



Investigative Reporting

Feelings and Facts

By

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When atheists ask me why I converted from atheism to Christianity, I tell them being an investigative reporter was a big help. Their next question is usually “what does being an investigative reporter have to do with your leaving atheism?”

My answer to that question is the purpose of this article.

Feelings

Investigative reporting begins with having a *feeling* about a possible story. By feeling I mean a *sense* of whether a story might “have legs,” meaning it’s a story worthy of investing time and resources into discovering whether claims are true or false. An investigative report can take weeks or months to complete, involving hundreds of hours of research, interviews, sourcing, etc. before presenting it to an audience. Select the wrong story and a reporter wastes valuable time and effort that could have been used for another story. Editors and managers want their investigative reporters to spend their time wisely, so it’s helpful as a reporter to learn their craft well. Many people confuse *sense feeling* with *emotional feeling*, so let me explain the difference.

When I was an investigative reporter (and later as manager of an investigative team), I would receive multiple investigative story ideas every week. Part of the process of developing the skills of an investigative journalist is having a sense about whether a story is worth looking into. Investigative research

takes a lot of time, so investigative journalists have to determine as quickly as possible whether a story idea has good potential for becoming a good story. That's where the reporter develops a *feeling* or sense about stories. You eventually get pretty good at being able to identify stories for where they may lead you.

That process does not usually begin at an *emotional* level. Someone contacts you about doing an investigation. It might be a phone call, email, text, envelope left at the front desk of your workplace, or a note left on your car's windshield. You look through the information given you and determine whether to take it to the next level – your editor or manager. I found it helpful as a reporter to make a few phone calls of my own before going into my boss' office. That's where your investigative *gut* helps you determine whether the story has some merit. You either believe there's something to it or you don't. If you're not sure, take it to your editor or manager and see what they think. They have more experience and might see something you don't. That's part of developing the skills necessary to become good at investigative reporting.

Investigative story ideas also come from covering regular news stories. You see or hear something and sense there's something worth investigating. You make some calls, check with some sources, look up some documents and make a decision. Again, it's not an emotional response to a story idea. It's a *feeling* about the possibility of something being hidden that needs to be revealed.

Revealing what others are hiding is a big part of investigative journalism. I worked on hundreds of stories and learned that powerful people hide important information from less powerful people (e.g. citizens, employees). That's where curiosity and skepticism play an essential role in choosing which stories to investigate. I wrote recently about the importance of **curiosity and skepticism in journalism**.

Curiosity and Skepticism are essential ingredients in investigative journalism, but how did they play a role in my becoming a Christian?

I grew up in a Christian family, but never became a real Christian (saved). I responded emotionally to hypocrisy in our church at the age of twelve and stopped going to church during high school. I became an atheist in college. What I had not done was investigate the truth claims of Christianity. I was skeptical about Christianity, but not curious enough to look at the evidence for Christianity.

I became a broadcast reporter after college and was drawn toward the investigative side of journalism. I learned the basic skills and spent time with investigative reporters and police detectives learning the craft. I was a strong atheist and shared my views as a talk show host, but didn't let my atheism affect the way I covered news stories. Journalists are supposed to be able to do that.

I interviewed a college professor who was a Christian about a story at a local church and he said some things that stuck with me. I had a *feeling* about what he said. It wasn't an emotional feeling. It was a *sense* that something was hidden that needed to be uncovered.

I began what became a five-month investigation into the claims of theism and Christianity. That investigation led me to become a Christian 50 years ago. I started writing about **the investigative process** in 2012 and hope to finish the series in 2024. It's an in-depth answer to atheists who ask me why I became a Christian.

I was emotionally invested in being an atheist. I admit to having confirmation bias as an atheist. I didn't want to change my beliefs or the way I lived my life. However, I *sensed* there was something to the story and had to follow the evidence wherever it took me.

Facts

Facts are vital to an investigative reporter. Facts right, story right. Facts wrong, story wrong. It's pretty simple really. Facts are part of the *trail of evidence* that reporters are supposed to follow to get to the truth of any story. Once an investigative reporter decides that a story idea is worth researching, they start looking for facts.

You've probably heard the term "fact-checking" used in media reports. I can tell you from experience that just because someone says they are "checking" facts doesn't mean they are telling you the truth. Many fact-checkers are not good at their jobs and get things wrong. Some don't know what they're doing and get things wrong. Some are lazy and will tell you anything so you just go away. Some have bad motives and use their position as *fact-checkers* to mislead reporters and cover for powerful people. They purposely don't want you to uncover the truth.

I learned early in my career not to trust official fact-checkers in government and business. As the Internet and social media came along, I learned not to trust what I read there either. Those who control information often manipulate information to protect themselves. So, who can you trust? People without power, without a reason to hide the truth from you. Some of my best story tips and sourcing for research came from people behind the scenes of government and business. That included secretaries, clerks, phone operators, machine operators, cleaning people. It's amazing how much non-powerful people know about what really goes on in government and business.

I also learned where to find documents in basements, supply rooms and attics. I started reporting in the 1960s, long before the Internet and search engines. Investigative reporters had to actually leave their office and go where paper documents and microfilm were available to look at in person. I learned how to read full-length documents quickly and take copious handwritten notes of what was in those documents if I couldn't get a copy.

I learned how to ask tough questions of powerful people and not let them out of answering those questions. I learned how to use what I had learned in document searches and from personal meetings with sources (some named, some unnamed .. all unnamed sources had to be triangulated in order to use them) to force powerful people to explain why they were hiding the truth from the public.

I was able to stand in front of powerful people and ask those questions because I had done my own *fact-checking*. I wasn't depending on what someone else said about whether something was true or not. I depended on my own research. I knew that I had followed the investigative *process* and trusted that process to reveal the truth.

I used those investigative skills to investigate the truth claims of Christianity. Christianity is true, therefore I believed it 50 years ago and still do.

The Truth

I continue to investigate Christianity, not because I don't think it's true but because it is true. Knowing the truth will set you free, as Jesus Christ famously said. There is great freedom in knowing the truth. I found that to be true after decades of investigating news stories. What investigative reporters discover in their investigations may not be easy to see or hear, but the truth means we are free from powerful people trying to keep the truth hidden from us. The same is true about Christianity. There are powerful supernatural beings who don't want people to know the truth that is in Christ.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Many Christians, or those who think they're Christians, have succumbed to the lies of the enemy, the god of this age. I've written many articles and series through the decades about how young people in churches are deconstructing and deconverting. Our most recent series **is about Exvangelicals**.

I don't think this would be happening at such an alarming rate if parents, pastors, youth leaders and teachers were better equipped to answer the tough questions young people ask. You don't have to be an investigative reporter to find ways to explain the truth to young people in your care, but you do need to be equipped in how to help them. Here are some resources you may find helpful.

Training Programs

One of the best training programs I know to prepare people to talk with exvangelicals, Nones and other unbelievers is from Engage 360. Their training program is called [Engage Your World: A Practical Guide To Having Spiritual Conversations In Everyday Life](#). You can download the first chapter of the guide at the link above. Engage 360 has online training and in-church training. I highly recommend their programs. They have a unique way of training and helping every Christian prepare to have spiritual conversations with family, friends, co-workers and other people in their community. Engage 360's training is a great combination of practical evangelism and apologetics.

Apologetics Resources

[Apologetics Book Reviews](#) — We've been sharing reviews on apologetics books for many years. You can look through some of our past reviews at this site.

[The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics](#) — Dr. Ed Hindson is one of the apologists who personally helped me during my journey from atheism to Christianity. His *Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* is an excellent resource for any Christian who is helping exvangelicals and others with questions about Christianity.

[The Poached Egg](#) — an excellent resource of some of the best apologetics articles.

Student Resources

[Apologetics Study Bible for Students](#)

[Impact 360 Ministries](#)

[Ratio Christi](#)

[Reality Student Apologetics Conference](#)

[Summit Ministries](#)

[Tactical Faith](#)

Research Resources

[LifeWay Research](#) — Church Goers Express Hope/Sadness Over Leaders Who Leave The Faith

[LifeWay Research](#) — Reconstructing Faith in a Deconstructing Culture

[Barna](#) — Only 10% of Christian Twentysomethings Have Resilient Faith

Reading Resources

[5 Things about Deconstruction](#)

[Engaging #Exvangelical: Three Tips for Church Leaders](#)

[‘Progressive’ Christianity: Even Shallower Than the Evangelical Faith I Left](#)

[Apologetics for the Next Generation](#)

[Meet Generation Z: Understanding And Reaching The New Post-Christian World](#)

[The Poached Egg](#) — an excellent resource of some of the best apologetics articles.

Conclusion

People today tend to be more emotional than factual – meaning they are more impressed with emotional feelings than with facts. They often view truth as being subjective rather than objective. If that’s true, then it isn’t true because truth is only subjective. Your truth is not my truth and my truth is not your truth. There is no true truth. As sad as that sounds, that’s what we’re dealing with in today’s world.

The “god of this age” has turned everything upside down. The devil has blinded people’s minds, but there is something we can do about it. We can uncover what’s hidden and reveal the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Christian parents and leaders need to do a better job of helping young people see that truth is real and that emotionalism is no substitute for truth.

One more note about journalism. It is not in a good place today and hasn't been for many years. We need better journalism, which means we need journalists to be better equipped to uncover truth and tell it clearly and without bias. I have my doubts that will happen given what's happening in today's world, but continue to be hopeful. However, as Christians, we can hold on to the Truth who holds on to us. May we stand for truth wherever we find it.

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