



More Ready Than You Realize

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I Read Your Book This Morning

Shortly after the release of my second writing project, *Finding Faith*, I was invited to do a book signing at my church.¹ It was an elegant affair, with a punch bowl (full of a bright red liquid, as I recall, but with a flavor hard to place) complete with a floating ring of something frozen and neon green, and silver trays of crumbly hors d'oeuvres—tasty, but messy, and too small to satisfy a hungry guy who didn't eat before coming. The final touch? The tasteful organizers had hired a talented harpist (a college student living near Washington D.C., but from Philadelphia) to provide delightful background music. After some informal socializing, I participated in an interview about the book (which gave the harpist a break—during which I happened to notice her leafing through a copy of my book), and then the music began and the small crowd returned to informal conversation.

At the end of the evening, I noticed the harpist struggling to load her harp into her van. I offered to help her, and it wasn't easy. (Those harpists may look and sound as delicate as petite piccolo players, but they have to be stronger than tuba players!) After we closed the rear gate of her vehicle, she turned to me and with complete seriousness said, "While you were talking, I had a chance to look through your book. I have a question for you:

1. I'm glad to say that *Finding Faith* has been revised and expanded and is now available in two volumes: *Finding Faith—A Search for What Makes Sense* and *Finding Faith—A Search for What Is Real* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Do you mean all that stuff you wrote in the book, or are you just trying to make Christianity sound good?”

I said, “Well, April that’s quite a question! Tell me what you mean,” and so began what I call a “spiritual friendship” — a friendship that continues to this day. I didn’t actually see April for several months after that initial meeting, but I gave her a copy of my book, and within twenty-four hours I got the first of many emails, which I would like to share with you, with April’s permission. I share them with you for a number of reasons:

1. So you can hear the real “voice” of an authentic spiritual seeker of a postmodern bent.
2. So you can begin to see how modern Christianity looks to a postmodern seeker.
3. So you can begin to imagine how you would have responded to April, to prepare yourself for some meaningful spiritual dialogues of your own.
4. So you can get a fresh vision of what evangelism should and can be.

I have maintained April’s spelling and punctuation and have only changed a few details for the sake of privacy. I hope you will find her messages as winsome, intriguing, stimulating, and challenging as I have.

Hi Brian (do you prefer to be called brian?) this is april, the harpist from your book signing party. i read your book this morning. it caused me to think a lot about a lot of things. i actually would like to tell you about it, but im afraid this e mail will be very lengthy ... i don't want to burden you (i

understand you listen to a lot of people every day!) so im not sure ... but i really need to talk to someone and i dont know, I just felt good about reading your book and about talking to you ... and I cant think of anyone else i can talk to about religion. i know this probably sounds psychotic considering i just met you last night, and under what circumstances i met you ... i dont know. im nervous to say anything at all, really ... well, ill try to make it quick and you dont have to respond, probably more im just writing for myself ... or not ... i don't know. in any case, please dont feel any pressure to respond.

“i read your book this morning.” Doesn’t that suggest a lot of motivation to you? I hope the book is good, but I don’t think I can take credit for that kind of intense interest. And I don’t think April is alone in this intensity. All around us are people who would stay up half the night reading or talking if they could get some help with their spiritual questions. All they need is someone who cares and who has some spiritual experience and wisdom to share. They are more ready than you realize—more ready for a sincere spiritual friendship with someone like you.

I think you will agree that through this email April is doing her part to establish a genuine friendship with me. She doesn’t want to burden me. She is careful not to be presumptuous and doesn’t demand a response. (How different from some poor so-called evangelists who talk whether or not others want to listen, and demand a response whether the other person is ready and willing or not.) She continues ...