

Learning to Love God in a World of Skeptics and Alternative Ways of Life

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Room For Doubt is a new grant-funded program that provides learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, to address the concerns of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and to represent the Christian message to those who are skeptical about its claims.

Introduction

- A. Can we learn to love?
- B. Learning to love GOD.
- C. The need
 - 1. Biblical commands
 - a. Mark 12:30 (cf. Deut 6:4)
 - b. Compare Matt 16:13-16 and John 21:15-17
 - 2. Cultural conditions
 - a. Churched doubters and “dropouts”
 - (1) Significantly doubted their faith? _____%.
 - (2) Can’t ask their most pressing life questions at church? _____%.
 - (3) At some point, felt like rejecting their parents’ faith? _____%.
 - (4) “Churched Teens”: No longer active in church in their 20s? _____%. [Barna]
 - b. The rise of the Nones
 - (1) Adults: 1990 = 8.1%; 2007 = 15.3%; 2014 = _____%.
 - (2) 18-29 year olds: 2007 = 22%; 2012 = 32%; 2014 = 36% (18-23 yr olds)
- D. Key questions on learning to love God
 - 1. What’s the core of God’s message in the Christian faith?
 - 2. What are the alternatives and how do they compare?
 - 3. If I choose God, what does living a Christian worldview involve?

I. Discern the Christian Worldview

- A. The “Christian” landscape (see David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*)
 - 1. Christian traditions
 - 2. Major religions: _____
 - 3. “Christian” groups: _____
- B. C. S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*

II. Detect and Diagnose the Alternatives

- A. **Christian Theism** (*theos* = Greek for “God”)
 - 1. Overview ideas
 - a. C _____

- b. S _____
 - c. I _____
2. Basic theme: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”
 3. Object illustration: A _____.

B. Deism (*deus* = Latin for “God”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. C _____
 - b. A _____
 - c. N _____
 - d. T _____
2. Basic theme: “God’s gone. We are endowed with reason. Use it!”
3. Object illustration: _____
4. Cultural connections
 - a. Notable examples: Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine; Antony Flew, a recently converted famous atheist.
 - b. Most American teens are “moral therapeutic deists” (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005, 2009).
5. Biblical connections (2 Tim 3:5; Matt 22:29; 1 Cor 2:4-5)

C. Pantheism (and **New Age**)

(cosmos = Greek for “world” or “universe”; (pan = all) + (theism = God)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. A _____ is God.
 - b. I _____ of this world.
 - c. M _____ awareness.
2. Basic theme: “Connect with the oneness of the universe.”
3. Object illustration: _____
4. Specific concepts and terms: *Atman* (the true self) is *Brahman* (the One); Samsara (the wheel of rebirth = reincarnation); Karma (works-produced principle that determines future incarnations).
5. Cultural connections: Hinduism; Taoism; some forms of Buddhism (e.g. Richard Gere, Steven Segal, Phil Jackson); New Age (e.g. Shirley Maclaine); Animism; Wicca; Yoda in *Star Wars*; Scientology (e.g. John Travolta, Tom Cruise); Deepak Chopra; Eckhart Tolle; *Lion King*; Oprah.
6. Biblical connections
 - a. Gen 3 (The serpent and Adam/Eve)
 - b. Acts 17:16-33 (The Stoic philosophers)

D. **Secular Humanism** (“Modernism”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____
 - b. **O** _____
 - c. **S** _____
 - d. **E** _____
2. Basic theme: “We can do it!”
3. Object example: _____
4. Cultural connections: Charles Darwin; Carl Sagan; Berenstain Bear’s *Nature Guide*; Richard Dawkins; Michael Shermer; Bill Maher; Spock from *Star Trek*; The Titanic; *Mission Impossible*; *CSI* TV series; *Numb3rs*; PBS “Cosmos” TV series; *Criminal Minds*.
5. Biblical connections (Acts 17 Epicureans; Luke 12:15-23; Luke 15:11-14; Matt 16:26; Phil 3:17-21).

E. **Nihilism** (nihil = Latin for “nothing”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____ really matters.
 - b. **A** _____ of Life (“I don’t care”; “I give up”)
 - c. **P** _____ outlook.
2. Basic theme: “We got nothing, and we’re going nowhere.”
3. Object illustration: A _____
4. Cultural connections: “Murder by Number”; “Final Destination”; “Bohemian Rhapsody”; Douglas Adams’ *Hitch Hiker* “trilogy”; John Cage; “Seinfeld”; Kurt Cobain, Columbine shootings; Samuel Beckett.
5. Biblical connections (Eccl 2:10-11).

F. **Atheistic Existentialism**¹

1. Background (Camus; Sartre)
2. Overview ideas
 - a. **F** _____
 - b. **A** _____
 - c. **D** _____
3. Basic theme: “Life is absurd. Be free and have fun.”
4. Object illustration: Mr. _____
5. Cultural connections: Friedrich Nietzsche; John Paul Sartre; Albert Camus; a lot of middle school, high school, and college youth! Ferris Bueller; the character “Jack” in the movie *Titanic*; *Groundhog Day*; *Dead Poets’ Society* (*carpe deum*); Hugh Hefner.
6. Biblical connections (Phil 3:17-21; 1 Pet 4:1-5).

¹ Existentialism can be *atheistic* (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) or *theistic*. *Theistic* forms stress having a direct encounter and relationship with some higher power. They minimize or reject the importance of doctrine, scripture, or history in favor of personal experience and communication with God.

G. Postmodernism²

1. Overview ideas
 - a. F _____
 - b. U _____
 - c. R _____
2. Basic theme: “Different strokes for different folks.”
3. Object illustration: A _____
4. Cultural connections: Madonna; Britney Spears; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Lost*; *Inception*; Reality TV shows; *Modern* [Postmodern?] *Family*.
5. Biblical connections (Deut 12:8).

H. Diagnosing the alternatives

1. The important matters
 - a. Meaning
 - b. Morality
 - c. Mortality
 - d. Matter
 - e. Living Matter
 - f. Mind
 - g. Messiah
2. Summary of the alternatives (John 6:67-68)
 - a. Incomplete
 - b. Inconsistent
 - c. Unliveable

III. Determine to LIVE a Christian Worldview

- A. Personal integrity in your “functioning components.”
 1. Mind (basic beliefs and assumptions about universal human questions)
 2. Attitude (Emotion/Conscience)
 3. Behavior (Actions/Communication)
 4. Will (Motives/Desires)
- B. **A WORLDVIEW** is “a way of life guided by basic beliefs and priority values that are expressed in preferred behavior.”
- C. **A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW** is “a way of life with basic beliefs, priority values, and preferred behavior *that are consciously directed by a love for God and His revelation to humanity.*”
 1. Connection to the “greatest commandment” (Mk 12:28-31; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28) and to the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9).
 2. Emphasis on love, not mere professed belief.
 3. Note how much scripture refers to these “functioning components.” (See the graphic below.)
 - a. E.g. Romans 12:1-2
 - b. E.g. Colossians 3:5-10

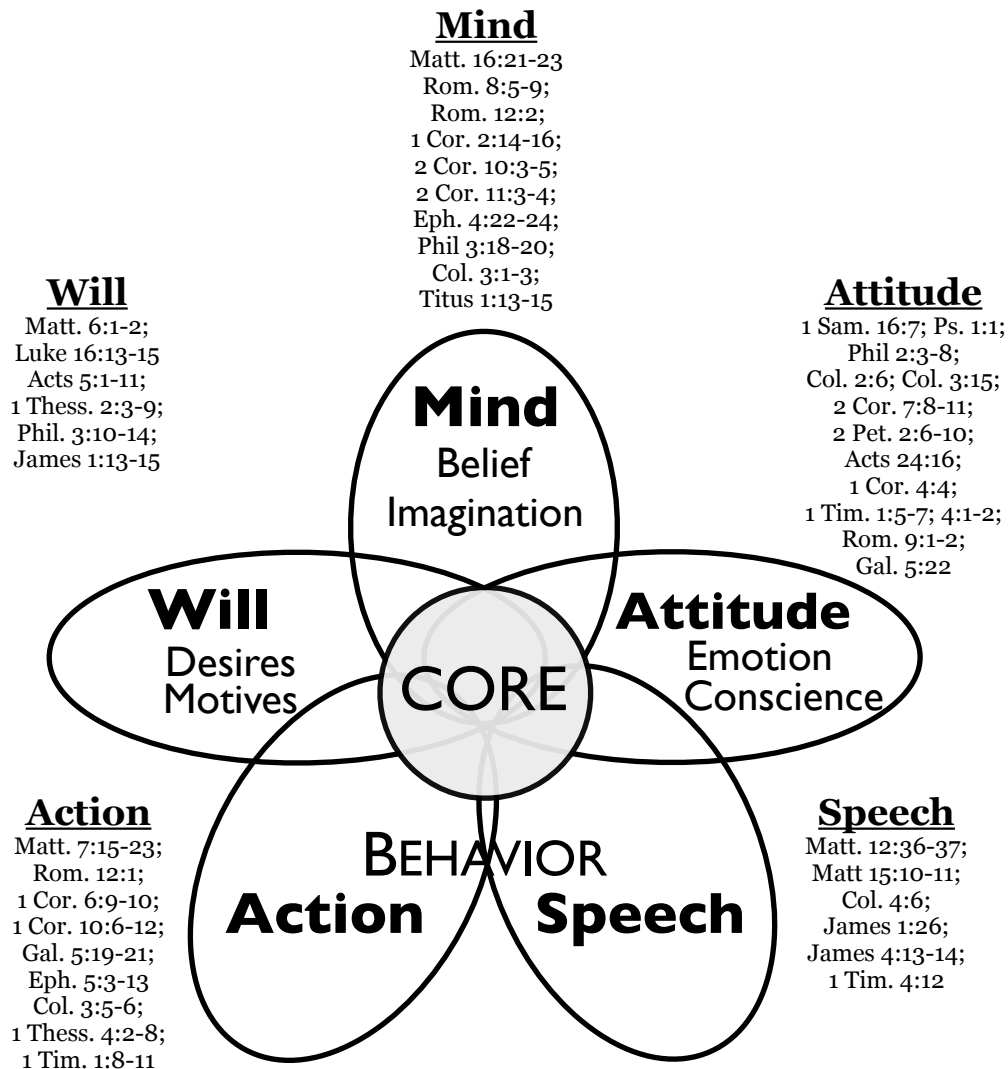
² “Postmodern” often refers to *cultural* characteristics. “Postmodern-ISM” is a *philosophical position* that disputes the possibility of universal truth and values. Often, this distinction is not adequately made. I suggest that the church adapt to a postmodern *culture* but be careful not to be unduly influenced by strong forms of postmodernist *philosophy*.

D. Learning to love God by LIVING a Christian worldview. (See the graphic on the next page.)

1. Individual Integrity (See the graphic below.)
2. Personal Involvement
3. Relational Investments
4. Social-academic Influence
5. Cultural Impact
6. Apologetic Interaction

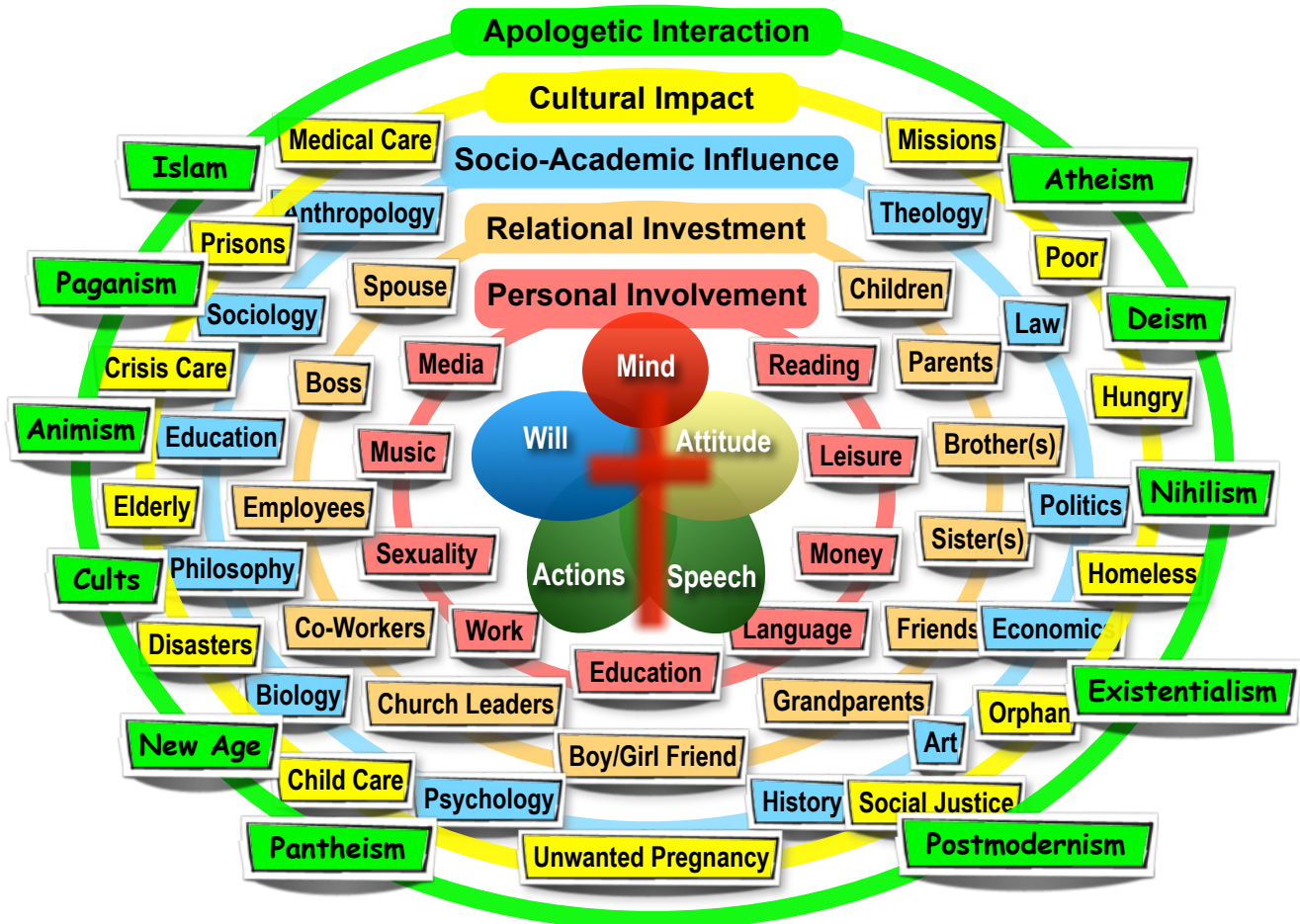
E. Devotionals leading us to love God more.

1. Identify the “functioning components” in Bible passages (e.g. Rom 12:1-2; Col 3:5-10; Eph 4:20-32).
2. Evaluate your “integrity” based on biblical reflection. Are these areas *consistent* with each other? E.g. Do you say but not do? Do you *do* right but don’t really *want* to?
3. Assess how *consciously* and *effectively* you APPLY a Christian worldview to ALL of life as a matter of *LOVING* God (see the graphic below, “Living a Christian Worldview”).



LIVING a Christian Worldview

“I ... implore you ... to WALK in a manner worthy of the calling ...” (Eph 4:1).
 “... We request and exhort you ... that as you received from is instruction as to how you ought to WALK and please God ... that you excel still more” (1 Thess 4:1).
 “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children WALKING in the truth” (3 John 1:4). [NASV]



How Consciously and Effectively am I LIVING a Christian Worldview in ALL of Life as a matter of LOVING God?

1. Individual Integrity?
2. Personal Involvement?
3. Relational Investments?
4. Socio-Academic Interaction?
5. Cultural Impact?
6. Do I know WHY I believe and live a Christian worldview? Have I gone beyond belief to personal conviction?
7. Do I know why I do NOT believe something else?