



## Best Email In 5 Years!

The message came on Saturday, June 18.

*"Rich here from the University of Georgia. I just wanted to drop you a brief message and let you know that last Sunday, I decided to rededicate my life to Christ. I don't think I ever truly was an atheist, although I had all but convinced myself that I was. I am to be baptized into Christ a week from tomorrow. I believe that our long discussion (and your willingness to listen without judgment and ask thoughtful questions) back in March or April played an important role in this process which God was working in my life at the time and continues to work. I pray this is of some encouragement to you in the Lord."*

I was so thankful that a major goal for our JFA team was part of his testimony.

March  
2011

Go back with me to March of this year. During our UGA outreach, as I walked toward the Tate Student Center, I recognized one of the men conversing near our outreach space. As I came closer I thought, "wait—that's Rich, the professor from 2007". **We had spoken four years earlier just a few feet from where he was sitting.**

As I approached Rich, I wanted to be friendly and re-introduce myself because we had totally lost touch. I would have never guessed what was about to unfold over the next few hours, weeks, and months. After a few seconds and my reminder about the content of our previous conversation, Rich remembered me.

We picked up as if we had never left off four years before. I was thrilled! Rich had genuine questions and concerns for me in 2007; and although we had lost touch since then, I never forgot him. **Little did I know our conversation in March would turn into the highlight of my year and the most exciting moment since I started with JFA.**



March  
2007

Rich's email above was a long time coming. In 2007, I had engaged Rich with our poll question, "Should Abortion Stay Legal?" I remember from the start that we had significant common ground on the topic of abortion. Rich was very uncomfortable with abortion. I challenged him with the ways he could join us in making abortion unthinkable, one person at a time.

At a certain point the conversation turned, and we discussed our religious views. Rich was very clear that although he grew up around Christians, he was now not a Christian, and frankly was disgusted with the church and with much of the Bible. He sincerely communicated how he struggled to trust many Old Testament passages and the God they depicted.

March  
2007  
cont...

I keep a journal of many of my campus outreach conversations and wrote the following notes after my 2007 dialogue with Rich:

"We talked about the Christian faith ...Rich knew his Bible very well and was struggling with God in the Old Testament and couldn't trust Him...he cited where God demanded that a whole people group be killed (including mothers and babies) in 1st Samuel and other challenging passages...I admitted that those passages were hard to understand and that I would consider his thoughts. I challenged him to honestly consider educated explanations of those Old Testament passages. I also challenged him to impose the crux of the Christian faith (life, death, resurrection of Jesus) on those tough texts instead of trying to understand them in isolation."

Rich and I at  
UGA in 2011.



March  
2011

In our March 2011 conversation I asked Rich if he still had the same concerns that he did four years ago. He said yes he did, but admitted that he hadn't really taken my advice and reviewed other perspectives, especially the foundational evidence of Christianity—the resurrection.

He said he was advising the Atheist Club at UGA and content not dedicating himself to any religion, much less Christianity. We talked extensively about his beliefs about truth, the existence of God, Christian culture, and Christ Himself. I later reflected in my journal:

"My discussion with Rich on Wednesday lasted for more than 2 hours! We discussed Christ's resurrection, how the behaviors of many Christians make it harder for Rich to believe their faith is special, and how Christians and Atheists can have more productive discussion. **I consider this Professor a genuine friend. He agreed to keep in touch by email, and even receive my prayer requests though he disagrees with many of my beliefs.** I truly thank God for my friendship with Rich. He not only challenged me and allowed me to challenge him--he also made me aware of ways that Christians have compromised their faith through lazy study of evidence, practices with money that show their devotion to worldly things rather than Christ, and many other honest concerns. He committed to study the best evidences for the resurrection and get back to me with his thoughts. Meanwhile I will be checking out links he gave me and addressing his concerns!"

June  
2011

A few months later, I received Rich's email. **I emailed him back that same day and made it clear his email was the best I had received in five years!** On facebook, Rich posted his testimony and began to graciously reason with those who asked about his conversion. Some people were positive while others were abrasive and argumentative with him. With each person, Rich was both honest and winsome. **I saw pictures of his testimony before his church near Athens, GA and his subsequent baptism (above). Praise God!**



Defending Human Value together,

*Jonathan Wagner*