

# The Spiritual Readiness Project

[spiritualreadiness.org](http://spiritualreadiness.org)

## Research Into Spiritual Readiness

Research Project 1

Fall/Winter 2018-2019

Apologetics Interest Survey

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Why Are Some Christians Interested in Apologetics?  
What's Behind Their Interest?

## WHY ARE SOME CHRISTIANS INTERESTED IN APOLOGETICS? WHAT'S BEHIND THEIR INTEREST?

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What motivates interest in apologetics? Apologists have often asked how we can “get more apologetics in the Church.” Typically we’ve pursued the question as a matter of “give them the resources and they’ll find out they like it.” Even worse, we’ve treated it as if we could argue people into liking argument. In reality, though, it’s not an apologetics question, it’s a motivation issue.

The doctrine of spiritual gifts makes clear we shouldn’t expect everyone to share a high motivation, so if some don’t care to dive deep into it, that’s expected. But those of us who aren’t gifted in evangelism are not thereby excused from doing it to some extent. The question for the Church, then, is how to motivate persons to an extent consistent with their gifting. Apologists seem to agree that the Church has not come anywhere near reaching even this modest objective. We at the Spiritual Readiness Project agree emphatically.

But what motivates people to be interested in apologetics? Apologists can all have their intuitive opinions on that; the Spiritual Readiness Project decided to find out by asking. Late in 2018 we surveyed apologetics-interested persons (AIPs), most of whom we reached through apologetics Facebook groups and Ratio Christi. 107 persons responded to the survey. Response patterns were consistent enough to provide confidence we have solid preliminary answers to our chief questions about apologetics motivation.

### Common Factors

We discovered several factors common (not universal, but common enough) among AIPs. We list them here with comments loosely based on a simple yet powerful motivation theory called Expectancy Theory, which (loosely) says people will be motivated to a task if they believe they can do it and that it will produce a valued outcome for them. We found the following to be generally true of AIPs:

- They’re **highly educated**. They believe (expect) they have the ability to learn.
- They have an **intellectual bent**. They expect to find intrinsic value in learning.
- They were **exposed to great speakers, teachers, or writers**, through books, articles, talks, or in one case a movie. Thus they believed (expected) there were answers at the end of their explorations.
- They experienced **fear, concern, or even frustration** over unanswered **faith-related questions** — either their own, or questions raised by friends or family members. Thus they came to believe (expect) there would be a positive value to be gained through apologetics.
- They were involved in **evangelism and/or early, basic-level discipling** of new believers. This, too, speaks to their expectation that apologetics could have a valued purpose, related to the previous item: questions that could be answered.
- Many had a **personal introduction** to apologetics through a family member, friend, or professor; thus they had access to the learning, and the valued outcome of being involved in it with someone else.

- Most had **friends nearby** (not just online) **currently supporting them** in their pursuit of apologetics.

To sum it up in the fewest possible words:

Intellectual Bent + Significant Faith Questions + Accessible Answers  
(along with Relational Support) = Interest in Apologetics

### **Demotivators and Missing Factors**

Our findings suggest that people will be *demotivated* to pursue apologetics if they're not involved in evangelism, if they're not paying attention to important questions, if they can't find/don't know about intellectually accessible resources, or if they don't like studying.

Most of this information through open-ended questions on what caused persons to become interested in apologetics. Respondents' open-ended answers notably did not include two factors that arguably ought to have been there: *biblical conviction* and *church*. Only four persons said they were led to apologetics because the Bible instructs us to be so equipped. Only five mentioned church in any way, and three of those mentions were negative: Their churches had discouraged them from the pursuit.

### **What To Do With This Information?**

These findings suggest a number of tracks apologists can take to bring about increased apologetics motivation. They explain the success of training programs used by some, such as Sean McDowell's or Stand to Reason's Berkeley and Salt Lake City missions trips, which supply questions, answers, and relational support in abundance.

Individuals' ultimate interest in apologetics will always be conditioned by the presence or absence of an intellectual bent in their lives. But there's still much we can do to encourage everyone to grow to some significant extent. It may well be that culture will keep throwing more questions at us. Apologists should encourage church members to become more aware of and engaged with those questions, to realize they're not alone in caring about those questions, and with the assured knowledge that good answers are easy to find.

How do we do this best? What are the best ways to reach churches, through pastors, parents, youth; through media, teaching, conferences; with which questions and which answers — and so on? That's another set of great questions, which we're continuing to research. The Spiritual Readiness Project is a multi-year initiative; there's much more to come.

For those who missed the chance to take part in the survey, we're still listening. Go to [spiritualreadiness.org](http://spiritualreadiness.org), then click on "Research" —> "Add Your Voice" in the main menu.

*Special thanks go to the Christian Apologetics Alliance Facebook Group and Ratio Christi for their support of and participation in this survey.*

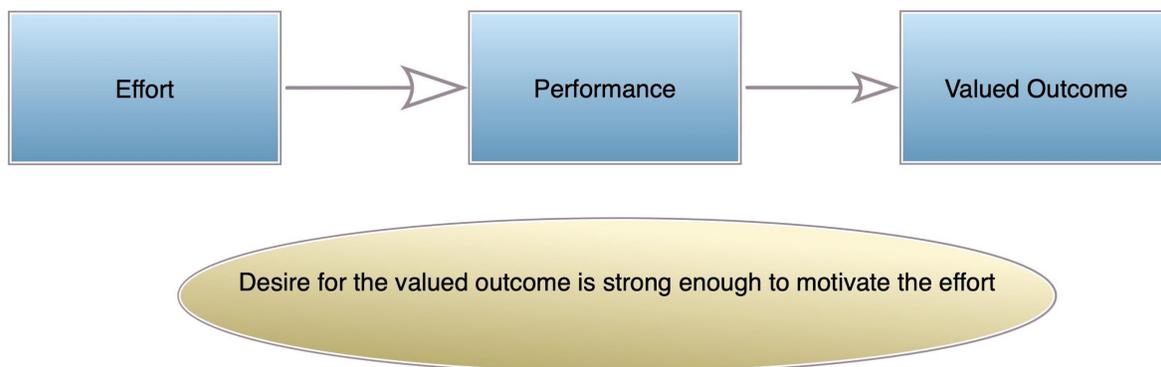
## SPIRITUAL READINESS PROJECT APOLOGISTS' MOTIVATION RESEARCH DETAILED REPORT

Why are some people interested in apologetics? What motivates them? The question matters: It could lead us to a better understanding of why some people *aren't* interested. While many have wondered why the Church isn't more interested in apologetics, not many have tackled it as the question it really is: a motivation question. The [Spiritual Readiness Project](#) is pursuing that question in a multi-year project intended to result in conferences, web resources, and at least one book. Our first research question explores positive motivation: the reasons some people are interested in apologetics.

There are many ways to look at motivation, but one of the clearest and most useful is Victor Vroom's *Expectancy Theory*. His model says people are motivated to do something if they believe (expect):

1. They have the capacity to do the task to some meaningful degree, and
2. The outcome of their efforts in the task will be something that they value, and
3. That outcome is important enough to justify the effort they invest in the task.

Or as the diagram shows:



*Figure 1*

The two arrows in this model represent the first two beliefs or expectations. The first one stands for, “I expect that what I produce I actually what will be related to my effort.” To understand this, think of two extremes: Picking up a large sack of flour, or picking up a wheat field. You can try a little or a lot; either way you’re not going to pick up the wheat field. Picking up a bag of flour, though really does depend on the work you put into it.

The second arrow is the belief that performance will yield an outcome you value. Suppose you want to mix pancake batter for a couple hundred kids at church camp. In that case, chances are you really do want to pick up the sack of flour. If on the other hand it’s dinnertime and you’re making spaghetti, you won’t pick up the flour, even though of course you could.

Finally, there's the underlying theme of believing the outcome is worth the effort. Let's suppose there's an equally large sack of instant pancake mix in the pantry right next to the flour — but you're also really famous for your pancakes from scratch. You'll pick up the flour instead of the instant mix (and you'll get out the eggs, butter, milk, baking powder, and your secret ingredient, too) because you believe that effort is worth the outcome.

Now in the case of apologetics, this approach would suggest four potential points of failure in motivation:

1. "I don't think I can learn it, no matter how hard I try," or
2. "I don't see anything that I care about coming from it, or
3. "If anything good came of it, I still wouldn't, consider it worth the effort."

Conversely, expectancy theory would predict that persons who have sufficient confidence in their performance, and who see a positive outcome being produced through their studies, will likely be motivated to pursue apologetics. It's disarmingly simple; both of those statements contain a whole world of implications.

Expectancy theory is clear and useful, and it explains a lot, as we'll see. It doesn't do a great job, though, of highlighting the interpersonal/relational side of motivation. People tend to enjoy doing what they can do with other people, what others approve of, what gives them a sense of prestige or power related to others, and so on. Various social motivation and social learning theories relate to this side of motivation. We simply theorize that having support from friends nearby should be a factor motivating interest in apologetics.

### **Testing the Theory With Motivated Individuals**

As a first test of this model's applicability to apologetics, we recruited Apologetics-Interested Persons (AIPs) through Ratio Christi and various apologetics Facebook groups. We surveyed them to determine as far as possible the basis of their motivation to pursue apologetics. Though we formed no formal hypotheses, we did expect to see indicators that AIPs believed in their ability to do apologetics, and that it would lead to outcomes they considered important.

We also theorized that personal support — having friends nearby who shared their interest in apologetics — would be a motivating factor in doing apologetics.

Our predictions related to expectancy theory were borne out, to the extent that a survey of this type could be expected to do. Our interpersonal/relational predictions were neither confirmed nor disconfirmed; more research is needed.

## Respondent Demographics

Of 135 persons who responded to our survey, 107 indicated they were actively involved in using or learning Christian apologetics. They form the basis of the analysis here.

As this was not a scientifically (randomly) sampled survey group, the first question for analysis must be, “Does this group represent AIPs in general?” The answer is unfortunately no. This group is heavy on apologetics Facebook group members and Ratio Christi members, and perhaps other groups as well. That hardly means there’s nothing to learn from their responses. It only means that results must be interpreted with the following demographics in mind.

The AIPs included:

- 37 members of the Christian Apologetics Alliance Facebook group
- 49 members other apologetics Facebook groups
- 22 staff members or adult volunteers with Ratio Christi
- 5 Ratio Christi-associated students
- 15 members of local apologetics interests groups, like Reasonable Faith chapters for example
- 14 college students
- 11 seminary students
- 35 who said they were none of the above

(The total exceeds 107 because respondents could check more than one of these.)

The response group was 70 percent male, 30 percent female.

Responses came mostly from the United States. Other countries represented were the United Kingdom (3 respondents), Canada (2), and one each from Australia, Austria, Chile, Germany, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Poland. 8 AIPs declined to answer this item. One non-U.S. respondent commented on how U.S.-centric the education-level question had been worded. We offer apologies for that.

The group was well educated on the whole, with about three-quarters of respondents holding at least a bachelor’s degree, and half of those having earned a Master’s degree or higher.

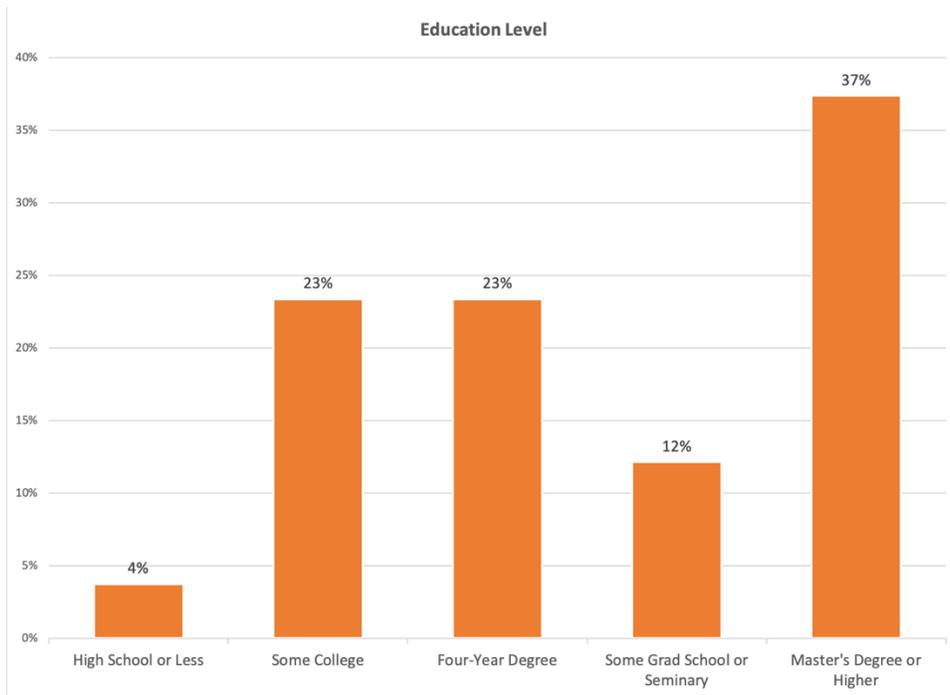


Figure 2

Respondents' ages were distributed as shown in Figure 3.

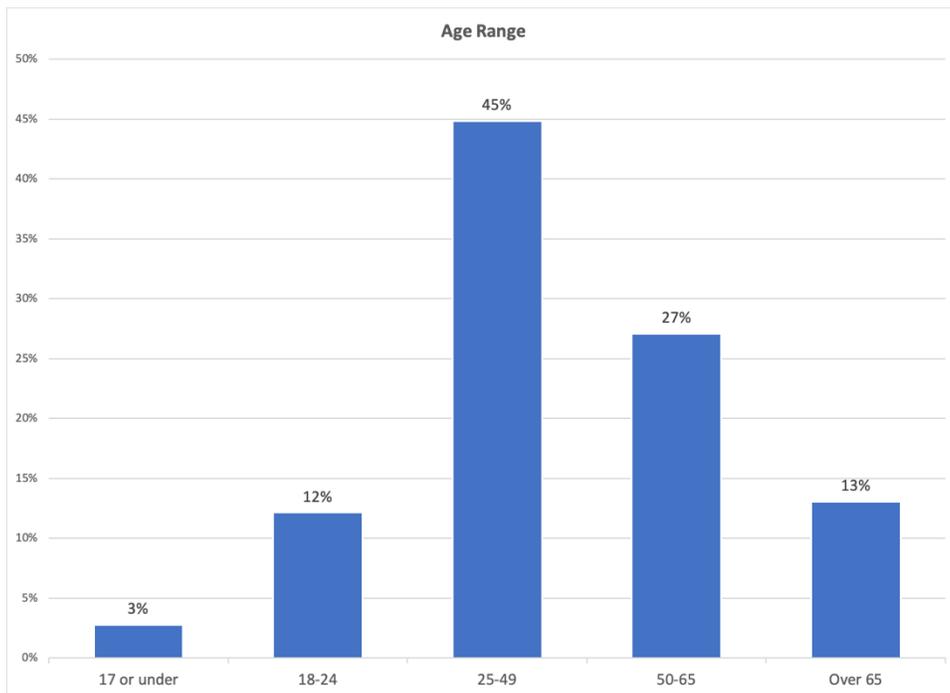


Figure 3

## Apologetics Experience

We assessed apologetics-related experience and confidence levels with two questions. First, *How long have you been actively engaged in using or learning apologetics?* Responses were:

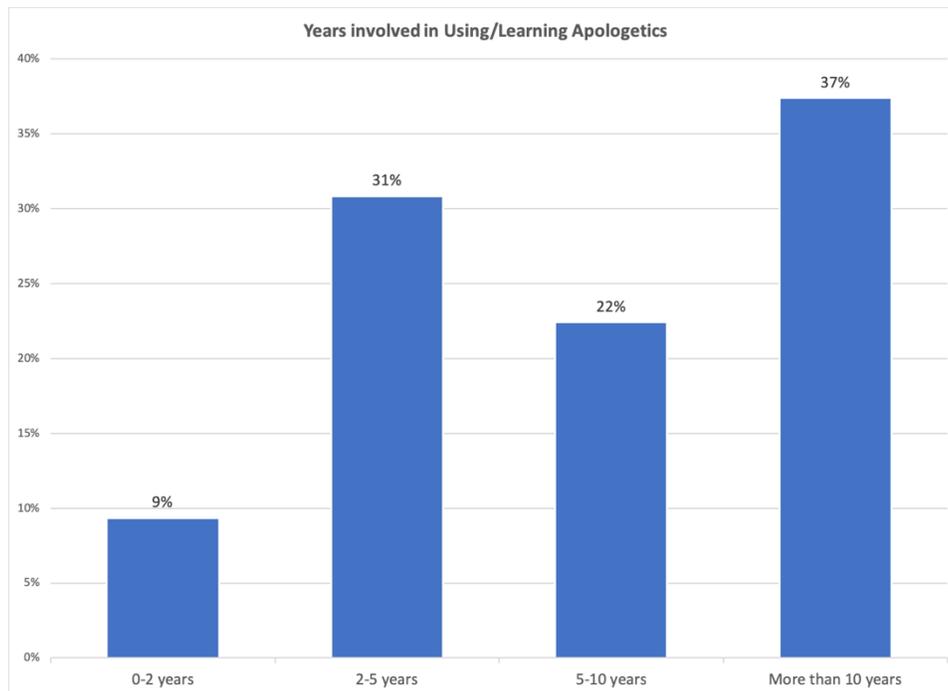


Figure 4

A rough comparison of this statistic with respondents' age ranges suggests that about three of every ten respondents first became interested in apologetics by their early 20s. The median age of first involvement in apologetics was sometime in respondents' 30s; more precise numbers are impossible to compute.

We also asked, *"How confident are you in your use of apologetics?"* This was rather evenly distributed across a range from "somewhat confident" to "quite confident." Few said they were less than "somewhat confident."

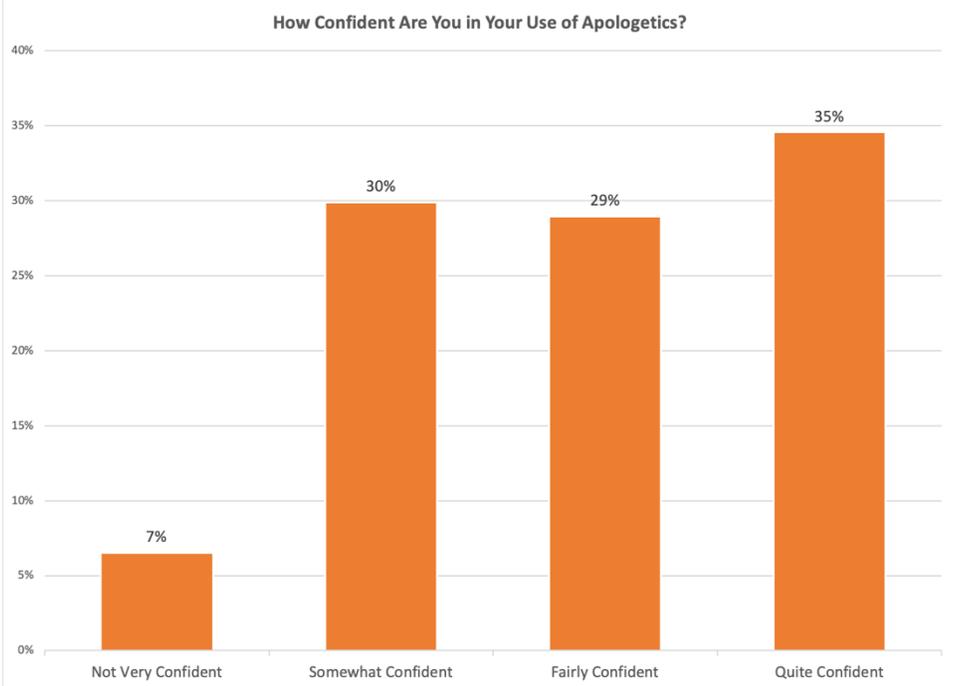


Figure 5

## Results: Qualitative Research Summary

The heart of the survey consisted in two open-ended questions: “In just a few words, what one to three things in your life most sparked your interest in your apologetics?” and “In just a few phrases or sentences, list some situations where you have found apologetics to be useful.”

Using keyword analysis, we found the following themes appearing frequently among the responses.

### Fear, Concern, Frustration

Many respondents (20) expressed concern over the possibility of being wrong about spiritual matters in their own lives, or the frustration of not knowing.

#### Examples:

*A crisis of faith in college as I encountered biblical criticism, other religions and evolution for the first time.*

*I had a crisis of faith while preparing to be a pastor and was close to giving up on it all when a friend (who didn't even know about my doubts) suggested I check out Reasonable Faith. I did, and my faith was restored.*

Others (7 respondents) spoke of their spiritual concerns over a friend or family member who needed answers:

#### Examples:

*Our church organized a Q&A evening some years ago and though much good resulted from the evening, lots of opportunities were missed because those on the panel were unable to answer the questions posed. I knew the answers to some but not all. Also my children abandoning the faith as young adults.*

*Having a child who was being led astray by Bart Ehrman books.*

### Desire to Learn, Curiosity, Intellectual Bent

There were many (24 responses) whose interest in apologetics was spurred by their interest in intellectual matters generally speaking.

#### Examples:

*I have a natural inclination toward intellectual things, and I was inspired by the persuasive and gentle ways I saw leading apologists speak and write (e.g. C.S. Lewis, Ravi Zacharias, and John Lennox)."*

*My own bentness toward reason and integrity, hearing Ravi Zacharias, the call to evangelism.*

## Evangelism and Discipleship

For many (26 in this category), evangelism was a door-opener and/or motivator to pursuing apologetics. In some cases that included (or was hard to distinguish from) discipling new believers.

### Examples:

*Apologetics provided answers to the questions people were asking me when I spoke to them about Jesus.*

*Talking with prisoners in a Bible study class where I meet with a small group weekly.*

There was also a significant and related category of answers (from 38 respondents) involving persons who were motivated by encountering issues and errors. These included issues related to science, other religions, and atheist challenges in general.

### Examples:

*A believing friend became an atheist and opponent to Christianity. Skeptics often come to my church.*

*My personal questions about God and disbelievers attacking my faith.*

*Apparent conflict between science and religion.*

*A crisis of faith in college as I encountered biblical criticism, other religions and evolution for the first time.*

*Living in a Muslim community as a Christian*

*Mormonism or Classic Christianity? Young earth or old earth?*

It's certainly no accident that when we asked where apologetics was useful, the overwhelmingly most frequent answer was evangelism. (Second highest? A tie between strengthening one's own faith and equipping others in faith and understanding.)

## Exposure to Speakers, Authors, and Other Great Sources

Along with all the above, many respondents' interest in apologetics was advanced by exposure to great teaching sources in books, conferences, online, or other media.

### Examples:

*The movie God's Not Dead and learning there was evidence for God.*

*I love books and came across Lee Strobel's books (I was running a church bookstall) - The Unbelievable? radio show and podcast, which led me to William Lane Craig and John Lennox, among others - YouTube videos from Acts 17 Apologetics and others*

## Personal Introduction

Finally, for eleven respondents, a personal introduction to apologetics from a friend or family member was important in launching their interest in apologetics.

### Examples:

*A friend who owned a bookstore, active in the field, gave me books, including McDowell's Evidence, etc. Friends who are ex-JW's Science trying, origins issues, from University days; worked with Campus Crusade for Christ, introduced to Francis Schaeffer "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?"*

*Having friends who were passionate about learning, defending the faith Sharing my faith with others."*

## Two Missing Factors:

### Biblical Convictions

There were relatively few (4) respondents who said they were led to apologetics by the Bible's teaching to do so.

### Examples:

*God telling us to always be ready with answers for the hope that is in us.*

*1 Peter 3:15 Personal interest Strong influx of atheist thought.*

### Church

One response really stood out for its absence: *Church*. Only five persons out of 107 mentioned church as part of their reason for being interested in apologetics. Three of those mentions were negative: Their churches had discouraged them from continuing to ask questions and get good answers. One could almost say the negative church mentions more than canceled out the positives.

## Results: Quantitative

We asked how open AIPs' pastors were to apologetics being taught in their churches. More than half said their pastors were at least moderately open to apologetics being taught in their churches. Almost a quarter of respondents said they didn't know.<sup>1</sup>

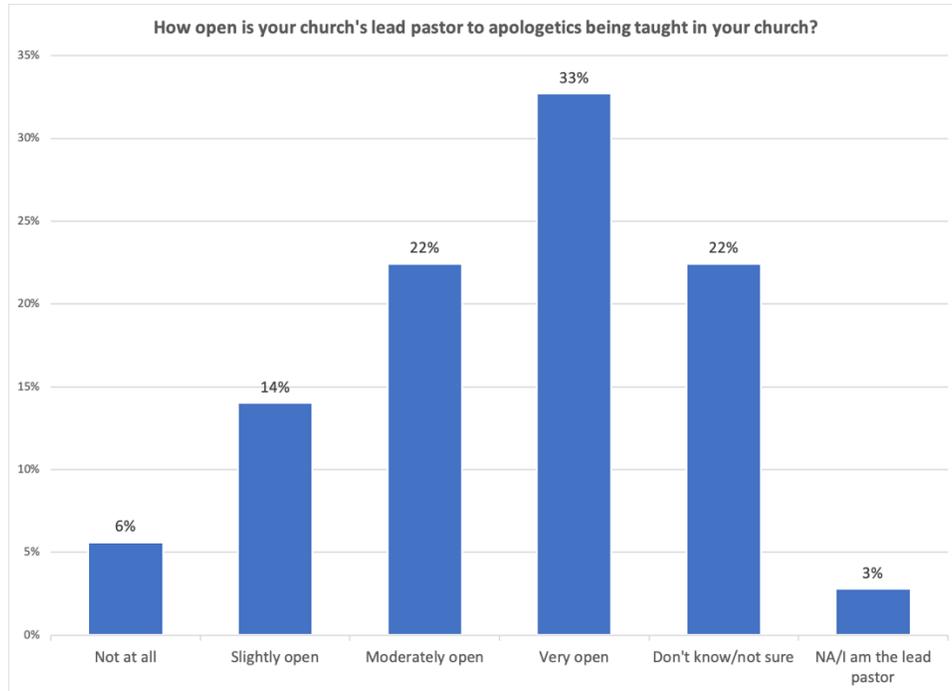


Figure 6

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### <sup>1</sup> What About Statistical Significance?

The quantitative relationships shown here were the only ones that met a minimum ( $p < .05$ ) standard for significance testing. That served as a convenient way to discard results that didn't prove interesting. For current purposes, though, statistical significance isn't a particularly relevant measure.

Statistical significance has a very defined meaning. In broadly simplified terms, it means that the result one finds in a sample group is likely also to be true of the entire population one samples from. It requires that the overall population be well defined, and that the sample be randomly chosen from among that full population. Our convenience sample for this survey was neither a random sample, nor was it drawn from a well-defined overall population; therefore statistical significance is an irrelevant measure for our use.

The best way to view the findings here, then, is with cautious interest. The results we show here are interesting, and there's a reasonably good likelihood they represent reality as applied to some overall population (particularly one whose demographics match the sample's). The results match theory, which lends them credence. Therefore, it's probably not a bad idea to test these results by putting their implications into practice in real ministry situations. Anything more definitive than that is hard to say, however.

There was no significant association between respondents' confidence in use of apologetics and their pastors' openness to apologetics in church. For future research, it would be interesting to know how these AIP responses compare with those of church members who are not interested in apologetics.

We checked our theory about local supporting friendships through three quantitative comparisons. First, *"How many people do you know of in your local church who share your interest in apologetics?"* The results were fairly well distributed:

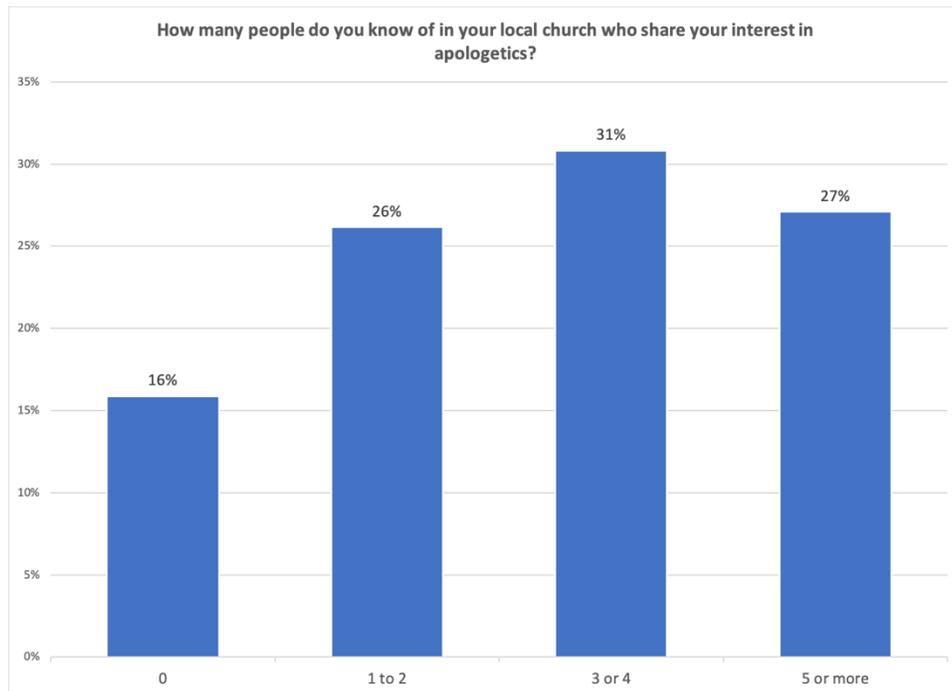


Figure 7

We also asked, *"How many local friends would you say share your interest in apologetics?"* Those results proved unusable, because we didn't specify whether to include church friends or not, and the results seem to show that some respondents thought they should include those friends, others thought they shouldn't.

Still the church-related connections show some interesting associations. As Figure 8 shows, there's a distinct positive connection between local church connections with interest in apologetics, and respondents' confidence in the use of apologetics.

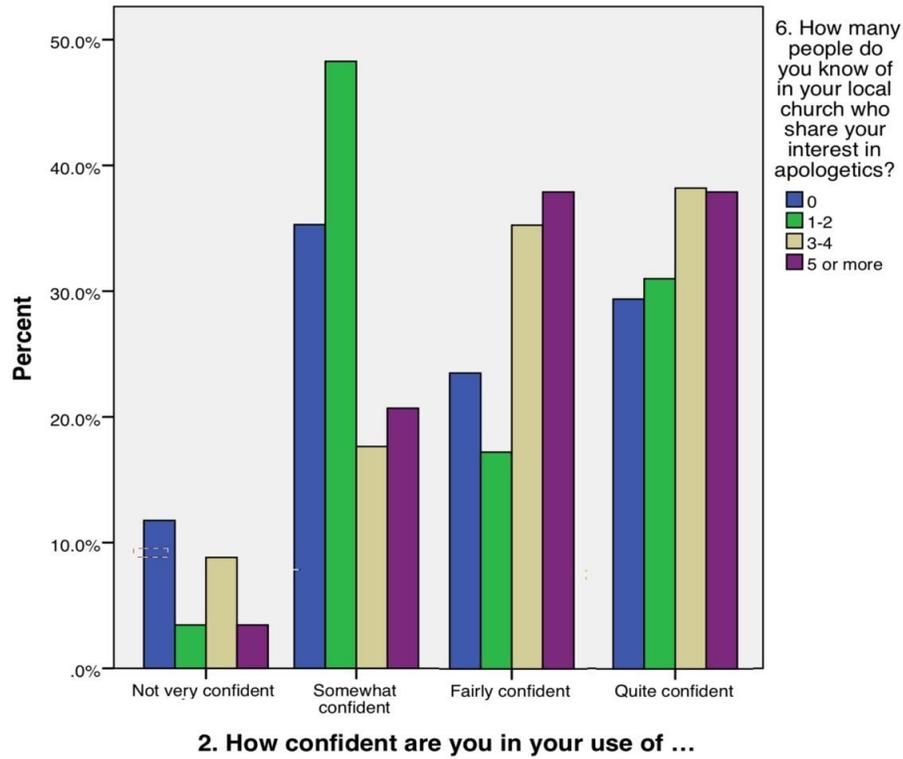


Figure 8.

Our second numerical comparison (cross-tab) showed that the number of church friends involved in apologetics is positively related to how long a person has been involved in apologetics. The causal connection here is hard to specify, as it could go in various directions. The right kinds of friends could spark an earlier and longer-lasting interest in apologetics (which would be consistent with what we reported above). Either that, or one who has had a long-term interest in apologetics might be better able to person to recruit others to that interest. Or something else might explain the relationship. Our data give us no way to tell what’s really going on behind the scenes here.

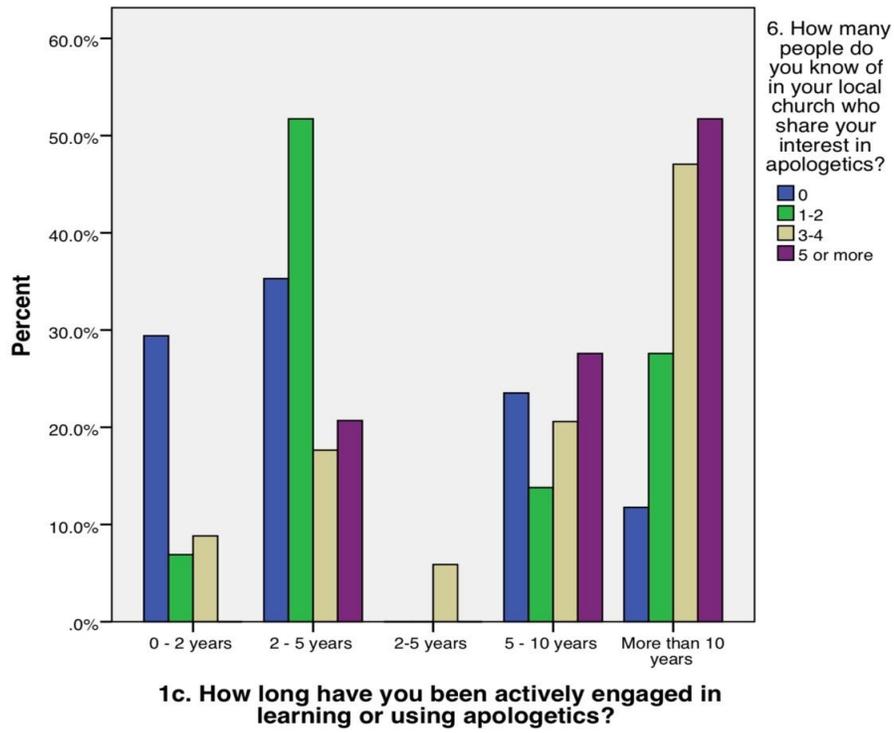


Figure 9

## Conclusions

### Expectancy Theory 1: *Capacity to Do the Task*

Expectancy theory leads us to believe that individuals will be motivated to be involved in apologetics, first of all, if they expect they have the ability actually to learn apologetics to some degree. Our results here support that supposition as far as the survey design may reasonably be expected to do.

#### Education

Respondents are much more highly educated than the general population, indicating that they have (and actually *believe* that they have) the intellectual capacity to understand and work with apologetics-related issues. Many respondents came right out and said their interest in apologetics was an expression of their bent toward intellectual matters.

The survey did not, of course, draw responses from any comparison group of persons who aren't as interested in apologetics. Therefore, we can only draw informal, intuitive conclusions as to that group's interest in intellectual matters or their level of education. Still these capability-related themes stand out so strongly here, it seems safe to conclude this is an important factor in apologetics interest.

#### Access

Further support for this aspect of expectancy theory may be found among those whose introduction to apologetics came through good books, talks, media, etc. These persons weren't just motivated by an interest in learning, but by discovering there was something substantive to be learned, and a source from which to learn it. It would be hard to expect anyone to gain an interest in apologetics if they have no good introduction to solid, accessible information.

#### Gifting

This result is consistent, by the way, with biblical teaching on spiritual gifts. In very brief terms, the New Testament leads us to expect Christians to have different interests and skills, expressed in different ministries. There's no reason to doubt that intellectual interests and skills would tend more often to be expressed in apologetics ministry (along with other cognitive-heavy ministries, such as theology and a whole host of different kinds of fruitful work in the "secular" sphere).

### Expectancy Theory 2: *Valuing the Outcome*

Expectancy theory suggests that persons will be motivated to a task only if they believe their work will have an outcome that they value. This appears to be supported in the responses received here.

First, from a strictly intuitive perspective based on their educational attainments, it seems likely that many of these persons value learning simply for the sake of learning. There is more, however:

#### Evangelism/Teaching/Correcting

Respondents' most frequently listed motivation (38 respondents) had to do with encountering issues and errors, either with friends, family members, or online.

Associated with that were 26 respondents who said their motivation was connected with evangelism and/or very basic, early discipleship instruction. (Four respondents were counted under both of these categories: They listed both unbelief/issues/errors and evangelism as motivators).

This accords with Expectancy Theory to the extent that respondents valued sharing, explaining, and defending the truth of Jesus Christ, whether for pure evangelistic motives or not.

### **Questions Answered**

Twenty respondents who said they began pursuing apologetics to get answers to their own questions. Presumably they wouldn't have asked those questions if they didn't matter, that is, if they didn't value the acquisition of answers.

It would seem especially likely that value of gaining answers would rise dramatically when a person's child, or a friend's, spiritual future is at stake. Still, only seven respondents indicated they were motivated by concern for a family member's spiritual health.

This is a motivational issue that needs further research. Intuitively it seems likely that concern for children would motivate parents to learn how to support them in their faith through apologetics. That's untested, however, and in this group, at least, it's not a prominent factor. Comparing respondents' ages with their years of interest in apologetics, though, it appears that something like one-half of them began developing their interest in apologetics by the time they'd reached their mid 30s. They were interested even before their kids (if any) would have reached an age most parents would start to see as crucial.

### **Relational Connections**

Figure 8 indicates that for our respondents, the more AIPs they knew in their church, the more confident they were in their use of apologetics. The connection appears strong, but more research is needed to see how well it holds up with larger and more representative samples.

About one out of ten respondents said they were introduced to apologetics by a friend or family member. A number that low does not suggest that personal introductions are tremendously important in starting people in apologetics.

## Discussion

While this study suffers the limitations of a small, non-representative convenience sample, nevertheless it reveals strong hints of motivational factors that support persons' interest in apologetics, and raises important questions as well.

The clearest suggestions are that persons are motivated to learn or use apologetics when:

1. They possess a significant intellectual bent to begin with;
2. They are exposed to good apologetic material in print, audio, video, or live; and
3. When they encounter significant challenges to the faith, either through their evangelistic efforts, through friends or family members, or questions of their own.

In short, the equation (assuming initial faith in Christ, of course) goes like this:

$$\textit{Intellectual Bent} + \textit{Questions} + \textit{Answers} \\ (\textit{along with Relational Support}) = \textit{Interest in Apologetics}$$

We're still speaking in tendencies, of course.

For practical ministry purposes, this suggests that the apologist who wants to promote interest in apologetics in his or her church would do well to (a) find intellectually-oriented persons, (b) provoke them with questions that really matter to them or to people they love, and then (c) make answers easily accessible. Intuitively speaking, apologists tend to be better at the first and third of these, and less inclined toward provoking a broad spectrum of lay people with questions that will motivate them with a need to study and learn.

### Intellectual Bent

The presence of *Intellectual Bent* in that equation could seem troublesome. What can be done for those aren't wired that way? Four possible answers seem worth pursuing, and will be the subject of further research in the Spiritual Readiness Project:

First, remind them with good teaching that all Christians have a responsibility to be prepared to defend their faith. It's analogous to those who "don't have the gift of evangelism." Most Christians know they have some responsibility to lift up the name of Christ, and to share the gospel, even if that's not their gift. The same could be true with respect to the gifts of knowledge, teaching, and so on that may be lacking for people who don't have an intellectual bent.

Second, expose them to great questions. Better yet, make sure they're questions they care about, for example, *How will their kids stay strong in the face of the challenges they face? What can parents/grandparents/uncles/aunts do to help?* Or, give them the opportunity to speak with non-Christians and face the questions head-on.

Third, make accessible resources easy to find.

Fourth, make sure they know who to go to in the church if they have specific questions they're not qualified to answer, and make sure they know it's okay to ask.

### **Evangelism**

Given that 26 persons mentioned evangelism as part of what motivated them, and also that it is the most fertile source of provocative questions (besides being a crucial ministry in its own right), it seems likely that active evangelism coupled with good training with easily available answers would be a strong motivator for the learning of apologetics.

Evangelizing the church's own children is one obvious place to focus. That raises the research question, are there ways that really, practically succeed in motivating parents by way of their desire to be ready to meet their children's spiritual needs? If so, what are they? What kinds of questions or issues would motivate them? By what delivery means? What kind of supporting answer-material would give parents confidence they can succeed in learning the material and passing it along to their children?

### **Other Related Opportunities to Explore**

Also for further research: Given that certain intellectually-oriented persons are naturally more likely to be interested in apologetics, and given the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts, are there practical ways for churches to enable such persons to maximize their service to their fellow church members through their gifts of knowledge, teaching, discernment, evangelism (in whatever combination those gifts might exist)?

### **Bible and Church: The Missing Factors**

Two motivational factors that might have been expected went completely missing in this group (or near enough not to matter). There is no evidence whatsoever that AIPs derived their motivation from anything they would label as "church." Possibly some motivations were delivered them at church or through church connections, but this group clearly didn't see their churches per se being strong motivational factors in their apologetics interest.

They also didn't find their initial motivation for apologetics through biblical commands such as 1 Peter 3:15. This isn't to say they wouldn't see high value in such commands today; rather, it is to say they were not compelled by such studies when they began to be interested in apologetics.

Further research suggested by this: Are there other ways biblically to teach the importance of apologetics? Could any of those ways motivate pastors to make apologetics a church priority? What other means might motivate pastors in this? Further, it's unfortunate that the survey's data on local AIP friends is unusable. It leaves hypotheses completely untested regarding the intuitive value of local apologetics networks.

The **Spiritual Readiness Project** is a multi-year research-based effort to help churches, their leaders and their members, become more fully equipped to face the unique new challenges being posed against the faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Western World. For more information on the Project visit [www.spiritualreadiness.org](http://www.spiritualreadiness.org).