

I find it really fascinating that God used my, is using my intellect to be able to do apologetics work and yet at the same time he's given me these experiences that help me to empathize with marginalized groups that would otherwise be more easily forgotten, especially in the apologetics field, because we often talk about just the majority of things you know, the typical things. What are things that are true

and I think that in many ways sometimes the outliers of the Christian population, those who feel marginalized, whether it's people who are eccentric or people who identify now as LGBTQ because they were given no other narrative, any of these marginalized people for them, apologetics doesn't always speak to them, and I know that apologetics can speak to them because apologetics is God's truth, and so I want to be able to bridge that gap between apologetics and the intellect and coming together and making it a an open and a safe environment for somebody to share that there's both an emotional thing going on and there's an intellectual response that we can work on together. And we do that by having a conversation, and so I don't know if that answered your question, but.

Gween Sellers

Yeah no, that was great. So kind of as a follow up to that. Did you ever? I mean so you loved God from a young age and then were hurt in his name and then the church kind of your church responded badly when you shared that, so did that ever cause you to question who God was? Or did you always separate it as people behaving badly versus who God actually is?

Colette Aikema

What a great question. Thank you Gwen. You know I think that's the that's really the meat of the matter. That was the messiest part because the church told me, so after I disclosed, the church told me that they would help me sort it out and help take care of everything and a few weeks later the pastor and another leader sat me down, two men and just me behind a closed door. They sat me down and they said, well, we've spoken to the boys and we want you to know that they're ready to sue you, so what do you have to say for yourself? And that was very very very hard. Because in that moment I realized either I had to lie and I told them this. I said well, either I have to lie and say it didn't happen, or I have to go to the police and I was not ready to go to the police and so I was put in this impossible position and what was so hard about it was the fact that because like I said, I was raised in a very conservative, very reformed home and so I was taught in our church community that the church is really the embodiment of Christ.

Colette Aikema

So when you have a problem, the whole body hurts and when you are hurt you go to the body for help and so I assumed that people would do the right thing in the church, right? I trusted them to act Christlike. And again, in healthy churches, this is a beautiful thing. We need to be able to depend on the body, but in toxic churches this is really really dangerous because what ends up happening is that we question God or we question God's goodness when we're hurt by people, so I trusted people to act Christlike. Because I was taught that the church was an extension of Christ himself. And so I thought, if I would just do the right thing then they would do the right thing.

Colette Aikema

Unfortunately I didn't know what I know now and now I know what the signs are of a healthy church culture and a toxic church culture and I didn't know that at the time and so I it was very very hard because I had to say to them, I explained to them that the fact that they completely dismissed my trauma as if it had not happened and that they shared confidentiality. 'cause after I followed up and said well how can they? How can they sue me? They don't know who I am and they said, well, yes, we told them about you and the others. And so that was very. It was a very jarring experience because every, all

the struggles that I'd had spiritually with trauma with sex addiction. All of these issues. They were simply saying that that problem didn't exist and that was the hardest thing because I knew that God would never.

Colette Aikema

I had to. I had to grapple with the fact that God would never dismiss me like that. And that was really hard, but I think I trusted I, I trusted in Princess and I trusted in horses. And so I went to what I thought would solve the problem instead of knowing that people make mistakes and now I know and again I could. There was no way for me to know that at the time. Because we didn't have the tools and the ability to recognize that we were in a church situation where the gospel was preached but not lived. And if we had the resources and the knowledge then we would have been able to recognize the fact that we were being given a counterfeit version of the Church of God.

Shea Houdmann

Colette what would you say to the person who's been through a trauma, maybe not the same trauma as you or the same type of abuse that you experienced but who has gone the route of I don't want anything to do with the church period. What are some maybe some keys to helping someone in that mindset to in a sense, even be willing to look for a healthy church rather than giving up on the church entirely.

Colette Aikema

Well, I think you almost answered it right there by saying we need to look for a healthy church and recognize that there are healthy churches and there are toxic churches. I think we, as North American Christians, we divide people into denominations. We all have our own labels and our own views and all these different things. And yet we're failing to see that there's a real culture of abuse going on in many churches, that's simply not being dealt with right, and so I think what we really need to do is we need to remind people who do not know the Lord that there was somebody else who was hurt by the church and there was somebody else who was so hurt by the church that his own countrymen would rather have a serial killer be free than have an innocent man be crucified. And so what's so important to realize is that we may be hurt by the church, but we will never be as hurt by the church as Jesus was.

Colette Aikema

And Jesus was hurt by the church. And what did he say to the? What did he say? Forgive them. And he said that to all of them, and so he continues to love the church, despite the fact that the church is also caught in sin. The church is affected by sin and there are healthy churches that are trying very hard with transparency and accountability to be able to move past that and to be able to put sin back at the foot of the cross and confess it and keep moving. And yet there are also church cultures where that is not yet happening and we need to be able to see that when we commit ourselves to God, we have to commit ourselves to the church as well. Because the church needs people to continue to speak up for it and work for change work for change because if people like me don't share our story, then there's no way for people to recognize that there are toxic churches and healthy churches.

Colette Aikema

And again I use these phrases very, very intentionally and they're based on the book *A Church Called Tove* by Scott McKnight and I highly, highly recommend this resource because he really talks about what a toxic church looks like and how to recognize it. The fact that it's led by narcissism and that there's a power through fear culture. And that I think now on the other side, I can see that that's what was happening, but at the time I wasn't able to see that.

Colette Aikema

So I one of the things that I do want to acknowledge is that this is something that my good friend, Daniel Gilman from the Center for public speaking in Canada this is what he says. That the idea of gossip and the idea of forgiveness have both been weaponized so that abuse is not dealt with in the way that it's just not responded to well, right?

Colette Aikema

And one of the things that I want people to really understand is that forgiveness doesn't mean that we just forget and sweep it under the rug and never talk about it again. Somebody asked me just today this podcast you're doing, can you do it? Have you forgiven the church? Yes, I have forgiven the church, but we need to understand that forgiveness does not mean simply forgetting right? Forgiveness means it means that we keep working for the church and working for God's glory to be shown in the church. Because if we don't, then the gospel becomes less relevant to our everyday culture, and that's part of what our job is. Our job is to be an ambassador for Christ. And how do we do that? We need to be a part of a church and that means that we need to find a healthy church. And so we got to do that work.

Colette Aikema

And so again, for every person who's been hurt by the church, I feel you. I feel you and God was there and he allowed it to happen and I do not know why, but he does and he is wise and he is good and no matter what happened no matter where you were, God was there and he hurt for you. And in every single way I know he would have wanted to intervene, but there's a reason why these things happen in such a way as to unfold God's work in our lives, and so for those of you who've been hurt by the church, don't dismiss God for the sins of the church, because we serve a Savior, Jesus. Who was hurt so badly by the church and yet continued to give himself up for it. And that's what we need to do.

Colette Aikema

And sometimes we're going to get hurt, but then we need to use those opportunities to keep learning and help other people to continue to grow, because when we give up when we pull out, what kind of influence can we have then?

Shea Houdmann

When I hear you talk and others as well with similar experiences, it reminds me somewhat of people who grew up with a very bad father. Whether the father was abusive or the father was absent and then they try to, they come to faith in Christ, then they're trying to need to love God the father. Anytime the word father is used, it's almost like trauma to them 'cause that's such a terrible dad for whatever reason into transitions. OK, the fact that your dad was not the type of dad he should have been, the Bible prescribes, doesn't mean you have to transfer that to how you understand God. God is the perfect father. God is the loving father. God is the merciful, gracious father. He does everything your father

should have been striving to be, and similarly people who've been hurt by the church. Those hurts that have been inflicted are not what the church is supposed to be. The church is supposed to be the exact opposite of what you experience.

Shea Houdmann

So rather than giving up on viewing God as your loving heavenly father. Rather than giving up on the church as a loving, supportive community. Look to God's word and see what these entities were supposed to be like and strive to push in that direction rather than giving up on it entirely. And I found that's been helpful for some people who struggle with these type of issues. But again, having never been traumatized by a father or by the church, I can't fully empathize with those who have. But to me it's taking our eyes off of what's happened in a sinful world filled with sinful people and focusing instead on the God who loves us and what he designed the church to be.

Colette Aikema

Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. I do think that what's so amazing about God's character is the fact that the two are not mutually exclusive. We don't need to say well we gotta love and that means we just move on right? How we love people is by telling them the truth right? And we do so in grace and in love, but I think about this is something we teach in our, it's something called the Identity project. It's a course where we teach the biblical view of sexuality and gender, and this is something that it is my absolute favorite topic to teach on because issues like I said of gender and sexuality very much hit home for me growing up and so.

Colette Aikema

So just as a side note, we talked a little bit about how those negative experiences and I really had to grapple with whether what God said was fair. You know when it came to issues of sexuality, I really wanted to know why he made certain demands or why he made certain boundaries and I was willing to follow them. I just wanted to know why he made them. And I think that's part of what the church needs to remember is that God is good and he is wise. And that means that all the boundaries he puts up are good and wise and for our protection.

Colette Aikema

And so instead of real, instead of thinking that because, for example, somebody might have grown up with a very abusive father. Instead of realizing that that instead of using it as an obstacle for understanding the Lord, I think that we can show people that it can actually be something that shows them more about who God is, because there is an absence there and your body and your mind and your spirit feels it, and that absence is what your Heavenly Father is.

Colette Aikema

So I mentioned that I'm teaching the identity project and one of the stories we teach in there is about the woman who anointed Jesus feet and who wept on Jesus feet. And in that story we teach not just the fact that Jesus loved Mary and loved Mary enough to forgive her sins and tell her to go sin no more. Right? Now it's not just that, he also loved someone else in the story enough to tell him the truth, and that's a person we often forget about.

Colette Aikema

And that person is Simon. Do we love the Simons of this world enough to continue to have this conversation. To talk about this, to call people on, hey, I know what you're thinking about this woman and actually well in this, this is why we teach this in the identity project, is the fact that Simon sees her only in her identity. If Jesus knew the type of woman, if he knew her identity, then he wouldn't let her touch him. Well instead Jesus says to Simon that she's a woman in need of forgiveness and that they are complete equals. And that's something that he is like, that's something we've forgotten. He loves Simon so much that he's willing to tell him the truth and call him to account and call him to repentance.

Colette Aikema

And that's exactly what we need to do. We need to love the church and love each other enough to say that things are not right and that's why we need God. Not things are not right. So let's just think about the good stuff, no, things are not right and that's why we need God. So what does God have to say about this? And how will he help us tackle this problem? Because we can't just wish for it to go away when it comes to abuse in the church, this issue isn't going to go away until it's dealt with. We need to wrestle with that so that we can live the gospel in a genuine way and not in a way that looks hypocritical to the culture because at this point that's often what happens.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I love your connection between knowing the gospel and living the gospel and just your commitment to both. I think that idea of truth being so important and being what grounds us. My church, recently had a sermon on 2nd Corinthians 4. That mentions do not lose heart twice and the pastor said, you know we don't lose heart because of like, how do we do that is to know theology, so when you really know who God is. And are grounded in that truth. That's how we can deal with these things of like the reality of sin, and that it does still happen in the church.

Gwen Sellers

But that's not a reason to give up on God or on the church, and like you were talking about the idea of do we love people enough to speak truth to them? Like you need both love and truth go hand in hand. Loving is not soft pedaling and truth doesn't mean just be mean and don't actually care about people they'd come together.

Gwen Sellers

Also, you mentioned before being drawn to apologetics and feeling like and bringing in people who are marginalized from that and showing them how apologetics can be so helpful in that. So I just I love that you have both of those things of the empathy and the commitment to truth, and that wanting to move forward rather than giving up, it's, I think that's great and really encouraging. And what we all need to be doing.

Colette Aikema

Thank you well and if this is something that you're interested in, I encourage you to look up the blog that I wrote so you can find it at Faith Beyond Belief about Ravi Zacharias and the scandal that happened after his death. Because as an apologist and as a sexual assault victim, it really hit home and I knew that

it would do a number on the idea of apologetics and I knew that God wanted more from the situation. He wanted us to be able to see that we as Christians can handle the truth, and when we act as if the truth is actually too hard to handle. We and we we say it and we we do it in sneaky little ways.

Colette Aikema

For example, we might teach that we are totally depraved, right? Total depravity we might teach that. And yet when abuse comes out or is disclosed then we tend to say things like they would never do that. So do we believe? Do we actually believe what we say we believe? Or like, do we believe that we're all sinful? Or do we believe that we that there's some sins that just don't affect us? And that's what I love about the fact that teaching apologetics allows us to have access to the truth and to teach the truth. But we never. We can never forget the order, so God calls us to speak in grace, love, then truth, and so we can't speak in grace and we can't speak truth into people's lives with grace and love if we are not part of their lives right?

Colette Aikema

If I'm just walking down the street and seeing a person that I have all kinds of judgments about and I want to have a conversation with him about what I think is right and what I think is wrong. That conversation isn't going to go very well because I have no right to be speaking into his life in that personal of a way, and I think that's one of the things that we as Christians need to remember with the LGBTQ community as well.

Colette Aikema

For us, it's such a. It's such an important issue, we just want to talk about it. We want to lay it out and we just say it like we mean it. And that's often part of what makes it's so so hard because it comes across so hostile because it's only truth with no grace and no love and no relationship. And so the fact that God allows us to be able to handle the truth. Gives me a firmer grasp on the fact that God really loves us and really loves us in truth and loved the church so much that he wants to strive first truth within the church community and outside of it.

Shea Houdmann

So Colette maybe in closing further, I wanted to give you an opportunity to share a little bit more about Faith Beyond Belief and how people can learn more and will include some links to where people can learn more about you in the description field on YouTube at [podcast.gotquestions.org](http://podcast.gotquestions.org) and let me say this about best Canadian accent on the the show notes. When we published this podcast episode, but how can people learn more about Faith Beyond Belief?

Shea Houdmann

These to close if someone is dealing with something similar to what you experienced, having been abused or wounded by the church and then having the church dismiss that, what do you say to the person who is dealing with that specific issue about why they shouldn't give up on God, Christ first and the church secondarily.

Colette Aikema



Don't stop looking for the community where God wants you to be, because once you enter that community, I will encourage you to ask them, have you read A Church Called Tove? You know? Ask the leadership. What do you do to ensure you have a healthy church culture because this is something we all need to do to help the church grow and to make sure that we are going to be taken care of right, and so that's one of the first things, but we can't do that until we acknowledge that the church is worth fighting for, because as much as the church can hurt us and again, I have lost the entire community I grew up with. I defended them and I fought for them and I was on board and when I disclosed my abuse they turned their backs on me and it sometimes makes me want to give up. But now God has given me a church family that is closer to me spiritually. And even in a familial way, than I have ever experienced before. And it's because God has given me a healthy church. And when I am when I am lost, they help me find God and when I am weak they help me and prop me up so I have strength and that is what church can offer and that is what God's will is for you.

Colette Aikema

And so if it's not right now, don't give up because it's coming and you need to let God do that work. And that's really, really hard. It means you have to put yourself out there in this church and do the work. But I know that God will use that family once you find it, to revolutionize your life and give you the give you the ability to do things that you didn't know you could do before. Don't give up because now, like me you could have a church family that shows you the love of Christ and when you need them to, they wash your feet even when you don't need them to. And that's when you get to know the Lord all over again, because then you can see that there's love and there is truth and I can forgive them because there is goodness. There's goodness that God gives to this to this world and to our church, and we need to look for it.

Colette Aikema

I would love it if you want to get to know us more. I don't know anybody who has not been excited and changed by our work at Faith Beyond Belief. And so, like I said, we're an apologetics ministry that works to equip Christians for everyday conversations about Jesus and the way that you can access all of that information as you go online to our website at [www.faithbeyondbelief.ca](http://www.faithbeyondbelief.ca) and all the links will be there whether you're interested in a conference. You're interested in having us teach a class, whether you're interested in taking these courses yourself, whatever it is that you need, you can find it all on the website, and so God bless you and may every single one of your conversations be filled with grace and truth.

Shea Houdmann

Colette, thank you for joining us on the show today talking about a very difficult, very important issue. But it's truly in our 20 years now at Got Questions we've run across a lot of people who want nothing to do with the church, due to the abuse that they've experienced there. So thank you for sharing your heart and your passion. You truly appreciate it and will include information where you can learn more about Colette and Faith Beyond Belief and thank you Gwen for joining me on the show today. I appreciate having you with me. This has been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.