

Why Young People are Leaving the Church

The Need for Apologetics

A two-part article series

Dr. Randy Douglass

October 21, 2009

Closing the Back Door: The Need for Christian Education

Part One

About the Author

Randy Douglass is Adjunct Professor of Religion at Charleston Southern University as well as a Bible teacher at Palmetto Christian Academy in Mount Pleasant, SC. He has a Doctor of Ministry degree and is currently working on the Doctor of Education degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. He is the coauthor of two books with Dr. Norman Geisler: *Bringing Your Faith to Work: Answers for Break-Room Skeptics* (Baker Books, 2005) and *Integrity at Work: Finding Your Ethical Compass in a Post-Enron World* (Baker Books, 2007)

The Back Door is Open

In my World Religions class at a Christian university, I had an interesting cast of characters for students. About one-third of the students were solid in their Christians faith. The next group was somewhere in-between, trying to decide if the Christian faith they were raised in was the faith they now wanted to live by. The last group was definitely not Christian in thought and practice. In fact, two of these students were Wiccans.

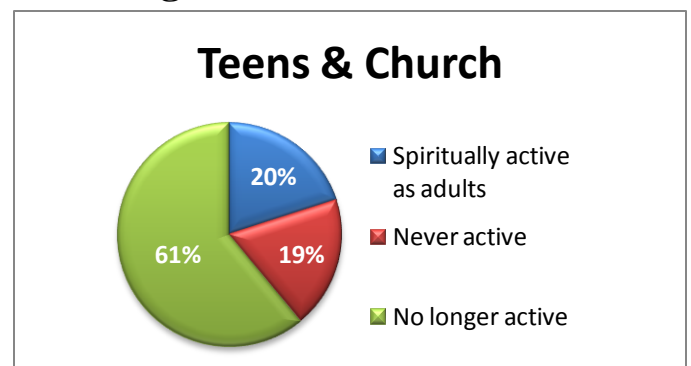
After class one day, I was talking with Kathy, one of the Wiccans. She told me that she was raised in a good Southern Baptist church. However, she had many questions about the Bible that no one could answer. Was it really the Word of God or just of man? What about all of the errors she heard about? Aren't there other ways to God than just through Jesus? On the outside she conformed, but on the inside she was full of doubts. Her college roommate, who was a Wiccan, convinced her that Christianity was not true. Eventually, Kathy walked away from Christianity and became a Wiccan convert.

I told Kathy that Christianity is the one credible faith and that no other religion could stand up to it in terms of logic and evidence. I asked her to listen in class with an open mind, and let the evidence alone convince her. She agreed to do that, and I committed to answer her questions in class.

Sadly, Kathy is not alone in her departure from the church. The hard truth is that we are seeing a large number of our adolescents walk away from the church and abandon the faith by the time they leave college. Many of these will never return. Why is this happening and what can we do to stop this mass exodus? These articles have been written in answer to these questions. In the first article, we will examine the reality of adolescent church dropouts and look at why this is occurring. In the second article, we will explore the more important question of *when* these adolescents are leaving, and conclude with some solutions to this problem.

Christian Adolescents are Going AWOL

Recent studies reveal the staggering number of young people who are dropping out of church. In a study done in 2006 by George Barna, he found that six out of ten 20-somethings who were involved in church during their teen years no longer attended church. The survey showed that 20% who were church-ed as teens remained spiritually active at age 29. 19% who were never church-ed as teens remained unconnected to a church. 61% who were church-ed as



teens became disengaged by the time they were 23. Most of these 20-somethings who leave the church never return. The Barna research showed that the religious activity of teenagers is not translating into spiritual commitment as adults in their 20s and 30s.

A 2007 USA Today article discussed a LifeWay Research survey, which showed that seven in ten Protestant teenagers stopped attending church for *at least* a year by age twenty-three. This survey was conducted of 1,023 adults aged 18 to 30 who regularly attended church in high school. 34% had not returned by the age of thirty. "This is sobering news that the church needs to change the way it does ministry," says Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Why are Church Adolescents Dropping Out?

College: Bias against Evangelical Students

There are at least five reasons that adolescents drop out of church. In a recent survey of 1,269 faculty members across 712 different secular colleges and universities, 53% of respondents admitted to harboring unfavorable feelings toward evangelical students. This survey was conducted by Gary Tobin, president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research. The professors' defense was that the anti-evangelical bias did not translate into acts of classroom discrimination. Can that really be true? The rule of thumb is this: where there is smoke, there is usually fire.

Intellectual Skepticism: Angry Tribe of Opinionated Educators

As a college professor in a secular university (University of Texas), J. Budziszewski sees firsthand the bias of secular professors against Christianity in the university classroom. He labels them as the "angry tribe of opinionated educators." Budziszewski believes that college is a war zone for young believers who are not prepared for the battle of their faith. He states,

Modern institutions of higher learning have changed dramatically in the last half-century, and from the moment students set foot on the contemporary campus, their Christian convictions and discipline are assaulted. "Faith is just a crutch," they hear from friends and teachers. "The Bible is just mythology." "Christianity is judgmental and intolerant." "Morality is different everywhere." "Everyone must find their own truth." "I can be good without God." "Jesus was just a man who died." No wonder so many lose their faith! (Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*, 2004, p. 17)

Sadly, Budziszewski is correct in his assessment. The problem is that we are seeing an alarming number of young Christians walk away from the faith by the time they finish college.

Surface Answers: Lifestyle Changes

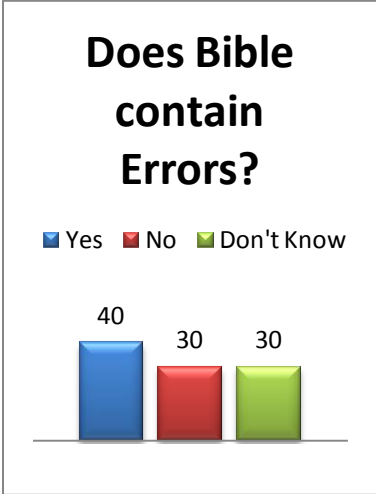
LifeWay Research wanted to know *why* young people were abandoning the church. They found that 97% of the "dropouts" listed life-change issues as a reason they left the church. With a shrug of their shoulders, their reasons were as follows: "I wanted a break from church" (27%); "I moved to college and stopped attending church" (25%); "work responsibilities prevented me from attending" (23%); or "I moved too far away from church to continue attending" (22%).

Digging Deeper: Doubts then Departure

However, there must be something else going on. Secular college and lifestyle changes cannot explain away the large exodus of young people from the church. Britt Beemer of America’s Research Group was commissioned to find out more about those who are leaving the church as the surveys of LifeWay Research and Barna discovered. Beemer felt that those answers were too shallow to explain the massive loss on our hands. Not content with the surface answers, he decided to dig deeper. He surveyed 1,000 people with three criteria: ages 20 to 29; those who said that they attended church nearly every week when growing up, but never or seldom go today; and those who attended conservative and evangelical churches.

1,000 Church Dropouts:

- **20-29**
- **No longer attend church**
- **Attended conservative churches**



Why did these young adults who regularly attended church growing up, seldom or never attend today? Beemer received the usual surface answers of “lifestyle changes,” so he dug deeper. Is biblical belief at the root of the exodus from the church as it was for Kathy? Interestingly enough, the majority of these dropouts held to a strong belief in God. 86% believed that God exists and created the world. When he asked if they believed they were saved and would go to heaven upon death, 66% said yes, 14% said no, while 20% were not sure.

However, when it came to the Bible, the majority of them felt that it was not a credible document. Consider the following questions about the veracity of the Bible:

Why doubt the Bible:

- **Written by men (24%)**
- **Not translated correctly (18%)**
- **Contradicts itself (15%)**
- **Evolution proves Bible is wrong (18%)**
- **Bible has errors (11%)**
- **If God, why suffering (7%)**
- **Hypocrites (6%)**

When asked if they thought the Bible contained errors, 40% said yes, 30% did not know, while only 30% said no. When asked what made them begin to doubt the Bible, the answers given were in the chart at the right:

Now we are finally getting somewhere! The primary reason adolescents are abandoning the church is not a matter of lifestyle changes. Lifestyle changes simply provide them with the *opportunity* to walk away from church with few questions asked. The primary reason adolescents are going AWOL is because of a deep distrust in the Bible. These adolescents had questions about the Bible that were not sufficiently answered. But wait a minute? Didn’t the majority of these young people go to Sunday school? Would this not be the place for teaching doctrinal truth?

Sunday School—Taught but Not Caught

Beemer had assumed that Sunday school was effectively teaching these young people. Of the 1,000 interviews, 606 of these 20-somethings were Sunday school students. Three out of five attended Sunday school when they went to church. That is very surprising when one considers the answers to the questions in the following chart.

The numbers showed that attending Sunday school did not help these young people develop a Christian worldview. One would think that those who regularly attended Sunday school would have deeper religious convictions than those who did not. However, the survey found the opposite. The causes for the church teen dropouts are many, but one thing is certain: Sunday school is not solving the problem.

Sunday School Questions	Attend SS	No SS
1. Regularly attend Sunday School?	Yes 61%	No 39%
2. Good people do <u>not</u> need to go to church?	Yes (40%)	Yes (29%)
3. Church relevant to you now?	No (46%)	No (40%)
4. Become more anti-church now?	Yes (39%)	Yes (27%)

Putting it All Together

We have seen the hard reality that between 60-70% of our church teens are dropping out of church when they reach college. When we asked why, we saw that college professors, the atmosphere of intellectual skepticism, as well as life changes were most commonly given as reasons. However, in a survey of 1000 church dropouts, it was revealed that before the departure, there were doubts. The primary predictor of departure was when an adolescent had doubts in the veracity of the Bible. Now we understand that lifestyle changes simply provided these teens with the opportunity to leave the church.

In the next article, we will discover the answer to the most important question of *when* are these teens truly departing from the faith? We will conclude with giving some practical, doable suggestions for the church as well as for the parent.

Part Two: When are Church Adolescents Dropping Out?

When are we losing this group of young people? In our last article, we saw that Britt Beemer of America’s Research Group surveyed 1,000 young people aged 20-29, who regularly attended church while growing up but not today, and attended conservative or evangelical churches. Beemer dug deep to ask them why they no longer went to church. He discovered that the majority of these dropouts doubted the veracity of the Bible. But when did these doubts develop?

Beemer’s study went on to reveal the answer. He discovered not only *why* young people were leaving the church, but also *when*. He discovered of all the 20 to 29-year-old evangelicals who attended church regularly but no longer do so:

- 95% attended church regularly during their elementary and middle school years
- 55% attended church regularly during high school
- 11% were still going to church during college

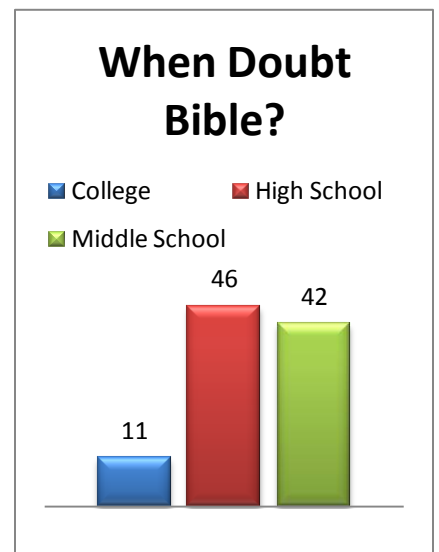
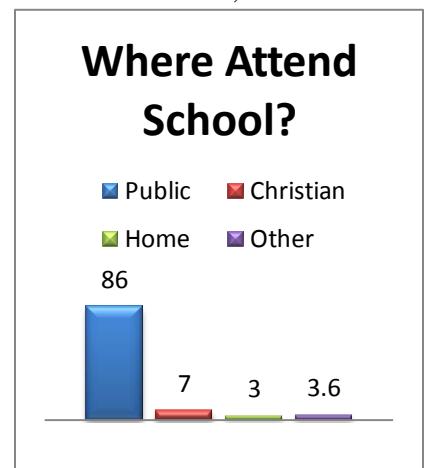
These findings are both revealing and startling. Most people assume that we lose our young people in college. However, this most recent survey shows that 89% have begun to walk away from the church by the time they entered college. Why is this occurring? He found that in the hearts and minds of these church-ed young people, there was a delayed reaction going on. First came the doubts, then came the departure. Many students did not begin doubting their faith *in* college; they just departed by the time they *went* to college.

As we will see, high school was when we lost nearly half of this group. A large group was lost even earlier in middle school due to doubts about the accounts and stories in the Bible being true. Of those who doubted the veracity of Scripture, four in nine said they had their first doubts in high school.

Beemer wanted to ascertain where these young people went to school. When asked what type of high school they attended, they answered public (86%), Christian (7%), home school (3%), and other (3.6%). Therefore, the primary place of schooling for these dropouts was the public school system.

The next two questions were even more eye opening. When asked at what age they began to question contents in Bible, the answers were early college (11%), high school (46%), and middle school (42%). This number comes from a combination of grades 7-9 (29%) and grades 4-6 (13%). When Beemer asked them if this questioning was beginning of their doubt in the Bible, 56% said yes, 31% said no, while 13% were not sure.

What this means is that by the time our adolescents get to college, most are already gone! Their hearts are fertile soil to the seeds of doubt. Make no mistake about it. College professors are not the primary casters of the seeds of doubt. They are simply the harvesters of the fruit of doubt that was placed deep in the hearts of these people when they were in high school and middle school.



Effective discipleship must address these doubts in the hearts of our young people *before* they go to college, not afterwards. By then it is too late. What can be done to stem the loss of our adolescents who are dropping out of church?

Solutions to Close the Back Door

Southern Baptist Convention researcher Ed Stetzer noted:

There is no easy way to say it, but it must be said. Parents and churches are not passing on a robust Christian faith and an accompanying commitment to the church. We can take some solace in the fact that many do eventually return. But, Christian parents and churches need to ask the hard question, “What is it about our faith commitment that does not find root in the lives of our children?”

Remember that belief in the Bible is a major predictor of whether a young person will leave the church and whether he or she will one day return. However, let us not lull ourselves into complacency by thinking that most of these dropouts will one day return when they have children. When asked if they expected to attend church regularly after they had children, only 38% said yes, while 32% said no, and 30% did not know. These numbers do not provide a lot of “solace” for the majority will not return even after having children.

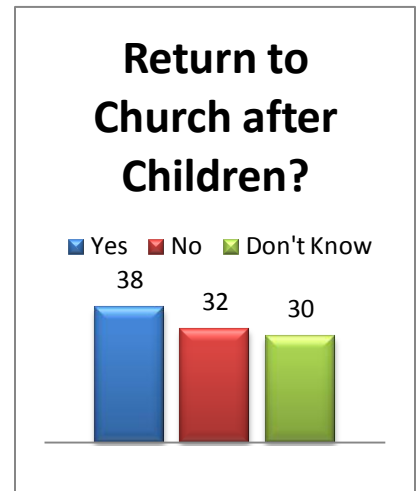
We have seen that a full 62% of these 1,000 absentees did not believe all the accounts and stories in the Bible. What should the church do about this problem? How can we begin to stop the flow of our adolescents who are dropping out of the church? The answer is to recognize that the primary reason for their abandonment is distrust in the Bible and to answer those questions and show them that the Bible is credible. We must answer their questions before they go to college while there is still time. To accomplish this, we must do three things:

1. Teach apologetics.

What is apologetics? 1 Peter 3:15 is the classic text for apologetics which says, “*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect....*” The phrase “give an answer” is from the Greek word *apologia* from which comes our English word “apologetics.”

Apologia was a Greek legal term, meaning among other things: an answer, or a verbal defense. An apologetic is a defense, or a statement of a position one holds or wants to defend or prove. In this case, the cause is Christ and Christianity. Apologetics does not mean an excuse or apologizing for what you believe. Rather, apologetics is the presenting of Christian evidence and logical arguments or reasons why a person ought to believe in Christ.

Unbelievers have good questions, but we have good answers. Rational people, including adolescents, want evidence for the claim that Jesus is the Son of God before they place their trust in Him. Remember that these 1000 dropouts departed from church because they had many questions, especially about the Bible. We must be prepared to answer such questions as: where does the belief in a God come from? Are all religions true? How do you know God exists? If there is a God, why is their



evil and suffering in this world? Is the Bible alone the Word of God? What about all of the errors in the Bible? Is Jesus really the Son of God? Is there only one way to heaven? These questions must be answered or our adolescents will one day walk out.

“The objections that unbelievers raise are not trivial. They often cut deep into the heart of the Christian faith and challenge its very foundations. If miracles are not possible, then why should we believe Christ was God? If God can’t control evil, is He really worthy of worship? Face it: if these objections cannot be answered, then we may as well believe in fairy tales. These are reasonable questions which deserve reasonable answers.” (Geisler, 1990, p. 11)

We must prepare our children for the questions and objections to the Christian faith. Too many Christians go out into battle ill equipped for the war. The war zone for the Christian begins in middle school and into high school. It continues on to the college campus, which even may include the Christian college campus. For the disciple after college, the war zone moves into the workplace, which is filled with different worldviews and religions.

“Most skeptics have only heard the questions and believed that there were no answers. But we have some great answers to their questions. Christianity is true. That means that reality will always be on our side, and we just need to find the appropriate evidence to answer whatever question is asked” (Ibid, 11).

2. Apologetics in the Pulpit.

What should the church do about this problem? We must make apologetic & worldview training a core part of our discipleship process, all the way from Sunday school to the pulpit. The pulpit is the primary means of teaching God’s Word to the gathered congregation. All week long, those who attend the church are bombarded in the school, workplace and media by messages that undermine the authority of God’s Word. Apologetics is one of the most life-giving things that a pastor can inject into the veins of his church. Believers need to hear not just sermons *from* the Bible but also *on* the Bible. Is it credible and relevant to our lives and world? We must defend the Word in this post-Christian world. We must make the connection between fact and faith so that the Bible again becomes authoritative and relevant in the church.

There is also an opportunity of which we must be aware. When Beemer asked those who are no longer attending church if they plan to come to church during the Easter and Christmas holidays, 49% said no, but 51% said yes. The church is always full on these most important Christian celebrations. Many of these absentee adolescents will be in church on these two days. Since this is true, the pastor must become intentional and preach apologetically to those who come to church on Christmas and Easter. Instead of having a Christmas play with children in bathrobes on Sunday morning, preach about how we know that God really did become a man. Instead of having a choir cantata on Easter Sunday morning, preach about how we know that a man named Jesus actually lived, died on the cross, and three days later, His tomb was empty! Use this opportunity to speak to the questions of these dropouts on the credibility of Christianity and the Bible.

Back Door Solutions

1. Teach Apologetics
2. In the Pulpit
3. In Sunday School

3. Reeducate Sunday school.

Churches need to evaluate the teachers who are teaching Sunday school and ensure they know how to answer the skeptical questions about their topic. Students are not being taught how to defend their faith, and how to answer skeptical questions. Many teachers have not been trained in apologetics themselves. It is possible that some teachers may even harbor some doubts themselves. Every church should provide apologetic training for their teachers from at least middle school and up. Our teachers must not teach Bible stories as moral “tales” but as historic fact...and then be able to give the evidence to back it up.

Sunday school curriculum from middle school through adults needs to include a steady diet of apologetics. Our entire culture (including secular schools) is aggressively teaching the apologetics of evolution and secular humanism. They indoctrinate our students in the humanistic worldview, and they model that worldview. At the same time, our churches and Sunday schools are teaching Bible stories that may seem nothing more than fairy tales to these young people. They are not connecting the Bible to the real world. Our young people are not being taught how to defend their faith—and we wonder why we are losing them.

4. Restructure Youth Ministry

Many youth ministries seem to be nothing more than entertainment systems. As long as we keep our teenagers busy, the youth minister must be doing his job. Instead of evaluating the effectiveness of a youth ministry by the number of events and all-nighters it had, maybe we should rather evaluate how many of the high school graduates stayed the course for Christ one, two and more years after high school.

Youth ministers must become passionate about learning and teaching apologetics. Teens are about to step out the door, and approximately 60-70% of them will not come back after they leave the youth ministry. Teenagers will be more likely to ask the youth pastor a question about their faith than their parents. The youth minister has one hour every Sunday with his flock while the school, friends and media have the rest of the time. A godly youth pastor will make the most of his time.

5. Apologetics in the Home

Parents must commit themselves to the study of apologetics as well. It is normal that teenagers will ask questions about their faith as they begin to develop their own personal worldview. When the parent is asked one of these apologetic questions, the response could very well set the tone for the child’s future spiritual development. Many teenagers hear their parent reply, “That’s a good question (meaning=I don’t know). Go and ask the pastor (meaning=I don’t care to find out).” Many adolescents will conclude that either there is no answer to their question, or it is not important enough to find out. The seeds of doubt have now been sown in the mind of the adolescent, but not by an atheistic college professor but by the Christian parent! In reality, the college professor is the one harvesting the crops of doubt, not the one casting the seeds of doubt. No, the seeds of doubt were sown in the mind of the teenager years earlier.

Back Door Solutions

1. Teach Apologetics
2. In the Pulpit
3. In Sunday School
4. In Youth Ministry
5. In the Home

6. Walk away from the Public School

This is a hard recommendation for me to make, for I have long been an advocate of remaining in the public school system to keep a Christian presence there. However, the data is now overwhelming. Yes, there are many fine Christian teachers in the public school system, but I find that many of them send their own children to a Christian school to be educated rather than in the one in which they teach. What do they know that we don't know?

In the public school system, the Christian worldview is not taught, not allowed to be taught, and will actually be taught against. For example, the average public school is pro evolution, pro abortion, and pro homosexuality. The effect of this anti-Christian worldview has left its mark on our church adolescents. I used to think that the war zone for the Christian young person began on the secular college campus; the hard facts now tell us that the war zone begins in the middle school and high school. Remember that 86% of these church dropouts attended a public high school. We can no longer ignore this negative impact of the public school system on our children. If possible, the parent should do everything possible to remove their child from this atmosphere of poison.

To the parent who chooses or must keep their child in the public school, the onus is on you. You have been warned. Your job in raising your child is now much more difficult and you must be up to the task. My suggestion is that every night you "debrief" your child from their training at school. Ask your child what was taught in their various classes, and then teach the Christian worldview to these ideas. This must become your sacred task for the spiritual health of your child.

7. Choose a Christian School with a Proper Worldview

It falls upon the Christian school to provide the student with an education that is not only excellent, but Christ-centered and apologetically focused. Christian schools offer a Christian environment unlike that found in the public school system. They also offer committed Christians who are trained teachers and experts in their field.

Beyond this, we must choose a Christian school that has a Christian worldview and teaches it. Having teachers who are born-again and pray at the beginning of class is good, but that is not enough. These teachers must bathe their subject in a Christian worldview. For example, the science teacher should be teaching evidence against evolution and for creationism. The English teacher should be training the students how to identify the worldview of the literature they are reading. The math teacher must teach the math courses from a Christian perspective...yes, that is important. The history teacher should be unveiling the work of God in the history of the world. Sadly, just because a school has the name "Christian" in front of it does not mean that they are teaching from a Christian worldview.

The Christian school should also train these teachers how to answers questions about their faith. Many questions are asked questions about and have comments made in class that pertain to spiritual things. Once these teachers are trained in apologetics, they will be more confident in their faith, understand what questions their students are asking, and look for opportunities to share these answers.

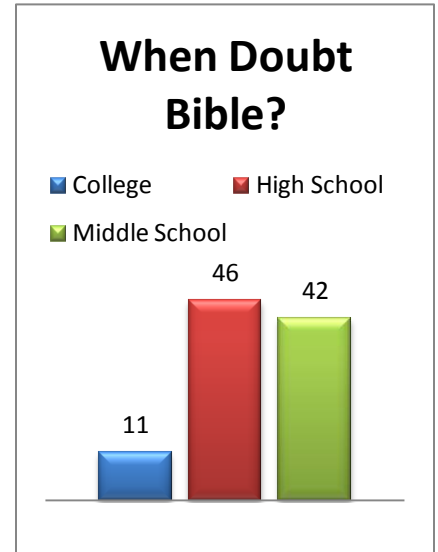
A strong Christian school will also provide a curriculum that includes classes on apologetic subjects, such as Bible study classes, world religions and cults, and Christian evidences. If a Christian school can produce a curriculum and faculty that are grounded in apologetics, this will provide the parent with an opportunity to ensure that their child will at least be taught the Christian worldview, if not

Back Door Solutions

1. Teach Apologetics
2. In the Pulpit
3. In Sunday School
4. In Youth Ministry
5. In the Home
6. No to Public school
7. Yes to Christian school

develop it as well. My own experience in teaching apologetics at both the college and high school level for the past three years substantiates this concept.

The parent should place the child in the Christian school as early as possible, at least by the middle school years. This will ensure a smoother transition for the adolescent into the Christian high school and help to develop a more substantial Christian peer group, which is essential for the teen years. There is another reason for placing the child in the Christian school as early as middle school. Remember we have learned that it is in the middle school where 42% of the church dropouts began to have doubts about their faith. View the chart on the right that was shared earlier. When asked at what age the 1,000 church dropouts began to question contents in Bible, the answers were early college (11%), high school (46%), and middle school (42%). When Beemer asked them if this questioning was beginning of their doubt in the Bible, 56% said yes, 31% said no, while 13% were not sure. The Christian school must be aggressive about apologetics not just in high school, but beginning in middle school as well.



While it is true that a Christian school is expensive, there is a cost to the public school as well. A parent once told me, “Why should I pay to send my child to a Christian school? The public school is free.” The evidence now shows us that the public school is not free, for there is a cost. The cost is the spiritual life of our children. The reality is that we will pay for it now (Christian school) or we will pay for it later (church dropout). For those parents who desire to send their children to a Christian school, but cannot afford it, there may be other options. Make it a matter of deep prayer and talk to the Christian school administrators. There may be other avenues available, such as scholarships. It is possible that after reading these articles, God will lay it on the heart of a wealthy Christian who wants to help to stop the church adolescent dropout rate. Giving a donation or setting up a scholarship at a Christian school such as PCA will help many who would love to attend but cannot because of finances.

We need to make hard decisions and we need to make them now. Our children and the future of the church are at stake. We must declare war and reclaim our children whom we have voluntarily handed over to many who do not have our worldview, our attitudes, our faith or our Christ. This solution is not only doable; it is also available. We do not have to start a Christian school where one does not exist. Good Christian schools already exist which offer an excellent education, a Christian environment, and committed Christian teachers. A few Christian schools even have an apologetic worldview in its curriculum. What are you waiting for?

8. Teach apologetics in a way the adolescent can comprehend.

Many Christians have the perspective that apologetics is only accessible to the highly intelligent. Who can understand all the issues that are involved in apologetics? How could an average Christian debate subjects such as evolution versus creationism or Jesus versus Muhammad? I have had people tell me that they have read some books on apologetics but were now more confused than before! No, only those geniuses with Ph.D.’s are equipped to handle such deep subjects that apologetics deals with.

We are blessed in our time to have some great evangelical minds in the field of Christian apologetics who have written many books on the subject. Contemporary examples would include such men as Norman Geisler, Ravi Zacharias, and Lee Strobel. With all of the material available both in

book form and on the internet, one has to wonder what else needs to be done. If a teenager has a serious question about God, Jesus or the Bible, then just read a book on it. Nevertheless, all of this wealth of information on apologetics has not made a dent on the church adolescent dropout rate. Is it simply a matter of “you can bring a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink?”

The problem is that there seems to be a fundamental flaw in our apologetic teaching materials. These materials are written at a level beyond the reading ability of the average adolescent. For example, what happens when a teenager asks the question, “How do we know there is a God?” The standard apologetic answer is the cosmological, teleological, and anthropological arguments for God’s existence. I tested the readability level of different articles written by well-known apologists on the “Teleological Argument” for the existence of God. The readability score of one of these articles according to the Flesch-Kincaid was 12.27, or well above a 12th grade reading level. In fact, it was at the beginning a college level. Consider that the 1040EZ tax code is at 10.50 readability level. Therefore, this article is more difficult to read than the tax code! My examination of the other apologetic articles revealed that the readability level of these writings to be consistently high.

These apologetic materials, while well written, are far beyond an adolescent’s scope in reading and comprehension. Consider that the Flesch reading ease number for the average American is 65. The one article in question that I tested had a reading ease number of 47. The SMOG readability test graded this article at an even higher level, being 14.95.

National literacy surveys have shown that the average adult in the U.S. reads at the 8th-grade level. Many students read "below grade level". For example, it is well known that many college graduates read at the 10th-grade level, many high-school graduates read at the 8th-grade level, and many eight graders read at the sixth-grade level (DuBay 2006, National Assessment of Adult Literacy). Nearly all of today's blockbuster writers write at the 7th-grade level, including John Grisham, Stephen King, J. K. Rowling, and Dan Brown. Experts today recommend writing legal and health information at the 7th-grade level.

We must examine our apologetic material from the reading and comprehension level of an adolescent. This material then must be rewritten at a level that the adolescent can comprehend. At the same time, this apologetic material must not be watered down or diluted from its biblical wisdom. When that happens, we will have ammunition in this battle for the hearts and minds of our church adolescents. Writing apologetic material at a level the adolescent can comprehend will be the focus of my Ed.D. dissertation.

These articles began by examining the large number of adolescents who are dropping out of church, many of whom will never return. It revealed that the primary reason was a distrust of the Bible. The seeds of doubt in the Bible and Christianity began in middle school and grew in high school and bore fruit in the college years. It was stated that apologetics must be brought to the forefront of the disciple-making ministry of the church, and suggestions were offered in how to do this. Finally, it was clearly seen that our apologetic material must now be written on a level that the adolescent can comprehend. It is my belief and prayer that when these suggestions are put into practice, we will begin to see our discipleship efforts rewarded with the most important group of all...our children!

- Back Door Solutions**
1. Teach Apologetics
 2. In the Pulpit
 3. In Sunday School
 4. In Youth Ministry
 5. In the Home
 6. No to Public school
 7. Yes to Christian school
 8. Teach Apologetics to Mind of Adolescent

“I’m Back”

It was Monday, the day after Thanksgiving break and I was in my classroom setting up for class. Kathy, the girl mentioned at the beginning of the first article, came up and said, “Hi, Dr. Douglass. I’m back!” I looked up and smiled, and said, “I see that. Welcome back. Did you have a good Thanksgiving?” “Yes, I did,” replied Kathy. “But that is not what I mean. I’m back.” I was puzzled. “I don’t think I understand what you mean, Kathy,” I said. With a smile, she replied, “On Thanksgiving evening, I had a long talk with my parents. On Friday, afternoon, I had a good talk with my pastor. And yesterday, on Sunday morning, I went forward and rededicated my life to the Lord.” I was thrilled! “That’s great!” I exclaimed. “What happened?” With tears running down her cheeks, she said, “You know how you so often say that unbelievers have good questions, but we have good answers? I had good questions but I didn’t know the answers. Now I do know the answers and they’re my answers. I’m back!”

In high school, many parents are passionate about getting their child into college. These parents must now become just as passionate about helping their child to spiritually *survive* college. Remember...unbelievers have good questions, but we have good answers. We must know them and share them with our children, before it is too late.

Bibliography

Barna, G. (2006, September 11). "Teenagers Embrace Religion but Are Not Excited About Christianity". *Barna Research Online*. Retrieved on September 12, 2009, from

www.barna.org/...teensnext.../147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years .

Barna, G. (2001). *Growing True Disciples*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press.

Bergin, M. (2007, August). Tenured Bigots. *Free Republic*.

<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1880406/posts>

Budziszewski, J. (2008). *Ask Me Anything 2*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.

Budziszewski, J. (2004). *How to Stay Christian in College*. Colorado Springs: Think, NavPress.

Geisler, N. (1990). *When Skeptics Ask*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Grossman, Cathy Lynn. (2007). *Young Adults aren't Sticking with Church*, USA Today. Retrieved on September 20, 2009, from

http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20070807/d_churchdropout07.art.htm.

Ham, K. (2009). *Already Gone*. Green Forest: Master Books.

MacArthur, J. (1989). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Railsback, G. (1994, 2001). An Exploratory Survey of the Religiosity and Related Outcomes Among College Students. *Doctoral dissertation* , University of California at Los Angeles, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 55, 03A.

Ravi Zacharias, Norman Geisler. (2003). *Who Made God?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Stetzer, E. (2007). *LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18-To 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church*. Retrieved on September 22, 2009, from

http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0,1703,A%253D165951%2526M%253D201117,00.html

Zacharias, R., Geisler, N. (2003). *Is Your Church Ready?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.