

Becoming Better Shepherds in a Society of Skeptics and Wandering Sheep

Howell's Mill Christian Assembly

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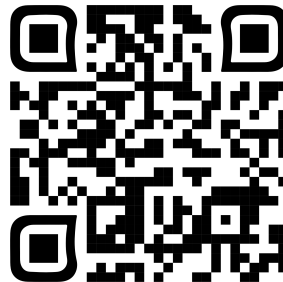
Program Director, Room For Doubt (www.roomfordoubt.com)

Program Director, WorldViewEyes (www.worldvieweyes.org)

Event Webpage (Handouts and Relevant Resources): www.worldvieweyes.org/HMCA.html

Room For Doubt seeks to encourage questions, address doubts, and strengthen faith. It features a great website, a convenient and cool mobile app for iOS and Android devices, and a six-week “Basic Questions” message and curriculum series for churches, small groups, Christian schools, and campus ministries. It is developing more instructional materials for adults and for high school youth groups, camps and schools.

QR Code to access the Room For Doubt App



Introduction

- A. HMCA: 60 years—an amazing ministry with incalculable impact!
- B. My, how things have changed!
- C. Challenges in the culture and the church.
- D. Becoming better shepherds for wandering and lost sheep (Ezekiel 34:2-4, 11; Luke 15:3-5).

I. The Qualities of the Sheep and their Pasture.¹

- A. The **Nones**—religiously unaffiliated.
 1. U.S. Adults: 1990 8.1%; 2007 15.3%; 2012 19.3%; 2014 22.8%; 2018 **23.1%**. [General Social Survey];
29.5% on the CCES [Cooperative Congressional Election Study].
 2. U.S. Millennials (age 18-29): 2007 22%; 2012 32%. Today: about **35%**.
 3. West Virginia: from 2008 to 2018: Nones grew by **18.6%**.
 4. For every ONE person becoming religious, **FOUR** become Nones.
- B. **Atheists**: 13-18 year olds (see the 2018 “Gen Z” report by Barna)
 1. “Atheist”: 6% of all adults; 6% of Gen X; 7% of Millennials.
 2. “Atheist”: **13%** of Gen Z.

¹ For a variety of sources the resources for Church and Christian Leaders dealing with the Christian faith and American culture, see <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/recommended-resources>. This includes survey sources, books with annotations, and suggested Christian websites. For R4D mobile app info, see <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/app/>.

C. **Churched Youth** (Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*).

1. Can't ask their most pressing life questions at church? 36%.
2. At some point, felt like rejecting their parents' faith? 32%.
3. No longer active in church in their 20s? 64%.
4. Church youth who report having serious doubts about faith? Over 70%.

D. Youth who grew up Christian: See David Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles* (2019).

1. **Prodigals** (Ex-Christians): 22%.
2. **Nomads** (Unchurched): 30%.
3. **Habitual Churchgoers**: 38%.
4. **Resilient Disciples**: Only 10% have a "resilient faith."

E. I want to ask this group of church and family shepherds:

II. The Concerns and Complaints of the Wandering Sheep.

A. The church is:

1. Overprotective.
2. Shallow.
3. Too exclusive.
4. Anti-science.
5. Not relevant.
6. Unfriendly to those who doubt.

B. I want to ask this group of church and family shepherds:

III. The Call of God's Shepherd.

A. The **MESSAGE** of the Shepherd.

1. The **COMPONENTS** of Faith.
 - a. Assent (Matt. 16:15-17; John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15; Heb. 11:6ab).
 - b. Trust (James 2:19; Matt. 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:1,6c).
 - c. Love (Mark 12:30; Deut. 6:4-5; Cf. Matt. 16:15-16 and John 21:1-17).
2. The **CONTENT** of the Faith in Scripture.
 - a. The "facts" Scripture.
 - b. The coherent message of Scripture.
3. The **CORE** of the Faith.
 - a. Distractions from the core.
 - b. The core of Christ.
4. The **CONFIRMATION** of the Faith.
 - a. The WHY of faith, not just the WHAT of faith.
 - b. **APOLOGETICS** (1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3; Phil. 1:7,16).
 - (1) "Negative" apologetics.
 - (2) "Positive" apologetics.

B. The **MOOD** of the Shepherd.

1. Exemplify **HUMILITY**.

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

2. Exhibit **SENSITIVITY** (1 Pet. 3:15b; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Jude 22).

C. The **METHOD** of the Shepherd.

1. Be **INTERROGATIVE**.

- a. The Gospels record **173** questions by Jesus.
- b. E.g. Jewish leaders: “By what authority?” and Jesus’ reply: “Is the baptism of John from God or men?” (e.g. Matt. 21:23-27; Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8).
- c. It’s just as important to learn good **QUESTIONS** to ask as it is to learn good ANSWERS to give.

Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*: “We need to be able to deal with doubt lovingly, helpfully, and especially without ever scolding or shaming anyone for doubting.” (25).

2. Be **COMPREHENSIVE**.

- a. More than the B-I-B-L-E.
- b. The relevance of God’s message to science, work, school, social justice, career.

3. Be **COMPARATIVE**.

- a. What are the alternatives? How do they compare to the Christian worldview?
- b. Expand our knowledge to other worldviews (philosophies & religions).
- c. “Neutralizing” apologetics.
 - (1) Col. 2:8 “Don’t be taken CAPTIVE by deceptive philosophies.”
 - (2) 2 Cor. 10:5 “We DESTROY arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God ...” (ESV).
 - (3) 2 Tim. 2:24-25 “... correcting those who are in OPPOSITION”
 - (4) Titus 1:9 “... be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who CONTRADICT it.”
- d. John 6:68 [Peter]

Conclusion:

- A. In spite of the discouraging data and the prevalent problems, I am **super-optimistic** about the future of the church.
- B. As sheep of the Good Shepherd, may we