

Why Is the Church Losing Her Kids? And What Can Be Done About It?

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Room For Doubt creates an atmosphere that invites questions—even doubts—about the Christian faith. The program offers learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, addresses the concerns of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and represents the Christian worldview to those who are skeptical of its claims. It features a six-week series for churches, area-wide campaigns, Christian schools, and university campus ministries.

Introduction

A. Christian Convictions

1. Truth (Eph 6:10–20; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:15–19).
2. Reasonable faith (1 Pet 3:15; Acts 17:2–3,17; 18:4,19; 19:8–9; 24:12).
3. Confidence and boldness (Acts 1:3; 2:36; 4:29; 17:31; Rom 1:16; Eph 3:11–12; Jude 3).

B. But we've got trouble.

I. The Demise of the Christian Worldview in Our Culture and the Consequences for the Church's Kids

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%**.
3. From “religious homes”? _____ **73%**. (Data from the “2009 American Religious Identification Survey”)
4. Religious “de-converts”? _____ **66%**.

“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]; citing a report at a 2008 meeting of the American Sociological Association).
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html>.

¹ The session webpage provides the handout (with answers), presentation slides, recordings, and other resources. Additional resources are available at <http://www.roomfordoubt.com/recommended-resources.html>. Materials for other presentations by Dr. Knopp are accessible at <http://worldvieweyes.org/Events.html>.

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%.

C. Developing doubt among churched kids.

1. Significantly doubted their faith? _____ 38%.
2. At some point, felt like rejecting their parents’ faith? _____ 32%.
3. Can’t ask their most pressing life questions at church? _____ 36%.
4. “Churched Teens”: No longer active in church in their 20s? _____ 59%.
(Some studies put the figure higher.)

II. Factors for the Demise and the Developing Doubt

A. Prominence of popular skeptics

1. Lawrence Krause (atheist cosmologist, Arizona State): “Change is always one generation away. So if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away. And that’s what I think we have an obligation to do” (*Salon* [Nov 4, 2014]).
2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006).
3. Christopher Hitchens, *How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007).
4. Bart Ehrman (Professor of Religious Studies, Univ. of North Carolina)
 - a) *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (2014).
 - b) *Forged Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2011).
5. Increasing *intellectual* skepticism and doubt

Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*: Students leave faith behind primarily because of intellectual doubt and skepticism (p. 89). “Why did they fall away from the faith in which they were raised?” (open-ended question): 32% said they left faith behind because of intellectual skepticism or doubt. (“It didn’t make any sense anymore.” “Some stuff is too far-fetched for me to believe.” “I think scientifically and there is no real proof.” “Too many questions that can’t be answered.”)

B. Internet Accessibility

Larry Taunton: “Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity”: “When our participants were asked to cite key influences in their conversion to atheism—people, books, seminars, etc.—we expected to hear frequent references to the names of the ‘New Atheists.’ We did not. Not once. Instead, we heard vague references to videos they had watched on YouTube or website forums” (*The Atlantic* online [June 6, 2013]).

C. More “High-Information Seekers” (see Larry Barnett’s Next Generation Project at <http://www.projectnextgen.org/>).

“We found that the presence of doubt much more strongly predicted leaving Christianity for high information seekers [H]igh information seekers with doubts are about two to four times more likely to disconnect from Christianity than other doubters who are not high information seekers.... According to our research, high information seekers are not intrinsically more difficult to disciple, but only when they have unanswered questions or unresolved doubts about Christianity’s truth claims.”

1. Over 70% of Millennials go to college.
2. Only 1/2 of their parents did.

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. Only 1/3 of their grandparents did.
- D. Summary of why churching teens are leaving. (See 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>]

 1. Shallow belief system.
 2. No room for doubt.
 3. Exclusive faith: How can Christianity be the only way?
 4. No answers for opposition (philosophy & science).
 5. The church is intolerant.
 6. The church is against science.
 7. The church not relevant (personally and professionally).

III. What Can We Do About It?

- A. Stress the real _____ **OBJECTIVE**.
 1. Belief that ... (Matt. 16:15-17; John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15; Heb. 11:6ab).
 2. Trust in ... (James 2:19; Matt. 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:1,6c).
 3. LOVE of ... (Mark 12:30; Deut 6:4-5; Cf. Matt 16:15–16 and John 21:1–17).
- B. Highlight the foundational _____ **MOTIVE**
 1. More than the WHAT of faith.
 2. The WHY of faith (e.g. 1 Pet 3:14–16; Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5; Titus 1:9; Jude 3).
- C. Be _____ **APPRECIATIVE** of tough questions and doubts.

David Kinnaman: **Over 33%** of young adults say that “Christians are too confident they know all the answers” (*You Lost Me*, Kindle 2119).

1. E.g. Church leader’s reply to young Dan Brown’s questions about God: “Nice boys don’t ask those questions.”
2. A biblical basis for legitimate doubt.
3. Different kinds of doubt.

“The prognosis for faith greatly depends on the proper diagnosis of doubt.” (Rich Knopp)

4. The “most dangerous” kind of doubt is _____ **UNEXPRESSED** doubt

David Kinnaman: “I believe that *unexpressed* doubt is one of the most powerful destroyers of faith” (*You Lost Me*, Kindle location 3088).

- D. Be _____ **INQUISITIVE**.
 1. Jesus and His questions. The Gospels record _____ **173** questions by Jesus.
 2. Learn **penetrating questions**.
- E. Be _____ **SENSITIVE** in your communication (1 Pet 3:15; 2 Tim 2:24–25; Jude 22).
 1. Follow the biblical HOW in a Christian defense.
 2. Cultivate an “atmosphere” of humility (1 Pet 5:5; Col 3:12; Acts 20:19; Phil 2:2–3).

Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*: “We need to emphasize that point strongly, because the great problem facing the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the doubt that is outside the church; it is the doubt that is inside the church. We need to be able to deal with doubt lovingly, helpfully, and especially without ever scolding or shaming anyone for doubting. We must allow people to be who they are and then be able to meet them where they are” (25).

- F. Be _____ **COMPREHENSIVE** in applying the Christian faith by using the **“worldview tool.”**
1. Individual Integrity
 2. Personal Involvement
 3. Relational Investment
 4. Socio-Academic Influence
 5. Cultural Impact
 6. Apologetic Interaction
- G. Be _____ **COMPARATIVE** (John 6:68)

IV. A Practical Proposal: Do the Room For Doubt Six-Week Series

- A. The **message**: Key questions about the Christian faith
1. Is **Doubt** always bad?
 2. How Can We Know **God** Actually Exists?
 3. Isn't the **Bible** Full of Myths & Mistakes?
 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?
- B. The **mood**: An inviting atmosphere for candid conversations about the Christian faith.
- C. The **method**:
1. Offer a six-week church-wide series or multi-church area-wide campaign for high community visibility and long-term impact.
 2. Consider an open mic Q&A event during the series.
- D. The **materials** (everything is downloadable):
1. Message Manuscripts; Adult Discussion Guide; Youth Discussion Guide.
 2. Videos for series promotion, sermon bumpers, small group leader training, and discussion starters, including videos from a “doubters uncensored” panel of six non-Christians.
 3. Graphics, logo files, etc.
 4. Specific recommended resources, including videos, for each of the six topics.
- E. The **mentors**:
1. **Mark Mittelberg**, best-selling author of books like *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (with Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels) and *The Reason Why Faith Makes Sense*.
 2. **Garry Poole**, curriculum specialist and author of *Seeker Small Groups* and many of the discussion guides for Lee Strobel's best-selling books.
 3. **Lee Strobel**, former atheist who has written widely-read books that defend the truth of the Christian faith like *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for Christ*, and *The Case for a Creator*.
 4. **Rich Knopp**, coordinator of Room For Doubt and professor of philosophy & Christian apologetics at Lincoln Christian University whose multimedia productions have been attended by over 75,000 youth and adults.