

Preparing the Soil for the Seed: Giving Room For Doubt

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Session Webpage: www.worldvieweyes.org/nacc2017.html¹

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Workshop Description: The word of God (the seed) is for everyone. But the seed often bears no fruit because the soil is inadequately prepared (Mt. 13; Mk. 4; Lk. 8). Learn from an apologist and an evangelist about how encouraging doubt can cultivate the soil for an evangelistic harvest and a deepened faith that results in devoted disciples.

Room For Doubt: A program that provides learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, address the questions of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and represent the Christian message to those who are skeptical about its claims.

I. The Seed and the Soil (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8)

A. Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23

1. Seed beside the road.
 - a. Birds eat it up (4)
 - b. Those who hear but do not understand it are snatched away by the evil one (19).
2. Seed on rocky places with shallow soil.
 - a. Immediately springs up but scorched by the sun and withers away (5-6).
 - b. Those who immediately receive with joy, but who fall away because of no firm root and because of affliction and persecution (20-21).
3. Seed among thorns.
 - a. Thorns come up and choke them out (7).
 - b. Those who hear the word but are unfruitful because of worry and the deceitfulness of wealth (22).
4. Seed on good soil.
 - a. Yields a good crop—30, 60, 100 fold (8).
 - b. Those who hear and understand and who bear fruit (23)

B. Mark 4:3-9, 13-20

C. Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

II. Important Points

- A. The seed is the word of God (Lk. 8:11); it is “good seed” (Mt. 13:24, 27).
- B. A spiritual battle (the evil one—Mt. 13:19; Satan—Mk. 4:15; the devil—Lk. 8:12).
- C. The importance of *understanding* (rocky-soil ones do not understand (Mt. 13:19); the good-soil ones do understand (Mt. 13:23).
- D. We have the privilege and obligation to spread the seed.

¹ The session webpage provides this handout (with answers), slides, and other related resources.

- E. We have the implied obligation to prepare the soil.
- F. The real objective: to bear fruit, not merely to hear, or to accept, or to receive it with joy.
- G. Cultural conditions can adversely affect fruit-bearing (e.g. affliction, persecution, worries, the deceitfulness of wealth, pleasure of this life).

III. The Soil of Our Culture

- A. The Rise of the NONES—the Religiously Detached (see Pew Research surveys.)
 - 1. Adults: 1990 8.1%; 2007 15.3%; 2012 19.3%; 2014 _____ 22.8%.
 - 2. 18-29 year olds: 2007 22%; 2012 32%.
 - a. 2014: Older Millennials (25-33): _____ 34%.
 - b. 2014: Younger Millennials (18-24): _____ 36%.
- B. The lack of a “Biblical Worldview” (Barna research).
 - 1. “Born again” adults? _____ 45%.
 - 2. “Biblical worldview”:² All Adults? _____ 9%.; All Teens? _____ 2%.
 - 3. “Biblical worldview”: Those 18-23? _____ <.5%.
 - 4. “Integrated Disciples”:³ ≥65: _____ 17%; 50-64: _____ 15%; 30-49: _____ 7%; 18-29: _____ 4%.
- C. Churched teens: questions and doubts (Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*).
 - 1. Significantly doubted their faith? _____ 38%.
 - 2. Can’t ask their most pressing life questions at church? _____ 36%.
 - 3. At some point, felt like rejecting their parents’ faith? _____ 32%.
 - 4. “Churched Teens”: No longer active in church in their 20s? _____ 59%.
 - 5. “De-convert” testimony

“The most frequently mentioned role of Christians in de-conversion was in amplifying existing doubt.’ De-converts reported ‘sharing their burgeoning doubts with a Christian friend or family member only to receive trite, unhelpful answers’” (Drew Dyck, “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church,” *Christianity Today* [Nov. 19, 2010]. See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html>).

IV. Why Churched Kids are Leaving: Some Key Considerations

(see e.g. Brian Housman, “Why are Teens Leaving the Faith?” *Lifeway* (June 17, 2013). [<http://m.lifeway.com/Article/ministry-family-Why-are-Teens-Leaving-the-Faith>]

- A. Shallow belief system.
- B. No room for doubt.
- C. Exclusive faith of Christian faith.
- D. No answers for opposing viewpoints (philosophy & science).

² For the Barna Research Group, the criteria for having a “biblical worldview” are as follows: Made a personal commitment to Christ with belief in salvation from Jesus; acceptance of absolute moral truth, biblical moral standards, Satan’s existence, and Jesus’ sinless life; and trust in Christ for salvation.

³ See the American Culture and Faith Institute survey (Feb. 2017). “Integrated Disciples” are those “who are designated as having a biblical worldview based on integrating their beliefs and behavior into a lifestyle that reflects foundational biblical principles.”

V. Preparing the Soil by Giving Room For Doubt.

- A. The Room For Doubt program and website (see www.roomfordoubt.com).
- B. The six-week series for churches and multi-church area wide campaigns (for an overview, see (<http://www.roomfordoubt.com/series/rfd-series-overview.html>)).
- C. Six-week series questions:
 1. Is doubt always bad?
 2. How can we know God actually exists?
 3. Is the Bible historically reliable or just fable?
 4. Why do Christians say that Jesus is God's Son?
 5. Why would God allow tragedy and suffering?
 6. Isn't it intolerant to say that Jesus is the only way?
- D. Six-week series & resources (by Mark Mittelberg, Garry Poole, Lee Strobel, Rich Knopp)
 1. Sermon manuscripts
 2. Adult discussion guide
 3. Youth discussion guide
 4. Videos for promotion, sermon bumpers, discussion starters, leader training, and instruction. (Includes videos of "Doubters Uncensored" panel with Garry Poole.)
 5. Recommended resources for EACH of the six topics.
 6. Program graphics, fonts, etc.
- E. All series materials are available online in downloadable format (<https://room-for-doubt6.mybigcommerce.com>).

Resources on Understanding the Cultural Context

- American Culture and Faith Institute. "Groundbreaking ACFI Survey Reveals How Many Adults Have a Biblical Worldview" (Feb. 27, 2017). <https://www.culturefaith.com/groundbreaking-survey-by-acfi-reveals-how-many-american-adults-have-a-biblical-worldview>.
- American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS). "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population" (2008). See https://secularstudents.org/sites/secularstudents.org/files/NONES_08.pdf. Links to several studies at <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/>.
- Barna Research Group (www.barna.org). Currently led by David Kinnaman.
- Barna Research Group. "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians" (May 9, 2017). <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians>.
- Barna, George and David Kinnaman, ed. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Tyndale, 2014). See www.barna.org/churchless.
- Barnett, Larry. "A General Introduction to the Next Generation Project: Understanding and Reversing Christianity's Recent Decline in the U.S" (2015). See www.projectnextgen.org.
- Kinnaman, David and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Baker, 2011).
- Lee, Morgan. "Many Practicing Christians Agree with Marxism (and Other Competing Worldviews)." *Christianity Today* (May 10, 2017). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/may/many-practicing-christians-agree-marxism-worldviews-barna.html>.
- Lifeway Research (www.lifewayresearch.com). Led by Ed Stetzer.
- Pew Research Center. "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation" (Oct. 9, 2012).

Pew Research Center. "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (May 12, 2015). See <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

Shaw, Hadyn. *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future is Bright* (Tyndale, 2015).

White, James Emery. *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Baker, 2014).

_____. *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Baker, 2017).

_____. Church and Culture website (<http://www.churchandculture.org>). Offers good resources and an excellent weekly blog from James Emery White at <http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp>.

Resources on Christian Worldview and Apologetics

Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (Viking, 2016). See the book review in the February issue of the *Christian Standard* at <http://www.christianstandard.com/2017/02/helping-the-skeptical-see-god/>.

Knopp, Richard. "Your Faith Is In Danger: Prepare for the Assault." Video presentation for high school youth. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K64sZ3mlnso>.

_____. "Learning to Love God in a World of Growing Skepticism and Secularism." 2016 NACC session. <http://worldvieweyes.org/NACC16.html> and video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuiEWpf6Ohw&feature=youtu.be>.

_____. "Where Will We Go Without God?" *Christian Standard* 149 (June 2014): 38-40. Online at <http://christianstandard.com/2014/06/where-will-we-go-without-god/>.

Koukl, Gregory. *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Zondervan, 2009).

McDowell, Sean, ed. *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical and Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking About God* (Harvest House, 2009).

Mittelberg, Mark. *The Reason Why Faith Makes Sense* (Tyndale, 2011). A small book (153 pages) recommended for the Room For Doubt six-week series. Volume discounts available.

_____. *Confident Faith: Building a Firm Foundation for Your Beliefs* (Tyndale House, 2013).

Poole, Garry, Bill Hybels, and Lee Strobel. *Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions* (Zondervan, 2009).

Poole, Garry, and Judson Poling. *Tough Questions Leader's Guide* (Zondervan, 1998).

Poole, Garry, and Lee Strobel. *Don't All Religions Lead to God? (Tough Questions)* (Zondervan, 2003).

_____. *How Does Anyone Know God Exists? (Tough Questions)* (Zondervan, 2003).

_____. *How Could God Allow Suffering and Evil? (Tough Questions)* (Zondervan, 2003).

Powell, Doug. *Holman Quicksource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (B&H Publishing, 2006).

Powell, Kara E. and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Zondervan, 2011).

Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Churches Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Baker, 2016). See the accompanying website at <http://churchesgrowingyoung.com>.

Whorton, Mark. *Quicksource Guide to Understanding Creation* (B&H Publishing, 2011).

Zacharias, Ravi and Norman Geisler, eds. *Is Your Church Ready? Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life* (Zondervan, 2003).

www.roomfordoubt.com. Website that encourages (and responds to) questions about faith with articles and videos. The program offers a six-week curriculum series for churches on basic questions of the Christian faith that includes messages, adult discussion guide, youth discussion guide, and numerous resources, including videos.

www.worldvieweyes.org. Provides presentation resources by Dr. Rich Knopp.

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