C.S. Lewis as Evangelist

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an insightful examination of how legendary Christian author C.S. Lewis used his writing to invite his readers to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Lewis and Evangelism

"C. S. Lewis never invited unbelievers to come to Jesus. He was a very successful evangelist." So begins Michael Ward's essay "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion." Ward follows up this provocative comment with others like it. For example, "Einstein failed his entrance exam to the Federal Polytechnic. He was a very successful physicist."{1} What is Ward wanting us to see here?



While he recognizes that his initial statement about Lewis needs some qualification, he's nonetheless put his finger on something very important about Lewis's evangelistic style. For while Lewis had a heart for evangelism, and desired to see men and women surrender their lives to Christ, he's not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist." One might readily describe Lewis as a Christian apologist or imaginative storyteller, a literary scholar or skillful debater, but "evangelist" would probably not top the list. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that Lewis engaged in evangelistic activity in a variety of ways. While he was certainly not a "preaching" or "revivalistic" sort of evangelist, he was a "very successful evangelist" all the same.

Philip Ryken has helpfully described Lewis as a "teaching

evangelist," a "praying evangelist," and a "discipling evangelist." Most important of all, however, he refers to Lewis as a "writing" or "literary evangelist." And this is surely correct, for Lewis's greatest "evangelistic impact" has been felt through his books and essays.{2}

Not long before his death, Lewis was interviewed by Sherwood Wirt of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. When asked if the aim of Christian writing (including his own writing) was to bring about an encounter between the reader and Jesus Christ, Lewis responded by saying, "That is not my language, yet it is the purpose I have in view."{3} Moreover, in his "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," Lewis frankly confesses that most of his popular Christian books "are evangelistic" in character, and addressed to those outside the Christian faith.{4}

Of course, Lewis was not *merely* a "literary evangelist." While such terminology captures the fundamental way in which Lewis shared his faith, it was certainly not the only way. Moreover, evangelism was not something Lewis did simply because he enjoyed it. He felt an obligation, even a burden, to make Christ known to others.{5} And as we'll see later, these evangelistic concerns and motivations came with a very real cost to Lewis in terms of his professional career and friendships.{6}

The Significance of Lewis's Conversion

If there's one thing Lewis makes clear about his *own* conversion, first to theism and then to Christianity, it's that he felt himself to have been *pursued* by God and *drawn* into relationship with Him. While in one sense he saw his conversion as arising from a "wholly free choice" on his part, he also saw it as resulting from a kind of Divine necessity.{7} Lewis makes this clear in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy.*

Consider the description of his conversion to Theism: "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet." Eventually, Lewis tells us, he "gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed," describing himself as "perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."{8}

Interestingly, before this, Lewis had described God as offering him "a moment of wholly free choice"—an opportunity to either "open the door or keep it shut." He tells us that he chose to open it, but almost immediately relates that "it did not really seem possible to do the opposite." He goes on to speculate that perhaps "necessity" is not "the opposite of freedom."{9} All of this reveals how significant Lewis found God's involvement in his conversion to actually be.

His conversion to Christianity is similarly, if less dramatically, narrated. He writes of feeling "a resistance almost as strong as" his "previous resistance to Theism."{10} But having been through something similar already, the resistance was "shorter-lived." While being driven to Whipsnade Zoo, Lewis came to believe "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He once again speculates about whether this momentous event resulted from freedom or necessity and concludes that maybe the difference in such a case is inconsequential.{11}

But why is this important for a discussion of Lewis and evangelism? Because it helps us understand how Lewis (on the one hand) could work tirelessly for the salvation of others, while also (on the other) recognizing that God was so powerfully involved in the conversion of a human soul that he (i.e., Lewis) need never worry that such weighty matters depended solely on him. He could thus be a relaxed evangelist, using his gifts to point others to Christ, while also recognizing that salvation is ultimately a work of God.

The Importance of "Translation" in Lewis's Evangelistic Work

So far, we've seen that the most important of Lewis's evangelism was through his writings. Indeed, the first book Lewis wrote, after becoming a Christian, was *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Published in 1933, the book bears the rather lengthy subtitle: "An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Romanticism, and Reason." And as with so many of the books that followed Lewis's conversion, it was concerned to commend Christianity to others.

In 1938, Lewis published the first volume of his "Cosmic Trilogy," titled *Out of the Silent Planet*.{12} In this book, Lewis communicates elements of Christian theology within the context of a science-fiction adventure story. In 1940, he published *The Problem of Pain*, a work of Christian apologetics concerned to address the problem of evil and suffering. As I've noted elsewhere, this book "attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the . . . BBC."{13} Welch wrote to Lewis, asking if he might be willing to compose a series of broadcast talks for the BBC. Lewis accepted the invitation, and the talks he composed eventually became the first book of his now classic statement of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.{14} These influential talks were delivered during the years of World War II.

In addition to these now-famous "broadcast talks," Lewis also spoke to the men and women of the Royal Air Force during the war. Such experiences helped teach Lewis the importance (and even necessity) of "translating" Christian doctrine into terms the average layperson could readily understand. Lewis wanted to communicate Christian truth to his audience, and he realized that to do so effectively, he needed to learn their language.{15} He thus described his task as "that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine . . . into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could

understand."{16}

It was Lewis's skill as a "translator" that made him so successful as a "literary evangelist." Few writers have been so effective at communicating the essential truths of Christianity to a broad, general, and often unbelieving audience, as C. S. Lewis. Indeed, Lewis placed so much importance on "translating" Christian truth into the language of the average layperson that he thought every ordination exam ought to require that the examinee demonstrate an ability to do it.{17} And in *Mere Christianity* (along with other works), we get a glimpse of Lewis doing this very thing.

Evangelism in Lewis's Fiction

In discussing the evangelistic work of C. S. Lewis, we've seen how Lewis's evangelistic concerns impacted his work as a popular Christian apologist. Now it's time to consider how these same concerns find expression in his fiction. In his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis discusses a major motivation for his fictional work. He tells us:

> "I wrote fairy tales because . . . I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could (OOW, 37).{18}

Through his fiction, Lewis helps his readers personally experience the potency of Christian truth. Consider *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* In that story, Edmund (one of the four Pevensie children who enter Narnia through the wardrobe) initially sides with the White Witch against the great lion Aslan. The Witch has all Narnia under her spell, making it "always winter and never Christmas."{19} In his desire to one day be king of Narnia, Edmund betrays his brother and sisters. According to the Deep Magic that governs Narnia, he thus deserves to die.{20}

But Aslan, the true king of Narnia, intercedes for Edmund, and the Witch renounces her claim on his life. The catch is that Aslan must give his own life in place of Edmund's. This he willingly does. But like Jesus in the Gospels, death cannot hold him in its power, and he returns to life again. According to one scholar, "the desired response" to this is not so much "to believe in the vicarious suffering of Christ, but to *taste* it."{21} Lewis thus used his fiction as a vehicle for evangelism, helping his readers to "taste" Christian truth in powerful (and even delightful) ways.

The "Cost" of Lewis's Evangelistic Witness

Although Lewis was not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist," he nonetheless had a heart for evangelism and was motivated to labor for the conversion of others. In fact, Christopher Mitchell has observed that "Lewis perceived evangelism to be his lay vocation, and the means by which he expressed this evangelistic impulse were his speaking and writing."{22}

While Lewis was not the sort of person to preach a conventional "Come to Jesus" sort of evangelistic sermon, he was nonetheless (as Michael Ward has noted) "a very successful evangelist."{23} When one considers the vast literary output

of Lewis, so much of which had evangelistic intentions, combined with his speaking, preaching, and debating on issues of vital concern to the Christian faith, along with his many prayers for the conversion of others, and generous financial assistance rendered for the cause of Christ, it is clear that the whole tenor of Lewis's post-conversion life was driven by a strong evangelistic impulse for the salvation of souls. And this in spite of the very costly nature of this witness.

According to Mitchell, Lewis's evangelistic commitments fostered "ridicule and scorn . . . among his non-Christian colleagues" at Oxford.{24} Indeed, even some of Lewis's closest friends occasionally felt embarrassed by his "zeal for the conversion of unbelievers."{25} Many of his colleagues were scandalized by the fact that Lewis used his academic training to write popular-level books in theology and Christian apologetics. No doubt some were also jealous of his ever-increasing popularity with the general public, for Lewis had an uncanny ability to write one book after another that people actually wanted to buy and read.

So *why* did Lewis do it? That's the question Mitchell asks near the end of his essay on this topic.{26} Why did Lewis persist in evangelistic writing and speaking that aroused such scorn from academic colleagues, and occasional embarrassment from friends? Mitchell suggests that it likely had something to do with Lewis's conviction that "There are no *ordinary* people."{27} Hence, while his evangelistic activities created difficulties for him, difficulties that might easily have been avoided, Lewis was convinced that bringing glory to God through the saving of human souls was "the real business of life."{28} And whatever abuse, scorn, or discomfort this might cause him personally, he was apparently willing to endure it in order to be found faithful.

Notes

1. Michael Ward, "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The*

Evangelistic Vision of C. S. Lewis, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 143.
2. See Philip G. Ryken, "Winsome Evangelist: The Influence of C. S. Lewis," in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands*, 62.
3. C. S. Lewis, "Cross-Examination," interview by Sherwood E. Wirt, in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 262.
4. C. S. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 181.
5. This would seem to be implied by Lewis's remarks in his sermon, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1980), 18-19.
6. See Christopher W. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eeerdmans, 1998), 3-14.
7. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 224-25.
8. Ibid., 228-29.
9. Ibid., 224-25.
10. Ibid., 237.
11. Ibid.
12. For readers interested in reading my prior article on this book, please see Michael Gleghorn, "Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet," Probe Ministries, October 29, 2023, probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-planet/
13. Please see Michael Gleghorn, "C. S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity," Probe Ministries, April 24, 2016, probe.org/c-s-lewis-the-bbc-and-mere-christianity/
14. For a helpful discussion of all the issues and concerns surrounding these events, please see Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).
15. C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, 94, 98.

16. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” in *God in the Dock*, 183.
17. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock*, 98-99.
18. C. S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 37.
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 16.
20. Ibid., 138-39.
21. Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), Kindle edition, loc. 2640.
22. Christopher W. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis’s Witness,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.
23. Ward, “Escape to Wallaby Wood,” 143.
24. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory,” 7. Note: The whole of this paragraph is indebted to Mitchell’s discussion in this chapter.
25. Ibid., 6-7.
26. Ibid., 9-14.
27. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 19.
28. C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 14.

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Why Study Church History?

James Detrich provides five reasons to study church history and allow our knowledge to build our confidence in our faith.

When I was in college, we had to do what was called

“evangelism night.” It was a night in which a group of us would pile into someone’s old, broken-down car (we were all poor back then) and skirt downtown to the city’s walking bridge, a large half-mile overpass extending over the Chattanooga River. We were always sure that plenty of people would be there that needed our message. One night I began talking to a man about Christ and he quickly cut me off, “I am a Christian,” he exclaimed. “Great,” I replied. As we continue talking, though, I soon discovered that he was a “different” Christian than me. He said he believed in an expansive New Testament that contained many more books than the twenty-seven I was accustomed to, and he had six or seven Gospels, where I only had four. When I told him that I didn’t think he was right, that the New Testament only contained twenty-seven books and four Gospels, he asked me an important question, “How do you know that there are only four Gospels? Maybe there are more books to the Bible than you think!” I stood there, knowing that he was wrong. But I didn’t know *why* he was wrong. I had no idea of how to combat him—I didn’t know church history well enough in order to provide, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, an account of the assurance that lies within me.



This is one of the great reasons why we as Christians need to study church history. In this article I am going to make a passionate plea for the study of church history and give five reasons why I believe it is essential for every follower of Christ. Alister McGrath said that “Studying church history . . . is like being at a Bible study with a great company of people who thought about those questions that were bothering you and others.”{1} These bothering questions, much like the one I could not answer on the walking bridge, oftentimes can be answered through learning the stories and lessons of history. It was Martin

Luther, the great reformer, who cried out: “History is the mother of truth.” This is the first reason why Christians need to study history, so that we can become better skilled to answer the nagging questions that either critics ask or that we ourselves are wrestling with. It would have been a tremendous help that day on the bridge to know that in the second and third centuries, the time right after Jesus and the apostles, that church pastors and theologians were exclaiming and defending the truth that we only possess four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If I had only known of this rich tradition, if I had only known my church history, I would have been able to give a reasonable account of that hope that lies within me.

Church History Provides Comfort

The first reason why Christians should study church history is that it helps Christians provide a more reasonable account of what we believe. The second reason is that Christians, just like any other people, go through many times of loneliness and despair. The book of Psalms reveals multiple times where various psalmists reveal that they feel as though God has left them, that their enemies are closing in, and that no one, including God, really cares. Suffice it to say that this often leads to a crisis of faith. Many of us suffer that same crisis from time to time, and the one thing that usually helps to be encouraged is to get around God’s people. When we are with others who believe as we do, it helps to stabilize, and to build, our faith. There is a sense in those moments of being with other Christians that our faith is bigger and more expansive—that it is communal, not merely individual.

Studying church history is about being with the community of faith. Reading the stories, learning the truths, examining the insights of these faithful men and women down through the centuries gives to us the sense that our faith is not shallow, but as the song used to say, it is “deep and wide.” Church

historian John Hannah claims that studying Christian heritage "dispels the sense of loneliness and isolation in an era that stresses the peripheral and sensational."{2} It breaks us away from this modern culture that emphasizes the glitz and the glamour of the here and now, and helps us to establish confidence in the faith by examining the beliefs central to our faith that have been developed over a long period of time. Christian theology does not invent beliefs; it finds beliefs already among Christians and critically examines them. The excavation site for Christian theology is not merely in the pages of Scripture, though that is the starting point, but it expands from there into the many centuries as we find the Holy Spirit leading His church. For us today, it gives us the ability to live each day absolutely sure that what we are believing in actually is true; to know and understand that for over 2000 years men and women have been worshipping, praising, and glorifying the same God that we do today.

It's similar to those grand, majestic churches, the cathedrals that overwhelm you with the sense of transcendence. The expansive ceilings, high walls, and stained glass leaves the impression that our faith, our Christian heritage, is not small but large. Entering into a contemplation of our faith's history is like going into one of those churches. It takes away the loneliness, the isolation, and reminds us of the greatness of our faith.

Church History Solidifies Our Faith

The third reason for studying church history takes us to the task of theology. Have you ever wondered if something you heard being preached in church was essential? Maybe you've asked, Is this really so important to my faith? Understanding and articulating what is most important to Christianity is one of the crucial tasks that theology performs. This task is developed from a historical viewpoint. It asks the question, What has always been crucially important to Christians in each

stage of church history? Over the centuries, Christian theologians have developed three main categories for Christian beliefs: dogma, doctrine, and opinion.{3} A belief considered as dogma is deemed to be essential to the gospel; rejecting it would entail apostasy and heresy. Doctrines are developed within a particular church or denomination that help to guide that group in belief. What a church believes is found in its doctrine. Lastly, beliefs relegated to opinion are always interesting, but they are not important in the overall faith of the church. But dogma is important and history tells the story of how the church receives these important truths. It tells the story of how the church came to understand that God is three and one, the received truth of the Trinity; or how they came to understand that Jesus was both human and divine, the received truth of the Person of Christ. In examining these things, you begin to understand what is most essential and what is less important.

This is the same question that was being asked in the early fourth century. Some folks calling themselves Christians were going around proclaiming that Jesus Christ was different from God the Father, that even though He was deserving of worship, there was a time when He was created by the Father. Other Christians rose up and declared that to be heretical. They claimed that the words and actions of Christ as recorded in the Scripture clearly affirms Him to be equal with the Father. The Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 sided with the latter group, claiming that Jesus was indeed equal with His Father. The exact wording of the council's conclusion is that Jesus is "of the same substance" with His Father. That dogmatic decision is reflected in the church's doctrinal beliefs and it demonstrates its crucial importance for Christianity.

History is indeed the treasure chest of truth. Open it up. Discover the riches within it. Find out what is there and what is not—what is important and what is not!

Church History Helps Us Interpret the Bible

Why should we study church history? The answers already given are that it provides perspective in answering tough questions, gives a sense that our faith has gravitas, delineates that which is important; the fourth reason is that the study of church history helps us to interpret the Bible. You might been inclined to say, “We don’t need church history, all we need is the Bible.” But we must remember that people interpret the Bible in many and various ways. For instance, do you know that the largest meeting in North America that discusses the Bible is called the Society of Biblical Literature. It meets every year and boasts of having thousands of members. Among those within the society, only an astonishing 30% of them are evangelicals, or people who would have a more conservative interpretation of Scripture. People all over are reading the Bible, but they are reading it in different ways.

So, how do we know how to interpret the Bible? We believe that a certain interpretation or tradition of the text goes all the way back to Jesus and His apostles. Thus, Scripture must be interpreted in light of this tradition—the way that the early community of believers read the various texts of Scripture as they recognized its authority in matters of faith and practice. They recognized that these texts supported, explained, and gave evidence to the belief system that they held dear. For us, going back and reading the early church fathers is profitable for our understanding of the broader cultural and theological framework so that we can better understand what Scripture is saying. For instance, as we discovered above, the Trinity is a crucial dogma of the church. Therefore, any interpretation of the Bible that contradicts that basic belief would be inadequate. History helps to paint the lines that we must stay within and it helps to construct the boundaries for a faithful reading of the text. Examining what was important to the apostles, and the

generation that followed, and then the next generation, gives a basic tradition, a framework, of values and beliefs, that must guide our faith today. The study of church history helps us to develop that basic framework.

It was a second-century pastor that complained that the heretics of his day read the same Bible as he did, yet they twist it into something else. He equated it someone taking a beautiful picture of a king constructed with precious jewels and rearranging those jewels so that the picture now resembles a dog.{4} We would contest ruining such a beautiful piece of art! This is exactly what happens when the beauty of the Bible is misinterpreted. To keep that from happening, we must study church history and find out what the precious jewels actually are that construct the beauty of the Bible.

Church History Demonstrates the Working of God

We have listed four reasons to study church history: it helps answering questions, it presents a faith that is deep and wide, it delineates what is important, and it helps us to interpret the Bible. The fifth reason why we should study church history is that it demonstrates the working of God. More specifically, it gives evidence that the Holy Spirit is working through and among His people, the church of God. It is the same Spirit that was working in that early Christian community that is still at work today in the community of faith. In other words, history provides a further resource for understanding the movement of God in the entire community of faith. We affirm that there is continuity between the early Christian community and the community today, because we serve one God and are the one people of that God. Hence, every sector of church history is valuable, because it is the same Spirit moving through every stage of history. Church history is His story and it tells of God’s faithfulness to the

community of believers as they have carried forth His truth and have given animation to His character. Just as Christ is the image of the invisible God, the church, through the Son and by the Spirit, is also the image of the invisible God. Church history is the story of how the community reflects that invisible God.

This is the concept that brings all the others into a connected whole. The reason why studying church history can provide answers to crucial questions of faith is due to the fact that the Spirit has been moving in the hearts of men and women down throughout history, aiding them in their questions of faith and the fruit of that work has been preserved for us today. The reason why studying church history can show us what is important to the faith is because the Spirit has been at work guiding the church into truth. The reason why studying church history can help us interpret the Bible is because the Spirit has illuminated the path for understanding the Bible for centuries. This is what is fascinating about church history: it is a study of His Story. He is there, just as Jesus said He would be. Remember it was Jesus who said that He was going away, but that He would send a Comforter. And this One would guide us in all truth. Church history is the story of that illuminated path where the God of the church guides His people into all truth. History is where He is.

Notes

1. Alister McGrath, “The State of the Church Before the Reformation” in *Modern Reformation* [January/February 1994]: 11.
2. John D. Hannah, “Notes on the Church to the Modern Era” (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary), 2.
3. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *Who Needs Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 73.
4. This is a metaphor presented by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, 1.8.1.

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Gen-Z: The Generation That Ends Christian Influence in America?

In order to grow the number of Gen-Z Christians, we need an understanding of ways to build bridges from their pluralistic, secular worldview to seriously contemplating the unique grace of God. Steve Cable draws upon the wisdom of two pastors who are making a real difference in the lives of young adults to address this important topic.

What Are Gen-Zs Like?



In this article we look beyond the Millennials to consider the latest generation and what they tell us about the future of Evangelicals in America. Gen-Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010. This year, half of the Gen-Z generation are 18 or older. By the time they are all at least 18, the Millennials and Gen-Zs will make up almost 50% of the adult population. We will consider how this generation compares with previous generations. We want to understand this generation to truly communicate the good news of the gospel to them; to help them "to walk in a manner worth of the Lord."{1}

In their book, *So the Next Generation Will Know*{2}, Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace identified some key traits common among Gen-Zs. They are:

1. Digital Multitaskers – "spending nearly every waking hour interacting with . . . digital technology," often while watching television
2. Impatient – quickly moving from thing to thing with an attention span of around 8 seconds
3. Fluid – constantly blurring the lines; making truth, genders, and family structures personal choices
4. Lonely – swamped in social media where personal relationships are minimized while personal troubles follow them everywhere. Sean points to "the availability of endless counterfeits that claim to be able to fill their hearts with meaning."{3}
5. Individualistic – individual feelings more important than facts while judging the choices of others is avoided. As James White points out in Meet Generation Z{4}, "the ability to find whatever they're after without the help of intermediaries . . . has made them more independent. . . . Like no other generation before, Gen-Z faces a widening chasm between wisdom and information."{5}

Most importantly, most of these young Americans are thoroughly secular with little exposure to Christian theology. As White opines, "They are lost. They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post-Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. . . . They have endless amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors."{6}

As they enter adulthood, the culture around them will not encourage them to consider the claims of Christ. In fact, the Millennials going before them are already seen leaving any Christian background behind as they age into their thirties.

Gen-Z: How Are They Trending?

What can we truly know about the religious thinking of Gen-Zs age 11 to 25? Pew Research surveyed teens and their parents

giving us a glimpse into both{7}.

They found *one third* of American teens are religiously Unaffiliated.{8} In contrast, their parents were less than *one quarter* Unaffiliated. Another Pew survey{9} found more than *half* of young adult Gen-Zs are unaffiliated. This group is easily the largest religious group among Gen-Zs.

Teens attend church services with their parents, but lag behind in other areas. Less than *one fourth* of teens consider religion very important. And on an absolute belief in God and praying daily, the teens trail their parents significantly.

Using an index of religious commitment{10}, almost *half* of the parents but only *one third* of teens rated high. In fact, almost half of teenagers with parents who rated high did not rate high themselves.{11}

Perhaps the minds of teenagers are mush. Their views will firm up as they age. In reality, older Gen-Zs and Millennials also trail older adults by more than 20 points in believing in God and praying daily.{12} Also, church attendance drops dramatically among these young adults who are no longer attending with parents.

If religion were important to teens, they would look to religious teaching and beliefs to help make decisions about what is right and wrong. But less than *one third* of teens affiliated with a religion turned to its teachings to make such decisions.

As George Barna reports,{13} "The faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades." It seems that Gen-Z will increase this gap.

Gen-Z: Worldview and Apologetics

Why have the Unaffiliated been growing dramatically over the last 25 years while doctrinally consistent Christians have been declining? At one level, we recognize the watered-down gospel taught in many churches encourages people to pursue other things and not waste time on church. That may have been the primary issue at one time. But in this decade, we are seeing a real reduction in the number of Evangelicals as well. The self-professed Evangelicals{14} among those ages 18 to 29 has reduced from 29% down to 20%, a reduction of almost one third.

One major driver is the dominant worldview of our young adult society. The worldview promoted by our schools, media, and entertainment industry has changed from a Christian inspired worldview to a worldview which is secular and specifically anti-Christian. As James White observes, "It's simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian."{15}

Almost all Gen-Zs have been brought up hearing the worldview of Scientism espoused. This worldview teaches "that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified . . . If something cannot be examined in a tangible, scientific manner, it is not simply unknowable, it is meaningless."{16} At the same time, most Gen-Zs have not even been exposed to an Evangelical Christian worldview. Consequently, apologetics is critical for opening their minds to hear the truth of the gospel. Many of them need to understand that the basic tenets of a Christian worldview can be true before they will consider whether these tenets are true for them. Answering questions such as: "Could there be a creator of this universe?" and "Could that creator possibly be involved in this world which has so much pain and suffering?"

is a starting point to opening their minds to a Christian view.

Encouraging Gen-Zs to understand the tenets of their worldview and comparing them to a Christian worldview begins the process of introducing them to the gospel. As White points out, "I have found that discussing the awe and wonder of the universe, openly raising the many questions surrounding the universe and then positing the existence of God, is one of the most valuable approaches that can be pursued."{17} The Christian worldview is coherent, comprehensive and compelling as it explains why our world is the way it is and how its trajectory may be corrected into one that honors our Creator and lifts up people to a new level of life.

Gen-Z: Removing the Isolation of Faith

What will it take to reach Gen-Z? James White says, ". . . the primary reason Gen-Z disconnects from the church is our failure to equip them with a biblical worldview that empowers them to understand and navigate today's culture."{18} If we want to equip Gen-Zs to embrace faith, we must directly discuss worldview issues with them.

The challenge is exacerbated as most Gen-Zs are taught a redefined tolerance: to not only accept classmates with different worldviews, e.g. Muslims and the Unaffiliated, but to believe that it is as true for them as your parents' worldview is for them. As Sean McDowell states, "Gen-Zs are exposed to more competing worldviews—and at an earlier age—than any generation in history."{19}

The new tolerance leads directly to a pluralistic view of salvation. Christ stated, "No one comes to the Father except through me,"{20} and Peter preached that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved."{21} Yet the survey of American teens{22} finds *less than one third* believe that only one

religion is true, broken up into *two-thirds* of Evangelicals and *less than one-third* of Mainlines and Catholics.

Compounding these issues is the growing practice of limiting the impact of religious beliefs on real life. Sean points out, "The biggest challenge in teaching worldview to young people is the way our increasingly secular culture fosters the compartmentalization of faith."{23} We need to help them see how a consistent Christian worldview applies to all issues. It is foolish to segregate your spiritual beliefs from your life decisions.

As an example, many Gen-Zs are enamored by a socialist view that the government should provide everything we need, equally distributing goods and services to all. Those who work hard and excel will have their productivity redistributed equally. It sounds like a possibly good approach and yet it has destroyed the economies of many countries including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. It fails because it is based on a worldview that "assumes greed comes from inequality in the distribution of material goods in society."{24} In contrast, the Bible is clear that greed is part of the fallenness of the human heart. As a result, any centralized function with no competition discourages productivity and becomes an inefficient bureaucracy.

Reaching Gen-Zs

Today, most Gen-Zs move into adulthood with little exposure to the gospel. The majority are either Unaffiliated, another religion, or have a nominal Christian background. Current surveys find that 98% of young Americans do not have a Christian worldview.{25}

This sobering data does not mean giving up on reaching Gen-Z. But if we are not intentional about it, we are not going to stem the tide. As James White observes, "What is killing the church today is (focusing) on keeping Christians within the

church happy, well fed, and growing. The mission . . . must be about those who have not crossed the line of faith."

And Sean McDowell points out that we need "to teach the difference between subjective and objective truth claims and make sure they understand that Christianity falls in the latter category."{26}

Sean encourages a focus on relationships saying, "Relationships are the runway on which truth lands. Take the time to listen with empathy, monitor from a place of wisdom, and demonstrate your concern."{27} White agrees, saying, "If we want (them) to know the faith, we have to teach, model and incarnate truth in our relationship with them."{28} From a place of relationship, we can address challenges keeping them from truly hearing the gospel.

One key challenge is the role of media. As Sean notes, "Media shapes their beliefs, and it also shapes the orientation of their hearts."{29} To counter this pervasive influence, he suggests engaging them in a skeptic's blog. Help them consider 1) what claim is being made, 2) is the claim relevant if true, and 3) decide how to investigate the claim.{30} By learning to investigate claims, they are examining the truth of the gospel. We should never fear the gospel coming up short when looking for the truth.

Key ways White's church is connecting with the Unaffiliated include:

1. Rethinking evangelism around Paul's message in Athens. Tantalizing those with no background to search for truth in Christ.
2. Teaching the grace/truth dynamic in quick segments consistent with their learning styles.
3. Being cultural missionaries – learning from those who have not been Christians.
4. Cultivating a culture of invitation by creating tools to

invite friends all the time.

If we focus on growing the number of Gen-Z Christians, we could change the trajectory of American faith. If we devote ourselves to prayer, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and reaching the lost in America rather than continuing church as usual, God can use us to turn the tide.

Notes

1. Colossians 1:9.
2. Josh McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 2019, David C. Cook.
3. McDowell and Wallace, p. 66.
4. James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Baker Books, 2017.
5. White, p. 44.
6. White, p. 64-65.
7. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals, September 10, 2020.
8. These are people who self-identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. In previous surveys, we referred to them as the Nones. Calling them the "unaffiliated" helps us avoid the confusion between "Nones" and "nuns."
9. Call out Pew survey from 2019.
10. The index of religious commitment looks at the answers to questions on church attendance, belief in God, prayer, and importance of religion and rates a respondents commitment from high to low based on their answers.
General Social Survey, 2018.
11. 42% of the teenagers with parents with a high index had a medium or low index.
12. General Social Survey, 2018
13. American Worldview Inventory 2020, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.
14. Pew Research surveys 2007, 2014, 2019.
15. White, p. 130.

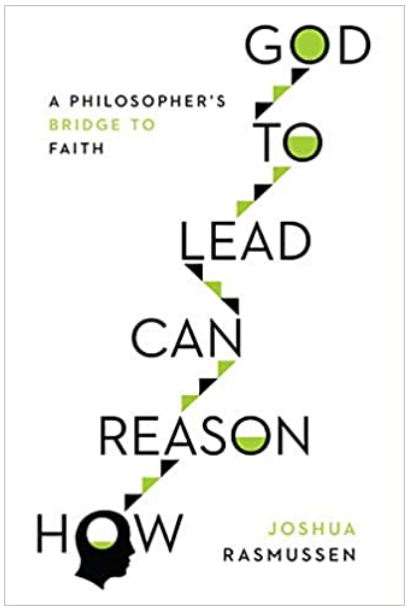
16. White, p. 141.
17. White, p. 139.
18. White, p. 80.
19. McDowell and Wallace, p. 81.
20. John 14:6b.
21. Acts 4:12.
22. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens.
23. McDowell and Wallace, p. 87.
24. Ibid, p. 93.
25. American Worldview Inventory 2020.
26. McDowell and Wallace, p. 113.
27. McDowell and Wallace, p. 78.
28. White, p. 64.
29. McDowell and Wallace, p. 164.
30. Ibid, p. 173-4.

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How Reason Can Lead to God – Part 2

Dr. Michael Gleghorn continues to make a compelling case for how reason can lead us, step by step, to the logical conclusion of God's existence based on the book How Reason Can Lead to God.

Foundation of Mind



In this article we're continuing our examination of Christian philosopher Josh Rasmussen's book, *How Reason Can Lead to God.*{1} In my previous article, I introduced the book and showed how Rasmussen began constructing a "bridge of reason" that led to "an independent, self-sufficient, . . . eternally powerful foundation of all reality."{2}



But Rasmussen goes further, arguing that there must also be "a certain *mind-like* aspect" to this foundation.{3} And that's what we'll explore in this article. We're going to follow Rasmussen's lead as he takes us over the "bridge of reason." And once we've taken that final step, we'll see that it's led us not to some cold, calculating, "mind-like" reality, but to a very "special treasure."{4}

But to begin, why does Rasmussen think that the foundation of all reality must be "mind-like"? To answer that question, consider that one of the things the foundation has produced is *you*—and *you* have a mind. As Rasmussen notes, "you are capable of thinking, feeling, and making decisions."{5} Indeed, if you're awake and functioning normally, you have some awareness of what is going on "around" you—and even of what is going on "within" you. That's because you possess a conscious (even *self-conscious*) mind. How is this to be explained?

According to Rasmussen there are only two live options: either minds ultimately originate from some sort of "mind-like" or "mental" reality, or else they arise solely from a physical process.{6} Is one of these options better than the other? Rasmussen thinks so, and points to "a construction problem"

with the matter-to-mind option.{7} Here's the problem. Just as a black steel pipe cannot be constructed out of emerald green toothpaste, so a self-conscious mind cannot be constructed from mindless particles. Particles just aren't the right thing for constructing the thoughts, feelings, and purposes of a mind. In order to construct a mind, "mental materials" are needed. Hence, the foundation of all reality *must be* mind-like in order to account for the unique features of self-conscious human minds.{8}

But at this point, some may raise an objection. After all, if we say there's a construction problem going from matter to minds, then wouldn't there also be a problem in saying that an immaterial mind created the material world? The answer is "No."

Foundation of Matter

Above, we argued that one can't explain the thoughts and intentions of human minds by appealing only to material particles. There must rather be an ultimate mind at the foundation of all reality.

But of course, human beings also have *bodies*. And your body (including your brain) is an example of incredible material complexity. Not only that, but in order for you to be physically alive, the "fundamental parameters" of the universe must be delicately balanced, or "fine-tuned," with a precision that is mind-boggling. As physicist Alan Lightman observes, "If these fundamental parameters were much different from what they are, it is not only human beings who would not exist. No life of any kind would exist."{9}

How should we account for such complexity? Can we explain it in terms of chance?{10} That's wildly implausible. And better explanations are available. After all, one could *try* to explain the words of your favorite novel by appealing to

"chance." But is that "the *best* explanation?"{11} Isn't it far more likely that an intelligent mind selected and ordered the words of that story with the intention of communicating something meaningful to others? While the chance hypothesis is *possible*, is it really *probable*? If we're interested in truth, shouldn't we prefer the *best* explanation?

So what *is* a better explanation for the material complexity that we observe—not only in our bodies, but in the fine-tuning of the universe that allows for our existence? If the ordering of the letters and words in your favorite novel is best explained by an intelligent mind, then what about the biological complexity of human beings? Scientists have observed "that molecular biology has uncovered an analogy between DNA and language." In short, "The genetic code functions exactly like a language code."{12} And just as the words in a novel require an intelligent *author*, the genetic code requires an intelligent *designer*.

Hence, a *foundational mind* offers a good explanation not only for human *minds*, but for the complexity of human *bodies* as well. Moreover, a foundational mind also provides the best explanation for objective moral values.

Foundation of Morals

What is the best explanation for our moral experience in the world? How might we best account for our sense of right and wrong, good and evil? So far, we've seen two reasons for thinking that the ultimate foundation of reality is "mind-like." First, a foundational mind best explains the existence of *human* minds. Second, it also offers the best explanation for the staggering material complexity of the human body and the exquisite "fine-tuning" of the universe that allows for our existence. Might a foundational mind also provide the best explanation for our moral experience? Rasmussen thinks so, and he offers potent reasons for us to think so too.{13}

Consider our sense of right and wrong. How should this be explained? Rasmussen proposes that our "moral senses are a *window* into a moral landscape."{14} Just as our sense of sight helps us perceive objects in the physical world, so our moral sense helps us perceive values in the moral world. Of course, just as our sense of sight may not be perfect, such that a tree appears blurry or indistinct, so also our moral sense may not be perfect, such that a particular action may not be clearly seen as right or wrong. But in each case, even imperfect "sight" can provide *some* reliable information about both the material and moral landscapes.{15}

How might we best explain both the moral landscape and our experience of it? "Can the particles that comprise a material landscape, with dirt and trees, produce standards of good and bad, right and wrong?"{16} It's hard to see how undirected particles could do such a thing. And naturally, they could have no *reason* to do so.

On the other hand, a foundational mind with a moral nature could account for *both* the moral landscape *and* our experience of it. As Rasmussen observes, such a being would account for moral values because of its moral nature.{17} Further, such a being would have both a *reason* and *resources* to create moral agents (like us) with the ability to perceive these values.{18} Its reason for creating such agents is that we're valuable.{19} A mind-like foundation thus offers a better explanation for human moral experience than mindless particles ever could.

Foundation of Reason

Human minds are special for their ability to reason. This ability helps us think correctly. When we reason correctly, we can begin with certain basic truths and infer yet other truths that logically follow from these. For example, from the basic truths that "all men are mortal" and "Socrates is a man" we

can logically infer the further truth that “Socrates is mortal.”

But here an interesting puzzle arises. Where does our ability to reason come from? How might we account for the origin of human reason? And one of the interesting topics tackled by Josh Rasmussen in his book, *How Reason Can Lead to God,* is the origin of reason itself. What’s the best explanation for this incredible ability?

If the universe sprang into being “from nothing, with no mind behind it,” then not only human minds, but even rationality itself, must ultimately come from mindless material particles.{20} But as Rasmussen observes, “If people come only from mindless particles, then *reasoning* comes from non-reason.”{21} But could reason really come from non-reason? Is that the *most plausible* explanation? Or might a *better* explanation be at hand?

The atheistic scientist J. B. S. Haldane once observed, “If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.”{22} For Haldane, if human reason arises entirely from a non-rational historical and physical process, then we have little reason to think that our beliefs are true.

Fortunately, there’s a way out of this difficulty. We can suggest that human reason comes from an ultimately *rational* foundation. In that case, reason comes from reason. We’ve already seen that the best way to account for minds, matter, and morals is by positing a foundational Mind as the source of all reality. And this is also the best way to account for human reason as well. As Rasmussen notes, “by anchoring reason in the nature of the foundation, we can explain how the foundation of all existence can be the foundation of minds, matter, morals . . . and reason itself.”{23}

In the next section we will follow Rasmussen “to the treasure at the end of the bridge of reason.”{24}

Perfect Foundation

In this article we’ve seen that a foundational Mind offers the best explanation for the existence of human minds and bodies, moral concepts, and even reason itself. In my previous article, we saw that this foundation is also independent, self-sufficient, and eternally powerful. Today, with some final help from the Christian philosopher Josh Rasmussen, we want to pull together the various strands of this discussion to see what unifies the various features of this foundation into a single, coherent being. What sort of being might all these features point to? According to Rasmussen, they all point to a *perfect* being. But why does he think so?

Rasmussen argues that a perfect being must have two essential features. First, it must have no defects, or imperfections. And second, it must have “supreme value.”{25} In other words, a perfect being cannot possibly be improved.

But why think the foundation of all reality is a perfect being? Simply put, the concept of perfection enables us to account for all the characteristics of this being that reason has revealed to us. Perfection accounts for this being’s independent, self-sufficient, and eternally powerful nature. It also accounts for how this being can be the ultimate foundation of other minds, astonishing material complexity, morality, and reason itself. As Rasmussen observes, “Perfection unifies all the attributes of the foundation” and “successfully predicts every dimension of our world.”{26}

A perfect being is thus the foundation of “every good and perfect gift” that we possess and enjoy, and must surely be described as “the greatest possible treasure.”{27} Moreover, since this being possesses “the maximal concentration of

goodness, value, and power imaginable," it can only properly be termed "God."{28} Thus, by following the "light of reason" to the end of the "bridge of reason," we have arrived not at meaninglessness or despair, but at "the greatest possible treasure," the self-sufficient, eternally powerful, supremely rational, and perfectly good, Creator God.

If you would like to explore the work of Josh Rasmussen further, I would recommend reading his book, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith*. You can also visit his website at joshualrasmussen.com.

Notes

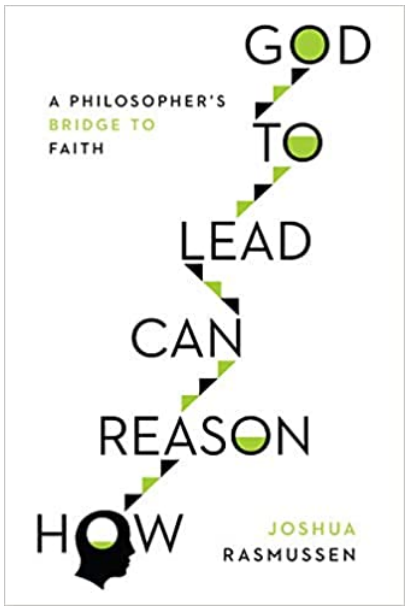
1. Joshua L Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).
2. See my previous article, "How Reason Can Lead to God, Part 1."
3. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 75.
4. Ibid., 8.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 77.
8. Ibid., 92. The phraseology of "mental materials" in the previous sentence is also borrowed from Rasmussen.
9. Alan Lightman, "The Accidental Universe," Harper's, December 2011, harpers.org/archive/2011/12/the-accidental-universe/, cited in Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 95.
10. Rasmussen deals with this option, as well as several others, in *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 95-108.
11. Ibid., 95.
12. Walter L. Bradley and Charles B. Thaxton, "Information and the Origin of Life," in *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer*, ed. J. P. Moreland. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 205.
13. Ibid., 109-24.
14. Ibid., 110. Rasmussen takes the terminology of a "moral

landscape" from Sam Harris's book, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2011).
15. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 110-11.
16. Ibid., 119.
17. Ibid., 121.
18. Ibid., 121-22.
19. Ibid., 122.
20. Ibid., 133.
21. Ibid., 133-34.
22. Haldane, J. B. S., *Possible Worlds*, 209, as cited in C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1960), 15.
23. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 135.
24. Ibid., 136.
25. Ibid., 137-38.
26. Ibid., 148.
27. Ibid. See also James 1:17.
28. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 148.

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How Reason Can Lead to God – Part 1

Dr. Michael Gleghorn makes a compelling case for how reason can lead us, step by step, to the logical conclusion of God's existence.



In 2019 the Christian philosopher Josh Rasmussen published a little book with the intriguing title, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith.* Rasmussen earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Notre Dame and currently teaches philosophy at Azusa Pacific University.



The book, dedicated to Rasmussen's "skeptical friends," aims "to mark out a pathway . . . that can inspire a greater vision of the ultimate *foundation* of everything."{1} Now admittedly, this is a tall order. And it leads Rasmussen into some deep philosophical waters. Still, he claims to be writing for a broad audience of truth-seekers—and he has largely managed to make the book accessible to the educated layperson. One reviewer characterized the result of Rasmussen's effort as both an "original presentation of cutting-edge philosophy of religion, and an engaging personal invitation to reason one's way to God."{2}

Now I realize that you may be thinking, "Well, this doesn't apply to me. I'm not interested in such 'heady' things as this." But do you know someone who is? Perhaps a son or daughter, spouse or co-worker? If so, you'll want to keep reading, for this may be just the sort of thing they need. Rasmussen wrote the book for those who need to think their way carefully through the issues. The sort of person who is not content to dodge difficult questions or settle for superficial answers.

Several philosophers have praised Rasmussen's efforts. Robert Koons, of the University of Texas at Austin, describes the

book as “winsome and engaging, drawing the reader into a thrilling adventure . . . of the existence and nature of reality’s ultimate foundation.”{3} And J. P. Moreland, of Biola University, compares the study with C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* and claims that “Rasmussen’s argument for God is developed with such precision and care that, quite frankly, it could not be improved.”{4}

With praise like this for Rasmussen’s book, I hope you’ll agree that it’s worth our time and effort to take a deeper look at its contents. What *is* Rasmussen’s argument for God? How does he develop it? Why does he refer to it as a “bridge to faith”? What sort of materials does he use in constructing his “bridge”? We’ll begin our inquiry in the same place that Rasmussen does, with the deceptively simple observation that *something exists*.{5}

The Blob of Everything

Let’s begin by considering the book’s subtitle: *A Philosopher’s Bridge to Faith.* What sort of bridge is this? As you might expect, since Rasmussen is a philosopher, this is a “bridge of reason.” But it has an interesting destination, for it leads not to skepticism, but to faith.{6}

Rasmussen constructs his bridge very carefully. He wants every step in his construction project to be reasonable. In order to accomplish this, he seeks to use quality materials and first-rate tools. His
materials are statements that anyone can see are clearly true. His tools “are rules of logic.” By carefully selecting his materials, and conscientiously using his tools, he constructs “a bridge of reason that leads . . . to a special treasure.”{7}

Rasmussen begins his project with the claim that something exists. Although few will object to such a claim, some may

still have doubts. After all, what if everything you think you experience is just an
illusion? Well, in that case, “the experience of your illusion exists.” Moreover, *you* exist. If you didn’t, you couldn’t have any doubts about reality. In order to have such doubts, you must *first* exist. Thus, Rasmussen’s first claim, that something exists, seems quite secure.{8}

Next, Rasmussen bundles every existing thing, of whatever sort, into a comprehensive whole, which he aptly dubs the “blob of everything.” This “blob” includes every existing thing, the totality of reality. Since every existing thing is included in the “blob of everything,” there is nothing “outside” or “beyond” it. It is *everything*. Hence, the blob cannot have its cause, or reason for being, in anything outside it (for, of course, there *isn’t* anything outside the blob of *everything*).{9}

Now this is strange! My car, cat, and computer were each created by causes beyond themselves. My car had a car maker. My cat had parents. But something about the “blob of everything” isn’t like this. It has what Rasmussen calls a *foundational layer* that doesn’t depend on anything outside itself for its existence. We’ll consider the nature of this “foundation” more carefully next.{10}

Probing the Foundation

As we just noted, there isn’t *anything* outside “the blob of everything.” And hence, there isn’t anything *outside* the blob that could cause, or explain, its existence.

What are we to make of this? Notice, first, that since the blob includes *everything* that exists, it includes many things that depend on other things for their existence. For example, the blob contains things like weasels, watches, and waffles and each of *these* things depend on *other* things for their

existence. Baby weasels depend on mommy and daddy weasels. Watches and waffles depend on watch- and waffle-makers.

But notice: not everything in the blob can be like this. After all, if everything in the blob depended on something else for its existence, then we would have a serious problem—for the "blob of everything" does not depend on anything else for *its own* existence. Attempting to build such a blob using only dependent materials (that is, materials that depend on something outside themselves for their existence) would commit what Rasmussen calls a "construction error."{11} One cannot construct an independent, self-sufficient reality (like the "blob of everything), using only dependent parts. That would be like trying to construct a black steel pipe using nothing but toothpaste! No matter how much toothpaste you have, you will never construct a black steel pipe with such materials.{12}

So here's the problem. The "blob of everything" includes many things with a dependent nature (like weasels, watches, and waffles). At the same time, the blob (as a whole) depends on nothing outside
itself for *its* existence. How is this possible? Clearly, the blob must contain some special ingredient that does not depend on anything else for its existence. Rasmussen calls this ingredient the "foundation."{13} It has an independent, self-sufficient, necessary nature. It's the sort of thing that *must* exist, no matter what.{14} It must therefore be eternal (i.e. without beginning or end) and provide "an ultimate foundation for everything else."{15}

Eternal Power

This "foundation" that is self-sufficient doesn't need a cause for its existence. It exists on its own. It's the sort of thing that *must* exist, that cannot *not* exist. And for this reason, the foundation must be eternal. That is, it must have

always existed. Finally, it must also be powerful. But why?

Well, consider first that "power exists." Rasmussen observes that there are only two ways of explaining this. The first suggests that power "came into existence from nothing." The second says that power is eternal and has always existed. Which way is more reasonable?{16}

Well, suppose that power came into existence from nothing. The difficulty here is that something cannot come from nothing without a cause. And if there isn't anything, then there cannot be a cause. Moreover, we must remember that "nothing" is *not* anything. It is the absence of anything. It thus has no potential to produce anything. It has no power or potential because it *isn't* anything. Something cannot come from nothing, then, because "nothing" has no power or potential to produce anything.{17}

Thus, Rasmussen claims that reason itself drives us to suggest "a power that exists on its own, by its own nature." In other words, since power exists, and since it can only come from something powerful, there must be an *eternal power*. That is, there must be a power that has always existed. This power never *became* powerful; it *has always been* powerful. Fortunately, this conclusion agrees with reason, unlike the view that power came from nothing.{18}

Rasmussen sums it up this way: "The foundational power is eternal."{19} Now this is quite astonishing. By thinking very carefully and following the light of reason, we have arrived at a foundation of all reality that is independent, self-sufficient, necessary, and eternally powerful. But we can go even further. By considering some of the things that the foundation has produced, we can learn even more about its nature.

Implications

Let's recap: beginning with the simple (and undeniably true) statement that *something exists*, we have watched Rasmussen carefully construct a bridge of reason that has led (so far) to an independent, self-sufficient, eternally powerful foundation of all reality. But Rasmussen goes still further. For if this foundation is the ultimate source of all other things, then we can learn something about the nature of the foundation by considering some of what it has produced.

For example, it is doubtless true that one of the most important things the foundation has produced is *you*—a human being. But what sort of thing are you? And what might this tell us about the foundation's nature?

Rasmussen examines four aspects of human beings that reveal some important characteristics of the foundation.{20} First, human beings have minds. We are not like rocks, papers, or scissors. We are self-conscious beings, aware of our own existence. We can think, feel, make plans, and work to accomplish them. Second, we have bodies. We are not disembodied minds, souls, or spirits. There is a complex physical (and physiological) dimension to our being. Third, we are moral agents. We experience a moral dimension to our existence. We sense that some things are good and that others are evil. We recognize that it is good to be kind to other persons and bad to harm them. Finally, we are rational agents. We can "see" or discern certain logical and mathematical truths. For example, we can "see" that two plus two equals four and that "nothing is both true and false at the same time."{21}

If we ultimately depend for our existence on a self-sufficient and eternal foundation, then what might this tell us about that which brought us into being? Although the details will have to wait for the next article, the various characteristics of human beings mentioned above point to "a certain *mind-like*

aspect of the foundation."{22} Indeed, we might even say that these characteristics reveal a foundation with mental, moral, rational—and even personal attributes!

Our goal for the next article, then, is to consider each of these characteristics in greater detail, showing how each one plausibly leads to a personal foundation of existence.

Notes

1. Joshua L. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), ix.
2. Todd Buras, review of *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith*, by Joshua L. Rasmussen, *Philosophia Christi* 21, no. 2 (2019): 453.
3. Robert Koons, Endorsement, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, frontmatter.
4. J. P. Moreland, Endorsement, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, frontmatter.
5. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 9.
6. Ibid., 8-18.
7. Ibid., 8.
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 11-13.
10. Ibid., 19-34.
11. Ibid., 22.
12. This illustration is indebted to others like it offered in Rasmussen's book.
13. Ibid., 19-34.
14. Ibid., 31.
15. Ibid., 34.
16. Ibid., 56-7.
17. William Lane Craig, "Questions About Leibniz's Cosmological Argument," Reasonable Faith, August 10, 2014, accessed May 24, 2020, www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/questions-about-leibnizs-cosmological-argument/

18. Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God*, 57.
19. Ibid., 60.
20. Ibid., 75-135.
21. Ibid., 131.
22. Ibid., 75.

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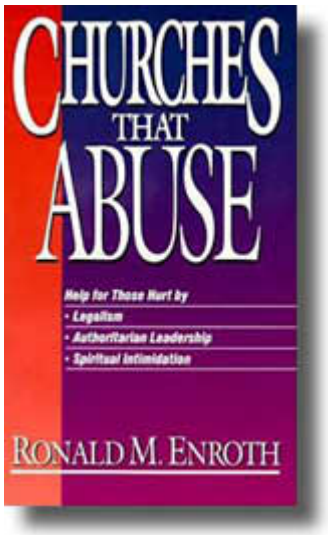
Abusive Churches

What characterizes abusive churches is their cultic method of ministry. Although outwardly orthodox in their theology, these churches use abusive and mind control methods to get their followers to submit to the organization. In this article Dr. Pat Zukeran covers eight characteristics of abusive churches.

This article is also available in Spanish.



We are all familiar with traditional cults such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. There are, however, other groups with cultic characteristics that do not fit the same profile as the traditional cults. Sometimes called "abusive churches" or even "Bible-based cults," they appear outwardly orthodox in their doctrinal beliefs. What distinguishes these groups or churches from genuine orthodox Christianity is their abusive, cultic-like methodology and philosophy of ministry.



In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ronald Enroth carefully examines several of these churches throughout the United States. He reveals the cultic methods these groups use and points out several distinguishing marks of abusive churches. At this point I will briefly introduce each of these characteristics and some of my own. Later, I'll discuss all these characteristics in detail.

First, abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. Second, the leaders of such churches often use manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. Third, there is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Fourth, these churches tend to change their names often, especially once they are exposed by the media. Fifth, denouncing other churches is common because they see themselves as superior to all other churches. Sixth, these churches have a persecution complex and view themselves as being persecuted by the world, the media, and other Christian churches. Seventh, abusive churches specifically target young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. The eighth and final mark of abusive churches is the great difficulty members have in getting out of or leaving these churches, a process often marked by social, psychological, or emotional pain.

Those involved in a church that seems to reflect these characteristics would be wise to evaluate the situation thoroughly and leave the church if it is appropriate. Staying may increase the risks of damaging your family relationships and multiplies the likelihood of losing your perspective. Members of such churches often develop a distorted view of reality, distrust everyone, and suffer from stress, fear, and depression. Some former members even continue to experience

these things after escaping from an abusing church. There are also several documented cases in which associating with an abusive church has led to the deaths of individuals or their relatives.

Some of these groups have networks of many sister churches. In some cases these groups have split off from more mainstream denominations. Occasionally the new groups have even been denounced by the founding denomination. Such groups often disguise themselves by frequently changing the name of their organization, especially following adverse publicity. This practice makes the true nature of these organizations more difficult to determine for the unsuspecting individual. Some abusive churches have college ministries all across the country. On some university campuses such student movements are among the largest groups on their respective campuses.

It is important that Christians today know the Bible and know how to recognize such churches so as not to fall into their traps. In order to help people become more aware of churches which may be abusing their members, I now want to go through in more detail the eight characteristics I mentioned earlier.

Control-Oriented Leadership

A central feature of an abusive church is control-oriented leadership. The leader in an abusive church is dogmatic, self-confident, arrogant, and the spiritual focal point in the lives of his followers. The leader assumes he is more spiritually in tune with God than anyone else. He claims insight into Scripture that no one else has. Or, he may state that he receives personal revelations from God. Because of such claims, the leader’s position and beliefs cannot be questioned; his statements are final. To members of this type of church or group, questioning the leader is the equivalent of questioning God. Although the leader may not come out and state this fact, this attitude is clearly seen by the treatment of those who dare to question or challenge the

leader. The leader of the movement often makes personal decisions for his followers. Individual thinking is prohibited; thus the followers become dependent on the leader.

In the hierarchy of such a church, the leader is, or tends to be, accountable to no one. Even if there is an elder board, it is usually made up of men who are loyal to, and will never disagree with, the leader. This style of leadership is not one endorsed in the Bible. According to Scripture all believers have equal access to God and are equal before Him because we are made in His image, and we are all under the authority of the Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 believers are directed to measure all teachings against the Word of God. Acts 17:11 states that even the apostle Paul was under the authority of the Bible, and the Bereans were commended because they tested Paul's teachings with the Scriptures. Leaders and laity alike are to live according to Scripture.

Manipulation of Members

Abusive churches are characterized by the manipulation of their members. Manipulation is the use of external forces to get others to do what someone else wants them to do. Here manipulation is used to get people to submit to the leadership of the church. The tactics of manipulation include the use of guilt, peer pressure, intimidation, and threats of divine judgment from God for disobedience. Often harsh discipline is carried out publicly to promote ridicule and humiliation.

Another tactic is the "shepherding" philosophy. As practiced in many abusive churches this philosophy requires every member to be personally accountable to another more experienced person. To this person, one must reveal all personal thoughts, feelings, and discuss future decisions. This personal information, is not used to *help* the member, but to *control* the member.

Another means of control is isolation. Abusive churches may

cut off contact between a new member and his family, friends, and anyone else not associated with the church.

How different this style of leadership is from the leadership of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lovingly, gently, humbly, and sacrificially leads His sheep.

Rigid, Legalistic Lifestyle

The third characteristic of abusive churches is the rigid, legalistic lifestyle of their members. This rigidity is a natural result of the leadership style. Abusive churches require unwavering devotion to the church from their followers. Allegiance to the church has priority over allegiance to God, family, or anything else.

Often members are required or pressured to attend Bible studies five, six, or seven days a week. There is a requirement to do evangelism; a certain quota of contacts must be met, and some churches even require members to fill out time cards recording how many hours they spent in evangelism, etc. Daily schedules are made for the person; thus he is endlessly doing the church's ministry. Former members of one church told me they were working for their church from 5:00 am to 12:00 midnight five days a week.

Members of such churches frequently drop out of school, quit working, or even neglect their families to do the work required by the church. There are also guidelines for dress, dating, finances, and so on. Such details are held to be of major importance in these churches.

In churches like these, people begin to lose their personal identity and start acting like programmed robots. Many times, the pressure and demands of the church will cause a member to have a nervous breakdown or fall into severe depression. As I reflect on these characteristics I think of Jesus' words concerning the Pharisees who "tie up heavy loads and put them

on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger" (Matt. 23: 4). What a contrast from the leadership style of Jesus who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. . . .For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Frequent Changing of Group/Church Name

A fourth characteristic of abusive churches is a pattern of constantly changing the name of the church or campus ministry. Often a name change is a response to unfavorable publicity by the media. Some abusive churches have changed their name several times in the course of a few years.

If you are in such a church, one that has changed its name several times because of bad publicity, or if you feel unceasing pressure to live up to its demands, it is probably time to carefully evaluate the ministry of the church and your participation in it.

Denouncing All Other Churches

Let us now take a look at the fifth characteristic: abusive churches usually denounce all other Christian churches. They see themselves as spiritually elite. They feel that they alone have the truth and all other churches are corrupt. Therefore, they do not associate with other Christian churches. They often refer to themselves as some special group such as, "God's Green Berets," "The faithful remnant," or "God's end-time army." There is a sense of pride in abusive churches because members feel they have a special relationship with God and His movement in the world. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth quotes a former member of one such group who states, "Although we didn't come right out and say it, in our innermost hearts we really felt that there was no place in the world like our assembly. We thought the rest of Christianity was out to lunch." However the Bible makes it

clear, that there are no spiritually elite groups or churches. Ephesians 4:36 states, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope, when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all.”

The Christian church universal is united by the same God, the same Holy Spirit, and the fundamental beliefs of the Bible which include such things as the Trinity, authority of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and so on. In these central truths we stand united. A church which believes itself to be elite and does not associate with other Christian churches is not motivated by the spirit of God but by divisive pride.

Persecution Complex

The sixth characteristic follows naturally. Because abusive churches see themselves as elite, they expect persecution in the world and even feed on it. Criticism and exposure by the media are seen as proof that they are the true church being persecuted by Satan. However, the persecution received by abusive churches is different from the persecution received by Jesus and the Apostles.

Jesus and the Apostles were persecuted for preaching the truth. Abusive churches bring on much of their negative press because of their own actions. Yet, any criticism received, no matter what the source—whether Christian or secular—is always viewed as an attack from Satan, even if the criticisms are based on the Bible. This makes it difficult to witness to a person in such a church for he will see your attempt to share the gospel with him as persecution. Often in cases like these, when I am accused of persecuting, I simply reply, “I am here talking to you with the Word of God which you say you believe. How can this be persecution?” This approach often helps in

continuing the dialogue with a member of an abusive church who has been brainwashed to believe that all opposition is persecution.

Targeting Young Adults

The seventh characteristic of abusive churches is that they tend to target young adults ages 18-25 who are in the middle class, well educated, idealistic, and often immature Christians. Young adults are the perfect age group to focus on because they are often looking for a cause to give their lives to, and they need love, affirmation, and acceptance. Often these churches will provide this, and the leaders frequently take the role of surrogate parents.

Painful Exit Process

The eighth characteristic is a painful and difficult exit process. Members in many such churches are afraid to leave because of intimidation, pressure, and threats of divine judgment. Sometimes members who exit are harassed and pursued by church leaders. The majority of the time, former members are publicly ridiculed and humiliated before the church, and members are told not to associate in any way with any former members. This practice is called shunning.

Many who leave abusive churches because of the intimidation and brainwashing, actually feel they have left God Himself. None of their former associates will fellowship with them, and they feel isolated, abused, and fearful of the world. One former member of a particular campus ministry said, “If you leave without the leadership’s approval, condemnation and guilt are heaped upon you. My pastor told me he thought it was satanic for me to leave and wondered if I could continue my salvation experience.”

Let me conclude this discussion by sharing some practical ways of reaching those who are involved in abusive churches. First,

we must begin with prayer. Witnessing to those brainwashed in abusive churches is often intimidating and difficult. Often leaders will not allow an individual member to meet with an outsider unless accompanied by an older, more experienced person who is trained in debating and/or intimidation. Therefore, we must pray (1) for a chance to speak with the individual{1} and that he would be open to what we have to share.{2}

Second, lovingly confront the person and surface some biblical issues. Often, abusive churches have a bizarre teaching or a theological error that can be pointed out. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth documents several examples of this. For instance, the leader of one church had strange teachings based on his claims of extra-biblical revelations from God.{3} These included dietary laws, sexual behavior, home decorations, and others. The leader of another group called doctors "medical deities." He also claimed medicines had demonic names and if taken, opened a person up to demonic influence.{4} Pointing out errors, inconsistencies, and bizarre beliefs may open the individual's mind and prompt him to begin asking questions.

Third, share articles you may find in the newspaper or in magazines on the particular church under discussion. The book that I have often quoted from, *Churches That Abuse*, is an excellent resource. The key is to get the individual to start asking questions and research answers for himself. Tell him to test everything with the Scriptures and not to be afraid to ask questions. If the leader is afraid or hesitant to answer a member's honest questions, the maturity of that leadership may be suspect.

Jesus, however, said that truth is a means of freedom, not bondage. He said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Notes

1. Ronald Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), p. 118.

2. Ibid., p. 181.

3. Ibid., p. 128.

4. Ibid., p. 170.

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God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally

Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an introduction and overview of Doug Pollock's book by the same title. Those who want to learn more about how to have natural and effective spiritual conversations are encouraged to read (and apply) Pollock's book for themselves.

Creating God Space



If you're a Christian, you probably wrestle from time to time with how best to share your faith with non-Christian friends and family. I mean, let's face it. We often *want* to share our faith. But we're a bit confused (maybe even overwhelmed) with how to go about it in a natural and non-threatening way. *Is* there a way to have spiritual conversations naturally?

According to Doug Pollock, the answer is "Yes"—and it all begins with something he calls "God Space." "I often wonder," he says, "what would happen if . . . the body of Christ could create low-risk, high-grace places for people to pursue their need to have spiritual conversations."{1} But Doug not only wonders about it, he's also spent the better part of his adult life actually doing it—and training others to do it too. Although he's had many roles, he's probably best known for his work as an author, speaker, and evangelism trainer for Athletes in Action.{2} His passion, however, is pointing people to Christ through spiritual conversations in which people have the freedom to simply be themselves.

You see, Doug believes that people actually want (and even need) to have such conversations. Moreover, they're often even willing to have them. The problem, of course, is that such conversations can often seem intimidating—even threatening—to both Christian and non-Christian alike. So Doug advocates creating a "safe space" in which to have such conversations. But he warns us that for many non-Christians in our world today, the church is often *not* perceived as safe.{3} Hence, he says, if we want to reach people for Christ, then *we've* got to go to *them*—and help create a "safe space" for spiritual conversations right where they are.

Doug calls it "God Space" —a space where "God is . . . encountered in . . . ways that address the longings and cries of the heart." In God Space "the 'unworthy' feel safe enough to bring their real selves . . . into the light, and to journey, one step at a time, toward the magnetic pull they sense deep in their souls." It's a space where "spiritual curiosity is aroused, and the message of Christianity becomes plausible."{4}

Does this sound like something you'd be interested in learning more about? Then keep reading as we consider Doug's book in more detail.

Spiritual Conversation-Killers

Doug Pollock offers some great advice about how to have natural, non-threatening spiritual conversations with those who don't know Christ. Before discussing this advice in more detail, however, we first need to pause and consider some of the ways in which we might unintentionally shut-down, or "kill," a spiritual conversation before it even has a chance to get going.

Doug describes ten "spiritual conversation-killers" in his book. Although we can't discuss them all, we'll at least mention a few of them. To get started, think of the non-Christian people you know and interact with on a somewhat regular basis. How many of them would be interested in having a "low-risk, high-grace" spiritual conversation with you? If your answer is few to none of them, then you might be guilty of the most basic spiritual conversation-killer of them all: "an unbelieving heart."{5} If we assume that the non-Christians we know aren't interested in talking about spiritual things, then we probably won't have many spiritual conversations with them.

And Doug says this is a big mistake. "I've had spiritual conversations with people all over the world," he writes, "including the supposed 'tough places.' I think it's because the Holy Spirit has given me a conviction that if God has put eternity in every person's heart, which is what Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, then *all* people were made for spiritual conversations."{6} So let's not "kill" an opportunity for spiritual conversations because of unbelief. Instead, let's assume that if we approach such conversations wisely, we'll find people eager to talk with us.

Okay, so how do we approach such conversations wisely? In my opinion, the best way to have good *spiritual* conversations is simply to apply some of the very same principles that go into having good conversations of any sort.{7} For example,

how well would my conversation go if I was disrespectful of the other person's beliefs or opinions? Or what if I came across as harsh, combative, or domineering? Would such conversations be successful? Probably not. And if that's the case with everyday conversations, then it's probably the case with spiritual conversations too. So if we want to have good spiritual conversations, we need to be humble, gracious, kind and polite. If not, we'll probably "kill" whatever spiritual conversations we might otherwise have had. And when that happens, no one wins.

Wondering Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations

In *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally,* Doug has four great chapters on *noticing, serving, listening,* and *wondering* your way into spiritual conversations. For our purposes, let's direct our attention to that final chapter, which involves "wondering" our way into spiritual conversations. "Of all the things you'll read in this book," Doug tells us, "this chapter holds the most promise if you truly want to see the quality and quantity of your spiritual conversations increase."{8}

So how does it work? How do we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations? As Doug lays it out for us, there are essentially two steps. First, we have to be really good listeners.{9} If we're not actively listening to what people are telling us, then we're not going to have much to wonder about. That's because we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations by asking good questions about what another person is telling us. That's step two. After listening carefully to what the other person is saying, we begin to wonder "out loud" by asking questions that are relevant to the conversation we're having.{10}

According to Doug, "good wondering questions" will

“flow naturally out of your context and . . . conversations.” They reveal “that you have listened thoughtfully.” They “are open-ended and promote more dialogue and reflection.” They “probe sensitively and reflectively into someone’s belief systems.” And finally, such questions encourage “others to investigate the Christian life” for themselves.{11}

So by listening carefully and asking good “wondering” questions about what you’re being told, you can open the door to all sorts of spiritual conversations. Doug even offers some examples of “good ways to start wondering.”{12} Suppose your conversation partner has made an interesting claim or expressed an intriguing perspective on some issue. You might respond by saying, “That’s an interesting perspective; I’m wondering how you arrived at that conclusion?”{13} Notice how such a question not only demonstrates an interest in, and respect for, the other person and their views—it also serves to keep the conversation moving forward in a positive direction. Indeed, once you get a knack for listening carefully and asking good wondering questions, who knows how many spiritual conversations you might find yourself having!

Bringing the Bible Into Your Conversations

Let’s now discuss Doug’s advice about bringing the Bible into our conversations.{15}

The word of God is powerful. Paul describes it as “the sword of the Spirit.”{16} And the author of Hebrews tells us it can “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” {17} Indeed, it’s partly because the Bible *is* so powerful, that we need to be careful about the way in which we bring it into our conversations.

As Doug reminds us, “If people sense you’re trying to use the Bible as an authoritative ‘crowbar’ to beat them into

submitting to your viewpoint, your conversation is likely over. However, if you humbly ask for permission to introduce the Scriptures into your dialogue, 'deep spiritual magic' begins to happen."{18} The key point here, of course, is *asking for permission*. This is important and Doug encourages us to always make a habit of it.{19} After all, if the person has given you permission to share something from the Bible, then they won't feel awkward or threatened when you do so. And if they *haven't* given you permission, then it's probably better just to wait and pray for a more opportune time.

Okay, that sounds good. But how can we know when it's right to ask for permission? Here we need a measure of wisdom and even plain common sense. In general, however, when the person expresses an *interest* in some issue about which the Bible speaks, it might be a good time to ask for *permission* to share what the Bible says. Doug gives the example of talking with some non-Christian college students about the meaning of love.{20} The students were intensely interested in this topic, but they were having a hard time defining what the word even meant. After discussing the issue for a bit, Doug asked for permission to share what the Bible has to say about love. Having gotten their permission, he directed them to the famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13. Primed and ready, the students eagerly listened to what the Bible had to say. Its message had suddenly become relevant to them, for it spoke directly to an issue about which they cared deeply.

If we could learn how to introduce the Bible like *that*, our non-Christian friends might be more eager to hear what it says. In the next section we'll conclude our discussion of Doug's book by considering "missed opportunities" and "burned bridges."{21}

Missed Opportunities and Burned Bridges

We've considered several ways to improve our conversations, but it's easy to make mistakes. So now we'll

consider Doug's advice about "missed opportunities" and "burned bridges." Can "missed opportunities" be reclaimed and "burned bridges" be rebuilt? And if so, then how do we do it?

Let's first consider missed opportunities. Suppose you had a conversation with a neighbor who made a comment that left a wide-open door for spiritual conversation—and you said . . . nothing. We've probably all had conversations like this. Maybe the comment caught us off guard, and we just weren't sure how to respond. Or maybe we felt too tired, or scared, or something else. Whatever the reason, we can "reclaim" such missed opportunities. It's often not even that hard. Doug tells of missing out on a great opportunity because he just wasn't sure what to say. About a month later, however, he got another opportunity. He told the person that he'd been thinking a lot about a comment which they had previously made. Intrigued, the person asked what it was—and almost immediately they were right back where they had left off a month earlier!{22}

Okay, that's the easy one. But what if we *didn't* remain silent. What if we said the *wrong* thing— and now feel like we've burned our bridges with another person? Granted, this is more difficult. But Doug throws down a challenge. For once we recognize and admit our mistake to ourselves, we can then confess it to God and bring the issue before Him in prayer. After praying about it, Doug says, we can actually go to the person and let them know that we've been thinking about how we "come across" in spiritual conversations. We can even ask if they'd be willing to give us "some honest feedback" about how others might perceive us in this area. And if so, then we can listen carefully and apologize for any mistakes we might have made. Of course, we can't predict how the other person will respond. But by taking this approach, we can go a long way toward restoring the relationship.{23}

If you'd be interested in creating some "God Space" for your own conversations, then I encourage you to get (and read)

Doug's book for yourself. I think you'll be really glad you did.

Notes

1. Doug Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 11-12.
2. For more on Doug, check out his website: www.godsgps.com/
3. Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
4. The citations in this paragraph can be found in Pollock, *God Space,* 20-21.
5. This is "Killer 1" in Doug's view. See Pollock, *God Space*, 24.
6. Ibid., 25.
7. In what follows, I briefly mention several of the spiritual conversation-killers which Doug discusses on pp. 29-32. Specifically, Doug mentions conversation "killers" like disrespect, control, judgment and combativeness.
8. Pollock, *God Space*, 65.
9. See Doug's chapter, "Listening Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations," in Pollock, *God Space*, 53-64.
10. Ibid., 14.
11. All of the quoted material in this paragraph comes from a section on "Good Wondering Questions" in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
12. See the examples under this section heading in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
13. Ibid., 73.
14. This is one way in which Doug likes to refer to non-Christians. See Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
15. See Pollock's chapter 9, "Bringing the Bible into your Conversations," in *God Space*, 87-99.
16. Ephesians 6:17.
17. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB).
18. Pollock, *God Space*, 95.
19. Ibid., 93.
20. See the discussion in Pollock, *God Space*, 90-94.

21. Doug discusses this topic in chapter 10, “Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Burned Bridges,” 100-106.
22. Doug shares this story on pp. 101-103.
23. The citations in this paragraph come from Doug’s discussion on p. 106.

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Will Everyone Be Saved? A Look at Universalism

Rick Wade covers some of the pros and cons in the universalism controversy. Bottom line? No.

In the spring of 2011, Pastor Rob Bell’s book *Love Wins* hit the book stores, but the furor over the book started even before that. The charge was heresy. Bell appeared to be teaching Universalism, the belief that everyone will be saved in the end. In fact, Bell *doesn’t* make a case for Universalism in the book, although his rejection of the traditional view of hell makes it seem so at first.



This will not be a review of *Love Wins* but rather a look at Universalism itself. It won’t do to simply label Universalism as heresy and be done with it. The way people responded to Bell’s book illustrates the problem.{1} It’s better to understand *why* this teaching has been and should be rejected.

It is important to try to represent others’ views fairly. This article, which is what aired on Probe’s radio program, is too short to do Universalism justice; there is way too much involved in it. Here I’ll confine myself to introducing some

of the important issues involved. However, a longer article in PDF form is available here to fill out the issue some more.{2}

Universalism has been believed by some Christians since the early centuries of the church. What makes it attractive? For one thing, Universalists wonder how a loving God could send people to hell—a place of conscious torment—forever. Furthermore, God is a God of justice, and a punishment of eternal torment seems incommensurate with our finite sins, as bad as they may be.

Universalists find scriptural support primarily in Paul's writings where he declares, for example, that "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom 5:18).

Before digging in, I need to make an important distinction. I'll be talking about *Christian* Universalism, not *pluralistic* Universalism. Pluralistic Universalism is the belief that everyone in the world will be "saved" by some almighty being or force that the various religions understand in different ways. *Christian* Universalism, by contrast, is the belief that Christianity holds the truth about God, man, and salvation, and that, contrary to the traditional belief, *everyone* will be saved through faith in Christ, even if on the other side of the grave.

The Love and Justice in God

Universalists take the traditional view of hell as being completely out of keeping with the loving character of God.{3} Philosopher Thomas Talbott believes that, because love is basic to the nature of God, everything God does has a loving aspect. Thus, there can be no eternal judgment against a person.

Because of this, Talbott sees God's justice primarily as *remedial* or *restorative*, not as *retributive* or *punitive*.

Speaking of Israel, for example, he points out that God "did not spare the natural branches" (Romans 11:21), yet eventually God will have mercy on them. Couldn't it be the same for the Gentiles, too? God's grand project since the Fall has been to save people. If He doesn't save all, hasn't He failed?{4}

Scripture claims both that God is just and that God is love (see Deut. 32:41 and John 4:8). It's also clear that God administers retributive justice. This is seen in Isaiah 3:11 where God says that what the wicked "have dealt out shall be done to him." Consider, too, God's judgment against the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deut. 20:16-17). There is no mention of restoration.

For Universalists, love is supreme; justice serves love. Why not the other way around? Why shouldn't love serve justice? N. T. Wright asks why *either* love or justice ought to be seen as the highest expression of God's nature. Perhaps, he says, both are expressions of God's *holiness*.{5}

The cross work of Christ is instructive here. Our hope for salvation rests on the fact that on the cross "He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21; see also Rom. 3:25; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 10:10,12,14; Isa. 53:5). What kind of judgment fell on Christ? It was *punitive,* not *restorative,* and it was properly ours.

Still, even with all this, how can we possibly regard *everlasting* punishment as just? It's important to understand that judgment isn't merely a reflection of a sin:punishment ratio. Believing in God in the biblical sense involves both our acceptance of God in all His glory and our submission to Him whatever He may command or promise. Thus, to *not* believe in God in this full sense is to reject God. So when people will be punished in hell, it won't be simply a matter of paybacks for individual sins. It will be because they rejected God.

Paul and Universalism

In addition to the appeal to the love of God, Universalists often look to the letters of Paul for support. Writes Thomas Talbott, "Unlike most conservatives, I see no way to escape the conclusion that St. Paul was an obvious Universalist."{6}

Where does he find this in Paul's letters? Romans 5 and 11 are key passages. In Romans 5, Paul compares the first Adam with the second Adam, Christ. In verse 18 he writes, "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." In Romans 11:32 he writes, "For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all." "All" is taken quite literally to mean everyone tainted by sin.{7} What can we say in response?

Paul's main point in Romans, with respect to the issue at hand, is that salvation is not just for Jews but for all people, and it comes through faith in Jesus. In chapters 1 through 4, Paul argues that everyone knows God exists but sins anyway and is deserving of punishment. Furthermore, the Jews had no safety net because they possessed the law; they broke the law themselves. Salvation has come through faith in Christ alone. In fact, faith has always been the basis of salvation. Paul sums up in chapter 5: through Adam everyone is tainted by sin; through Christ alone is found salvation for everyone. That he doesn't mean every single person *will* necessarily be saved is clear in Romans 11:22. The Jews who will be grafted back in are those who "do not continue in their unbelief."

Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 is an important passage for understanding Paul's teaching on eternal punishment. There Paul says that those who do not obey the gospel "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Gregory

MacDonald, a Universalist, acknowledges that this is an especially problematic passage for Universalists.{8}

Jesus and Universalism

It's often been noted that Jesus makes the strongest statements on hell in Scripture. Universalists believe they have been misunderstood.

Given that Paul clearly taught Universalism, Thomas Talbott believes, passages such as Matthew 25, where Jesus spoke of separating the sheep from the goats, must be interpreted in that light. Talbott characterizes Jesus' prophetic teachings as "hyperbole, metaphor, and riddle . . . parable and colorful stories."{9} He says that "Had it been Jesus' intention to address the question of universal salvation . . . in a clear and systematic way, I'm sure he was capable of doing so."{10} Jesus is simply teaching what would have been our fate were it not for the atonement.{11}

Did Jesus make any clear statements about the finality of judgment? I'll mention just three passages.

In Matthew chapter 7 we read the severe warning from Jesus that in the end not everyone who claims Jesus as Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. "I declare to them," Jesus said, "'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (vv. 21-23). There is no mention of a second chance later.

In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), when those who weren't prepared knocked on the door and asked to be let in, the bridegroom refused, saying he didn't know them. One must be prepared or be locked out. There's no hint of a later unlocking of the door.

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus speaks of "everlasting punishment." "Everlasting" is the English translation of the Greek word

aiōnion. Universalists argue that this word refers to an age of punishment because the root word, *aiōn*, means just that—an age with a beginning and an end. But aiōnion isn't just a form of aiōn; it is a form of the word *aiōnios* which means "eternal."

According to the standard Greek lexicon of our day, aiōnios can mean, among other things, with a beginning but without an end.{12} One example is when Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:2,3). Paul says that this new home is "eternal in the heavens" (Romans 5:1).{13}

When Jesus speaks of punishment in Matt. 25:46 as everlasting, He means just that. Everlasting life or everlasting punishment; it's one or the other.

Postmortem Salvation

Because obviously not everyone dies in Christ, postmortem salvation is an essential component of Universalism. There must be people saved after death.

There is no direct scriptural teaching about postmortem salvation. The closest is the much disputed passage in 1 Peter 3 where Peter speaks of Jesus making proclamation to the spirits in prison (vv. 19-20). It is not at all clear that the event spoken of in 1 Peter refers to the evangelization of all the lost after death. Theologian and New Testament scholar Wayne Grudem names five possible interpretations of this passage in an article, and says that even more are possible.{14}

Gregory MacDonald believes that Rev. 21:25, which says that the gates to the New Jerusalem will never be closed, indicates that unbelievers can exercise faith after death and come in. Verse 24 speaks of the kings of the earth entering the city along with the glory and honor of the nations. MacDonald identifies these with the kings defeated earlier with the

beast (19:19). They had been enemies; now they are not.

In response, we note that "kings of the earth" is a common designation in Scripture for earthly rulers.{15} It is entirely reasonable to see John, in Revelation, as talking about one group of kings who side with the beast and another group who are part of the kingdom and who enter to bring homage to *the* King.

The wall around the city marks a boundary between those who may enter and those outside.{16} "Outside" doesn't necessarily mean simply outside spatially but can also mean those not included in the circle or group.{17} Those who are able to enter the city are those whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27). No promise is given that a person's name can be entered after death.

There is no clear promise in Scripture that there will be an opportunity for people to be saved after death. Are we willing to risk the eternal damnation of people by presenting the supposition that there will be?{18} Universalism is conjecture built upon a basic notion of what the love of God must mean. The case built from Scripture, however, is too fragile to sustain it.

This article barely scrapes the surface of this subject. I urge you to look at the longer article, "Universalism: A Biblical and Theological Critique," also on Probe's web site.

Notes

1. My comments regarding the hasty reaction to *Love Wins* are given in a short article on Probe's web site titled "(Ir)Responsible Critique: The Rob Bell Affair."

2. The longer version, titled "Universalism: A Biblical and Theological Critique," is available on Probe's web site.

3. Gregory MacDonald, a Universalist, states that "The love of

God is very important for the Universalist. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a strong belief in God's love that often drives people towards Universalism." Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006), 100. Note that "Gregory MacDonald" is a pen named used by Robin A. Parry. To reduce the possibility for confusion over book titles and author names, I will refer to him as MacDonald when referencing his book *The Evangelical Universalist*.

4. See for example John A.T. Robinson, *In the End God* (New York: Harper & Row: 1968), 116.

5. N. T. Wright, "Universalism and the World-Wide Community," *Churchman* 89 (1975): 197-212.

6. Thomas Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgment," in Parry and Partridge, *Universal Salvation?*, 48.

7. Thomas Talbott, "Christ Victorious," in Parry and Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation?*, 18-19.

8. MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*. 151-54.

9. Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgment," in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge., eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 43.

10. Talbott, "A Pauline Interpretation," 50-51, n. 18.

11. Ibid., 45.

12. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press,1979), s.v. "???????".

13. Other Scriptures that refer to our future as eternal include Luke 1:33, John 4:14, John 6:51, 58; 8:51; 10:28;

11:26; and Rev. 22:5. Another reason we know eternal life extends into the future in a temporal sense is because it is the life of the Son and he has no end (1 Jn. 5:11; cf. Jn. 1:4). We will have life everlasting because Jesus, to whom we are now connected, has life everlasting.

14. Wayne A. Grudem, "Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19-20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature," *Trinity Journal* 7.2 (Fall, 1986): 3-31.

15. See Matt. 17:25; Acts 4:26; Rev. 6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9.

16. Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Wall, Hedge, Palisade," by N. Hillyer, 3:948. Hillyer takes the wall to be symbolic, but the same meaning would apply to a literal interpretation.

17. For other Scriptures on this use of "outside" see Mk. 4:11; 1 Cor. 5:12f; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12.

18. See Jay Wesley Richards, "A Pascalian Argument Against Universalism," in William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 217-218.

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The Professor: Why Are You a Christian? – When Challenged,

Can You Defend Your Faith in Christ

Are our adults ready to give a defense of the gospel? When challenged, can they give a reasonable explanation of their faith? Dr. Bohlin presents a sobering view of this question based upon years of experience questioning high school and college-age students on the basis for their belief in Christ. By exposing their lack of cogent answers to questions they may be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

Over the last ten years, I have used a very effective technique to help teens realize their unpreparedness for the step toward college. It seems our young people are heading into public and even Christian colleges thinking they are ready for the challenge to their faith that higher learning can be.

Probe Ministries has sponsored a college prep conference since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

If you remember the thousands of college radicals who protested and picketed in the ‘60s and ‘70s, they found their push for change was not very effective. Instead, many of them stayed in college, obtained Masters Degrees and PhDs. After all, it was easier than getting a real job! As a result, they are now your children’s professors!

The college campus was an anti-Christian breeding ground several decades ago and now it is even worse. Christianity is not so much openly mocked as it is marginalized and deemed a

false and mischievous mythology.

If you haven't already heard some of these statistics, you need to hold onto your hat.

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years.{1} Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our churched youth are making many of their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years.{2}

With this statistical background, it's plain our young people need some preparation before going on to college or the military. But as most parents of teens know, just telling them they need this is less than likely to be convincing.

Enter the Professor. The technique I mentioned at the beginning is to impersonate an atheistic college professor doing research on the religious beliefs of young people. Sometimes the students know I am playing a role with them, but occasionally I play the professor and the students are none the wiser.

A Simple Question

When I step to the front of the room, I introduce myself as Professor Hymie Schwartz (a name borrowed from my late colleague Jerry Solomon who played this role far better than I do). I tell the group that, since I am conducting research on the religious beliefs of young people, their youth pastor, counselor, principal, teacher—whatever, has allowed me to visit with them.

I begin the conversation something like this: "Since this is a

church or Christian school I presume you are all Christians. Is anyone not a Christian?" Of course no one raises their hand. But I am always aware that some may indeed not be believers and may not appreciate my questioning so I am always paying attention.

At this point I simply call on someone, usually someone who isn't really paying attention or is engrossed in conversation with a neighbor. "You! Are you a Christian?" No one has ever answered no. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, with hands casually stuck in my pockets, I demand, "Why?"

Students are paying attention now. This is for real. Now consider my question for yourself. If Peter warns us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks to give a defense for the hope that we have, this is a pretty basic question. In our highly secular culture, if someone finds out you're a Christian, they may indeed ask you why. Peter says you ought to have an answer.

But this simple question why is usually something our young people, and even their parents, have never really considered. Their Christian faith is certainly something they would claim is central to their lives, but the dumbfounded looks on their faces tells me repeatedly that this question is a new one.

It's usually about this time that any parents sitting in the back are suddenly quite relieved I'm not talking to them!

By asking such questions, I can get them pretty riled up and confused. The point is not to have fun but to help them see that they need to be prepared and think a little about why Christianity is important to them and why they think it's true.

"I Asked Jesus into My Heart!"

Having their Christianity questioned usually comes as a

surprise and even shock. Rather than directly answering the question, they try to tell me *how* they became a Christian. It usually takes the form of confidently saying they asked Jesus into their heart.

The professor quickly fires back, “You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What’s he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!” That always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, “No, I mean it’s like I trusted Jesus as my Savior.”

Again the professor will fire back quickly with a question like, “Why did you do that?” or “Savior? What did you need saving from?” I think you can see where this is going. It really is not difficult to pick something from what he or she said and challenge it. I either pretend I don’t understand what they said, forcing them to better explain themselves (which is rare), or I deliberately ask them why they think that way, or how they know that.

In answer to “How do you know that?” I am often told that “It says so in the Bible!” They usually can’t tell me where the Bible says that. I also ask if the Bible is true, and they say it is. But when I ask, “How do you know it’s true?” the blank stare reemerges.

Sometimes a student will say, “Because it’s the word of God!” Now I can really dig a little deeper. In response to further questioning, they usually can’t tell me where the Bible says it’s the Word of God nor can they tell me why the Bible is different from The Book of Mormon or the Qur’an. If there is a youth pastor or chaplain present there is usually an embarrassed look on their face or a head buried in their hands.

By this time the class is very tense and full of nervous laughter. When I reach a dead end with a student—for instance

when they say, “I don’t know” with a very resigned and defeated voice—I look for one of the laughing students and ask, “What about you?” Of course that gets everybody’s attention again and off we go.

While I admit I have a little fun playing this role, it never ceases to break my heart at how ill-prepared our young people are to follow Peter’s advice to always be prepared with an answer. I have yet to find a student in ten years who is willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the professor.

“You’re a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous Bigot!”

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

When I have challenged students to tell me why they think or believe Christianity is true, some will turn to their own subjective experience. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, specifically when speaking to a Christian audience. But someone who doesn’t even believe in God will frequently find ways to truly make fun of this element.

A student may describe that Jesus speaks to them in their prayer time, to which I quickly ask what His voice sounds like or how they know it was Jesus and not indigestion. The blank stares usually resume at this point. We have become so comfortable in our Christian bubble sometimes that we frequently don’t see how unintelligible our language is to those outside the community of faith. It’s tough to share the gospel that way.

Sometimes a student will interject that they believe in Jesus because that’s what their family has taught them or it’s what they learned in church. I usually pounce on that pretty quickly and repeat that this student believes Christianity is

true because their parents told them so. The student usually agrees. After commending them for honoring their parents I tell them that's really pretty stupid. Pausing a second for the shock to register, I go on about the boy raised in India whose parents are Hindu and he respects his parents and believes Hinduism is true, so the boy in India and this student are both headed to heaven because they trusted their parents!

One time a student stammered around and eventually agreed with my statement as his youth pastor put his head in his hands.

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those who don't believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, "Just because I don't believe the same fairy tale as you, I'm going to hell?" When they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, "You're a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!"

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer, with Gentleness and Respect

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this routine even though they are routinely embarrassed by their inability to handle the challenge. When Peter admonished all of us to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), they fail miserably. Perhaps as a parent, you may be glad that I don't do this with adult groups.

Often students will try to turn the conversation in their favor by asking the professor a question. I quickly dismiss that idea by simply answering that *I'm* asking the questions. But when we're done, if time allows I attempt to leave them with hope by quickly summarizing how I, Dr. Ray Bohlin, Vice-

President of Probe Ministries, would answer the same question.

Here's the outline of my response. In a calm voice I quickly assert that I know there is a God. As a scientist I look principally at how marvelously our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet are designed for complex life here on earth. The number of highly improbable coincidences rules out chance and strongly implies design. This is reinforced by the evidence from biology of the incredible complexity of life, particularly the coded information in DNA. This remarkable molecule with its accompanying system of transcription and translation screams for intelligence.

The fact that all people have some sense of right and wrong, even though we may disagree sometimes, tells us we are comparing our morality to some invisible standard outside ourselves that must come from a supreme Law Giver. I am convinced there is a supernatural God.

If this God exists, then has He spoken to man? I quickly tell about the uniqueness of Scripture, written by forty authors from eight countries over fifteen hundred years in three languages and all with a consistent and unique message of a God of love who ransomed us from our sins. Where we have archaeological evidence it consistently confirms the accuracy of biblical events. I am convinced the Bible is the true and unique Word of God.

The Bible throughout is about Jesus, who repeatedly claimed to be the unique divine Son of God and offered his death and resurrection on behalf of mankind as proof. That Jesus bodily rose from the dead is the only rational conclusion of the evidence of the empty tomb. On top of that, my personal experience of the last thirty-seven years has shown me again and again the unique love and power of God.

So what about you? Why are *you* a Christian?

Notes

1. “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” 2007, www.lifeway.com/article/165949/, accessed May 15, 2010.
2. Youth Transition Network has researched this problem over the last ten years and has excellent resources, videos, research, and books and DVDs for purchase. Take a look at www.ytn.org.

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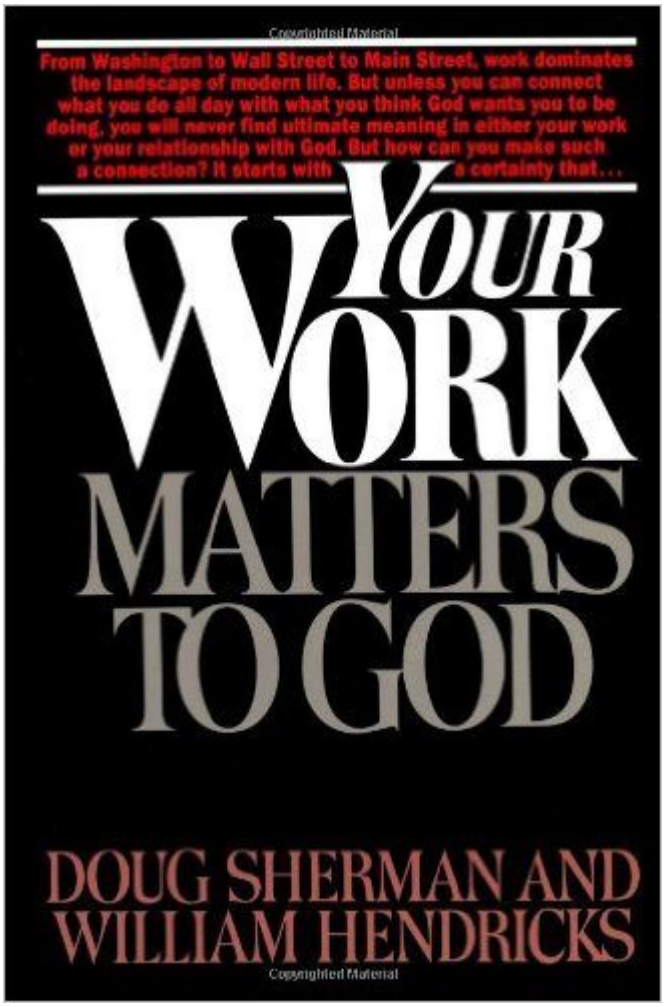
Your Work Matters to God

Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.





In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*,{1} Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, "Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence."{2}

First, let's explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you'll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, "Who am I, and why am I important?" That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You're suddenly a "nobody," and you are not important because you are

not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, "What impact will this have on my career?"

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life.{3} He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.{4}

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we're examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don't really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn't charge them with, "Go and make disciples of all nations which aren't in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies." No, He said, "Here's the garden, now cultivate it." He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won't

last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: *time*. It's okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness *now*, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn't eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there's everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, "Real work is serving God, and then there's what others do" (which sets us up for condescension), or "Real work is serving God, and then there's what I have to do" (which sets

us up for false guilt and a sense of “missing it”).

It’s an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we’re making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It’s unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what’s going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn’t lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our *only* priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory.{5} Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we’ll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here's a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, *as if you were serving the Lord, not men*, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn't notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, "I see you. And I appreciate what you're doing." Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world *before* sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God's good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

> After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift![{6}]

Being happy in our work doesn't depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

Why Work is Good

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn't contribute to what He doesn't want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God's gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.

2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!”{7}

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”{8}

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.{10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

Notes

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God.* Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, The Message.
7. 2 Thess. 3:10

8. 1 Tim. 5:8
9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.
10. Matthew 22:37-39

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