ISSUES AND ANSWERS
a handbook providing Biblical answers to questions of children and youth
by Roland Boyce
Forward

How I would have loved to have a book like ‘Issues and Answers’ when my kids were growing up! Why? Because I didn’t have answers to their issues!

How many times has a parent been in a conversation with their kid that goes something like this?

“Okay Dad and Mom, show me in the Bible where it says that you shouldn’t have an abortion or what you should wear, or how far you should go on a date”…and other classic queries.

Even though the Bible doesn’t deal with these issues directly, it does delve into the lives of real people who dealt with many of these issues. Noah dealt with getting drunk, Elijah struggled with depression and thoughts of suicide, and David faced issues of adultery and murder.

But what parent has time to look all this up in a book? And what book deals with these issues topically? Usually an entire book is written on only one issue and/or written in a way that is way too complicated for the average kid to understand.

That’s what ‘Issues and Answers’ has done for the modern parent/, youth pastor or Sunday School teacher. It helps to correlate the Scriptures with the contemporary problems and challenges faced by their children and youth in this complex 21st century world we live in today.

It is important first to know the basic content of the Scriptures.

A recent Gallup poll revealed the following:
1. Six out of ten teen-agers couldn’t name one of the four Gospels.
2. Three out of ten didn’t know what happened on Easter.
3. Half couldn’t recall five of the Ten Commandments.
4. A third didn’t know how many disciples there were.

Problem: Too many kids today lack even a basic understanding of what The Bible says. They, and often their adult counterparts, are ignorant of the Scriptures.

Josh McDowell, noted author and speaker published a small brochure entitled, “Beyond Belief to Convictions.” asks, (Why you should be concerned by what your kids believe and what you can do about it?) The crux of the work is that beliefs determine values and actions. It is best to instill right values within them based on solid biblical beliefs. He says: “Unless their actions are built on a solid foundation of biblical beliefs, you can expect their lives to reflect the pain and consequences of wrong choices.”
McDowell makes this point: Believing isn’t enough. “I’m going to tell you that simply teaching your kids to believe in the right things isn’t going to be enough to enable them to stand strong and make the right choices in today’s culture.” According to McDowell, over 80% of young people today have distorted or incorrect beliefs about Christianity. And their behaviors are affected.

**It is important to apply the basic concepts of The Scripture.**

Problem: Too many kids today lack the understanding of what The Bible says about specific social issues and as a result can’t apply The Word of God to daily life choices. This results in bad decisions which impact them immediately and what kind of Christ-followers they will be in the future.

Let’s remember that on 9/11/01, terrorists having deep, abiding convictions simply acted on them, even though those convictions were WRONG! They knew what the Koran said, believed it, and simply acted on what they believed!

Unless kids today are convinced that the principles of the Bible are true AND that they are the basis of their choices, they will be easily swayed by the convincing principles of the world in which they live; they will behave according to principles that are wrong. If they believe the wrong way they will act the wrong way.

Christians are losing in their struggle to live out their beliefs in today’s culture because they are not connecting what they believe with how they behave. The polls tell us that people believe in God, The Bible, and Christ but this does not translate into combating or changing the culture. We are losing the spiritual war!

Thus, one of the biggest challenges in our Churches and Sunday Schools today is connecting the Bible lessons to real life situations. Recently, I was looking over the teaching series for the Sunday school in our church.

The 13 weeks were dedicated basically to re-telling the same Old Testament stories again. Only three of the weeks asked questions that even came close to dealing with two real life issues! How we respect others? What does it mean to stand up for God under pressure? Simply stated, unless we can relate ‘the stories’ to life values and decisions, we will lose another generation.

According to George Barna, a specialist on churches, we need to help a child develop a worldview and that worldview is formed by age nine. He suggests that most churches don’t take somebody seriously as a spiritual individual until they are teen-agers or young adult; if you wait until that age, it’s too late. It says that too often Christians separate their faith from the rest of
their life. Now that’s a real problem, because their faith and biblical teaching have so much to do with their everyday life.

Recently a headline captured my attention: “Convention is teaching a Defense of Islam.” The article went onto say that the largest Muslim Convention in the U.S. that year was teaching a ‘crash course’ in basic Islamic teaching so “the thousands of attendees can return home more confident about defending their faith.”

That is precisely what parents, Christian churches, Sunday Schools, and Youth Groups are to do weekly.

‘Issues and Answers’ seeks to build a bridge between what one believes and how one behaves. It helps develop the link between conviction and conduct.

The format of the book is as follows: A topical listing of 40 issues alphabetically, the Biblical background on the issue, the basic conclusions of Biblical teaching surrounding the issue, a statement of the youth’s culture prevailing perspective on the topic, and bibliographical helps for further study… plus an interesting bit of trivia to add a little ‘seasoning’ to the subject matter.

It is my basic belief and conviction that parents and teachers today, need to have answers to our youth’s basic questions. We must be able to deal with the very real life issues they face today. The authority of the Bible and our personal credibility are on the line here. We must not appear to be uninformed or unresponsive to these very real concerns, although many of them were not a part of our growing up experience, which is all the more reason to have help finding the answers to questions we never had to look up!

It we do not provide adequate answers to these issues, someone else will. And that, my fellow parent is a really scary prospect!

Roland Boyce

DEDICATION

Issues and Answers is dedicated to my beloved wife, Joyce, our two wonderful children, Ryan and Alana, and our incredible grandsons, Easton and Myles who represent the many families for which this work has been arduously written.
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ABORTION

“To abort: to miscarry a human being before it is fully formed or is in an undeveloped state.” So is the dictionary definition of abortion. It is a helpful definition because it defines that which is yet unborn as a human being even though it’s not fully formed or completely developed. In terms of pregnancy, we call this formation process or development as coming to full term. The point: the embryo is a human being, a person, an individual!

The Bible makes it clear that God views a human life to be present at the moment of conception, when the sperm of the man unites with the egg of the woman. This is not a blob…it is a baby, a human being, a life which God does not want destroyed.

In Exodus 20:13, God commands ‘thou shall not commit murder.’ What He really means is you will not commit pre-meditated killing, intending to do it ahead of time and with a plan.

The difference between pre-planned murder and non-pre-planed murder is one of motive and intention. To kill by intention is to plan to do it and have a specific plan in mind for killing. To kill by accident is to not plan to do it and not have a specific plan in mind for killing. One is accidental; the other is intentional.

Example of an accidental killing: Two kids are playing with guns they found in their dad’s unlocked cabinet in the basement. They play Cowboys and Indians and the gun goes off and a life is lost.

Example of intentional killing: A hit man is hired by the Mafia to take the life of someone who double crossed them.

Death has resulted in both cases but from a different motive and intention. The child did not intend to kill anyone, it just happened. The hired gunman intended to kill someone, it didn’t just happen; he planned it and made it happen!

Abortion then, from God’s point of view is a form of pre-meditated murder; it is an intentional killing. Babies obviously die by accident. The body of a woman can ‘naturally abort’ a fetus but that is by natural means. This is called a miscarriage. No one made it happen. In an ‘un-natural abortion’ someone deliberately causes the life of the unborn child to end.

The amazing thing in our society today is that we fight so hard to make sure other things live…like animals. In a way, it looks like ‘Save the whales, lose the humans.’
Reality is that we have killed 40 million babies through abortion since 1973 in this country. Two out of every five babies in the world is not permitted to live.

Isn’t it interesting what we do fight to save babies lives, once they are born but often not before they’re born! Dr. Eric Keroack, an Ob-Gyn. in the Boston area puts it this way: “A fetus is considered so precious that we spare no expense to save its life; yet it’s also so worthless that it can be disposed of.”

People may consider the embryo a human being or simply a blob. Either way, in the eyes of God this is an unnatural death, it is an intentional taking of a life. It breaks the Fifth Commandment, ‘thou shall not kill.’ If we believe that God meant what He said, His law is broken all the time.

What’s more, according to the Old Testament, anyone who commits intentional murder and takes another life faces punishment. The punishment for taking a life of anyone was for the person who killed him or her to be killed. This is ‘capital punishment. (SEE DEATH PENALTY)

To put it in other terms; if you took a life your life was taken in return.

Let’s make it clear, however, that today we do not believe that a mother should be penalized for having an abortion. It is possible, however, that she may have other consequences to face, consequences like guilt, grief, loss, anger at herself or others, and fear of being able to have children in the future. These are very real emotions connected to abortion. These are often things not talked about before a woman has an abortion! Simply, convenience is viewed as more important than consequences for the unborn child and for the mother who will often deal with trauma for aborting her child.

In Exodus 21 He says this: “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman, and she gives birth prematurely, but there is not serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is a serious injury, you are to take a life for a life.” The point here is that an unborn child is considered a human being! If it was injured to the point of death, a life had been ended.

Recently in my town, new laws went into effect which included this explanation. “An embryo or fetus can be defined as an ‘individual’ for legal purposes, allowing for criminal prosecution or civil rights action against a person who harms or kills a fetus. This is exactly what God said in the law of the Old Testament.

Interestingly we finally get around to seeing that God was right after all. God says that an embryo is a human being and if you murdered someone who is pregnant you killed two people!

The Psalmist understood the preciousness of life to God. In Psalm 139 he records these sacred words about the sacredness of life. “For you created my inmost being’; you knit me together in
my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; you r works are wonderful I know full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Here we see that the Creator God created, made, wove together, saw and wrote down everything about all of us. God gave us life at a specific moment in time; a moment He knew about before time began. He brought us into being by ‘divine design’. We were not the result of accident but of intention. And what’s more, God says that each of us has value and worth in his sight.

Job put it this way in his book. “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; you have granted me life and favor, and your care has preserved my life.”(Job 10: 8, 12)

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, is a living example of this Psalm. In the book that he wrote, we read “The word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I shaped you in womb, I knew all about you, before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you.”(Jeremiah 1: 4, 5)

It is clear that God knew about all potential human beings before He brought them into being.

Remember, too, that the one who gave life is the only one who has the right to take it away. This is something we will talk about when we consider the subject of the killing of older people. (SEE EUTHANASIA) To kill anyone goes against what God desires. He loves us and wants us to live. He brought us into being for a special purpose and He wants everyone He has created to be born and to live all the life He has in store for them. No one has the right or the authority to destroy what God has made, not before birth or after birth!

Today we are told two things: First, if God did not create us, then we are not special, have no purpose on earth. Second, if there is no God who created life, then people have the right to do with life whatever they want to. They think they are not responsible to God for what they do, including taking the life of other people. (SEE EVOLUTION)

Sometimes we have seen the bumper sticker that promotes, ‘Pro-Choice’ which reads, “It’s a woman’s body - she has a right to choose.” And the other ‘Pro-life’ bumper sticker that reads, “Everyone has choice except the baby.” That’s it: a woman, her husband, her family, her doctor all has the chance to make a choice but the baby doesn’t. But we’re told because the baby is undeveloped and not fully formed, then it isn’t a human being and so it doesn’t have a choice. And if it is a person, its choices are less important than the mother’ choice. Fact: he or she is a human and deserves the right to life.

We can ask, “How can anyone kill someone, especially an innocent baby?” Well one answer to that question is: “I wanted to have sex but I didn’t want to have a baby.” So, you tell yourself that this baby is just a blob and that it’s your body and you can do whatever you want with it!
Still people don’t recognize what is inside them as a real person. Not recognizing this fact allows them to kill what is inside of them and say it’s okay and their conscience is clear.

I have talked to many women who have taken the ‘easy way out’ and have taken the life of their babies because it seemed like the right thing to do. Later on, they have felt pain and regret for actually taken a life and have struggled with that decision…a lot! Reality: it wasn’t the easy way out, after all!

A woman is smart and sensitive enough to know that she has destroyed something that was alive and a part of her. She may never get over the empty feeling of something that was alive and part of her and is now gone. That baby will always be a part of her.

When a woman becomes pregnant due to rape it is a very hurtful thing. Not only has the woman had unwanted sex, but also she often has to consider having an unwanted baby.

Some people believe that when a woman conceives a baby from rape that she should be able to have an abortion. She feels this is okay because she did not have a choice in becoming pregnant. Although I would feel sorry for a woman in this situation, I believe she does have a choice as to whether to save the life of her child or not. Because God honors those who honor life, I believe He will honor the mother who keeps her child and help her through her difficult situation. An accident becomes an opportunity she will face pain either way, if she destroys the child keeps the child. Yet, I believe God will honor her for the decision to let it live and pursue all options available to her one of which is adoption.

The one exception which I think allows for an abortion is if the life of the mother may be in danger. This would mean that to save the baby’s life because she would lose her own. In these rare cases, I believe an abortion could be possible.

But to put it another way, I believe that God can ‘make miracles out of our messes’; He can use human mistakes, even rape, to bring about new life in more ways than one. This is not to say that rape is okay, for instance, but to realize that a life has been made is important to God; one for which He has a plan; one He can save and rescue. To put it in today’s terms: Adoption! Not Abortion! There are actually more people wanting to adopt babies in this country than there are babies that are aborted. There is no need then to take the lives of these babies; there are people who need and are willing to take care of them!

Why is adoption an important alternative? It’s one God would clearly support because He desires that we honor life. In fact, it is fair to say that God honors those who honor life…those who adopt rather than abort!
In case you’re wondering if religious people deal with this problem, let me close with a statistic: “The typical woman having an abortion is between 20 and 30, has never married, has had a previous birth, lives in a metropolitan area, is economically disadvantaged, AND (caps mine) a Christian.”

For many women inside and outside of the Church, non-Christians and Christians, abortion is a real LIFE issue. Yet this issue is not only about women who are mothers. It is about babies who are human. God chose to create them. He asks that we chose to keep them.

Here’s a true ‘choose life’ story to support that. Ludwig Van Beethoven was the fifth child in his family. Times were hard for ‘Mr. and Mrs. Beethoven.’ So, not having him to be born was an option. But, his mother and father chose to keep Ludwig. And the world is so glad they did. There would have never been a 5th, 7th or 9th Symphony without this little boy who grew up to be one of the world’s greatest composers! God creates every life with special potential and purpose.

Something that cannot be omitted from our discussion of this subject is how we respond to someone who has an abortion. We respond the same way God does. We choose to attempt to understand and forgive this person whether we agree with their choice or not.

It has been said that in life, God allows for ‘U-Turns’, the chance to learn from one’s mistakes and start again. Everyone violates God laws, not just women who have abortions. God gives everyone a second chance.

After all, a woman who chooses abortion is already dealing with the emotional pain that accompanies that decision. We make it worse when we add the pain of a judgmental attitude or an unforgiving spirit. We are called to be Christ-like in our response to people in these difficult circumstances.

Many women who have had abortions work through the guilt of their decision, have birthed other children and have been able to carry on healthy and happy lives as mothers!

**MODERN REASONING**
Since the baby is only a ‘blob’ it is not human and can be destroyed with no problems. The only choice that counts is the mother’s since she is the only person involved.

**RESPONSES**
1. God considers every life to begin at conception and of great value.
2. People who take the life of an unborn often believe it’s not a real baby or an actual life.
3. God may allow for the taking of a baby’s life when the life of the mother is in danger or if she is raped.
4. We do not need to abort babies since there are so many people that want to adopt them.
5. We need to understand and forgive those who choose to have abortions.

**RESOURCES**
Alcorn, Randy. Pro-life Answers to Pro-choice Arguments.
Kuykendahl, Carol. Gianna Aborted and Lived to Tell About it.

**FACT**
There are approximately 1.5 million babies aborted in this country every year and approximately 45% of all abortions are repeats.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* Abortion kills a human life at some point in a pregnancy.
*Activity:* Take an egg and break it. Discuss the fact that a chicken will not be born. Compare the value of a chicken and of a human. Which is more important?
Take an unbroken egg home as a reminder of how important our life is to God.
ALCOHOL

A lot of people would probably be surprised to realize that alcohol has been around from the beginning of time. In fact it is found for the first time in the ninth chapter of the first book of the Bible, in Genesis.

Here we find the story of Noah, the ark builder, who had become Noah, the vine grower. This is how the account reads. “And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and become uncovered in his tent.” It sounds like the first ‘booze’ party. Only Noah was the only one at the party. He drank too much of the wine he had made and became what we could call intoxicated, in more modern terms, ‘wasted’. Certainly God created grapes, which He knew could be made into wine.

Science, by the way, has found out what makes people ‘drunk’. Alcohol appears to target a brain protein that slows down nerve cells, resulting in sluggishness and a lack of coordination.

Throughout the Old Testament there are many accounts of people who drank wine, some who got drunk and some who didn’t. In the book of Kings a king was known for drinking himself drunk when he should have been paying attention to a war, which he lost. King David got a man drunk so that he would do something he wasn’t supposed to do. Another king was celebrating his kingdom by drinking too much and got taken over by his enemy that very night! Another ruler got drunk and killed a good man who didn’t deserve to die. It should be noted that when people drink too much, they often do things they shouldn’t do and regret later!

In the New Testament, wine is referred to less often. The most familiar situation is recorded in the Gospel of John, Chapter 2, where Jesus turns water into wine for a wedding party. It is important for us to know that wine was often used as a beverage in Christ’s day in that part of the world because the water was too bad to drink. This is still the case in some parts of Europe and other places. In other words, it was normal to drink alcohol because it was expected that people would not get drunk by drinking too much.

There appear to be three questions we need to ask about drinking.

Did God intend for people to make and drink wine?
According to Genesis 9 and John 2, God did create grapes, knew they could produce wine, and allowed people to drink it. Both Old and New Testaments indicate that people did drink wine. Because it was common, people tended to drink it more carefully and didn’t just drink to get drunk!

Is it all right to get drunk?
It does not appear, however, that God wanted people to drink too much wine and get drunk. This is what God is saying in the Old and New Testaments.
Old Testament: Proverbs 23: 19-21; 29-35. Here the writer of a poetical book describes what can happen to someone who drinks too much on a regular basis. If they become addicted to alcohol, it can ruin their life. He says, “For the drunkard (drinks too much) and the glutton (eats too much) will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe someone in rags.” Speaking of too much wine, the writer goes on, “At the last, it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper (snake).”


What is the best way to deal with drinking that becomes a problem?
People have debated the answer to this question for years. There are usually two different answers that come from two different groups.
Group 1: Christians should not drink alcohol at all. They believe the Bible says that drinking is completely wrong and that a Christian should not partake of anything alcoholic. They refer to such Scriptures as I Corinthians 6 which talks about ‘drunkards not inheriting the kingdom of God’, Galatians 5 which talks about the ‘works of the flesh being drunkenness and the need for self-control’ and I Timothy 3 which explains that a Church leader should not be ‘given to wine’.

Group 2: Christians can drink but they should not drink too much (get drunk). They believe that the Bible does not forbid drinking and that it is okay for you to be a Christian and drink alcohol. They refer to such Scriptures as John 2 (of course) where Jesus actually made wine for people to drink. In Matthew 26 Jesus used the Jewish wine cup as a symbol of His upcoming death/shed blood. In I Timothy 4, Paul tells Timothy not to drink only water but a little wine for his stomach’s sake (Group 2 loves that one!)

So what should our response be to this question? It is first important to recognize that the Scriptures used by Group 1, refer to being drunk, not simply drinking. In other words, although they can be used to discourage people from getting drunk, they cannot actually be used to keep people from drinking at all.

The best answer to Question 3 is: Drink, but don’t get drunk! It would pretty safe to say that this is the answer the Bible gives. It does permit drinking but it does not permit drinking too much/getting drunk. This is a balanced view between two extremes: Not drinking at all and drinking too much. But let me suggest some other points that might help you make your decision about drinking.

It’s hard for a lot of people to control their drinking. Not everyone can drink without getting drunk. In other words, people ‘lose their balance’ when it comes to drinking in more ways than
one! A certain percentage of people who start drinking become alcoholics. They meant to take control of alcohol but alcohol winds up taking control of them! For many drinkers, it becomes too easy to drink too much, to get drunk regularly, and often become addicted to alcohol. This is evident in the 10 million alcoholics and 30 million problem drinkers we have in this country.

Remember, Noah got drunk once, but there’s no record that he got drunk again. Once it happened, hopefully he knew what he needed to do to prevent another ‘drunk.’ (But some contend that he had gotten drunk before, liked the ‘buzz’ and drank on purpose.) Once it happens, we should learn from our mistake. But too many people find it hard to not want to get drunk repeatedly. And, remember, after the first time, it’s never a mistake again! It’s by choice.

Alcohol can harm the body. There are medical findings, which do suggest that some alcohol, especially red wine, can be good for your health. (Maybe this is what Paul meant when he was telling Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake!!). But when a person drinks too much alcohol, it can be bad for their health. Notice that when someone is drunk we say that they are intoxicated! It does not appear, however, that God wanted people to drink too much wine and get drunk. This is what God is saying in the Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament: Proverbs 23: 19-21; 29-35. Here the writer of a poetical book describes what can happen to someone who drinks too much on a regular basis. If they become addicted to alcohol, it can ruin their life.

New Testament: Ephesians 5: 15-18. Here the writer of the Epistle gives a warning: “So watch your step, use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. Don’t drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God instead, huge draughts of Him.” The word, ‘toxic’ means that something is actually poisonous or harmful to us.

Remember, too, that in cultures like those in Christ’s time, where wine was used in place of bad water, it is wine that is used, not beer or hard liquor. But when alcohol is abused in any form can affect a person’s physical and mental health. Alcohol actually destroys brain cells. The more you drink the more you actually damage your mind.

Many Christians believe that the New Testament Scripture in I Corinthians 6: 19, 20 refers to this when Paul says, “Didn’t you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for?”

Misusing alcohol can lead to the misuse of other substances, such as drugs. A lot of people, especially teen-agers, feel that alcohol is the ‘safe drug’ because it doesn’t seem be as habit-forming or as hard on their health. Actually alcohol is a drug, a very addictive one, and one that is very hard on a person’s health when misused. But the tendency to rely on any stimulant like
alcohol or drugs can cause a person to be physically or mentally dependent on those things. In one way, alcohol can be what is called ‘a gate-way drug’, an entry way to using other drugs to which you can also become addicted.

One can be more likely to drink if their family does. A lot of kids these days are those whose parents were drinkers and/or alcoholics. They are known as ACOA’s. (Adult Children of Alcoholics). Although an ACOA has problems in adult life because their parents had a problem with alcohol, not all of them drink. Many saw what alcohol did to their parents and their home life, and they don’t want anything to do with booze. There are 28 million ACOA’s in this country and they have four times the chance of becoming alcoholics and 50% of them do become one. So, if your family has a drinking problem; watch out. It might be easier for you to have one!

Drinking can be dangerous for the person who drinks, for the people in their life. Statistics support the fact that alcohol has a lot to do with car accidents, people taking chances they wouldn’t take if they were sober.

Drinking and driving is a serious problem. (Especially if the designated driver is drunk, like the chauffeur for Princess Diana…remember?). States are starting to crack down on drinking drivers as reflected in a new law I read about recently where a $1,000.00 fine per year for up to three years was given to motorists convicted a first time for drunk driving (D.W.I. Driving while intoxicated. D.U.I. Driving under the Influence) and increased to $1,500 for a second offense!!!

It is for these reasons that many Christians and a lot of churches either forbid or discourage people to drink in the first place.

Too, if a Christian drinks at all (and certainly if they drink carelessly) they can set a bad example for other people. For those who are not Christians or those who may be young Christians, drinking on the part of a Christian may be confusing. They see a ‘double standard’.

There is some support for this position when we look at certain Scriptures such as Romans 14 and I Peter 4. Speaking of what one eats and drinks, Paul says, “I said it before and I’ll say it again: “All food is good but it can turn bad if you use it badly; if you use it to trip others up and send them sprawling”. In other words, if you drink and it causes someone else to drink and leads to problems in their life, then you should think about not doing it…at least in public (Romans 14:15)

Speaking of a person running with their old peer group, Peter says, “You’ve already put in your time in that God-ignorant way of life, partying night after night, a drunken and wasteful life. Now it’s time to be done with that for good.” Simply, once you become a Christian, don’t do what you used to do; you look and act differently. (I Peter 4: 2, 3-The Message.)
I want to say a word, however, about those who are in Group 1 who disagree with and criticize those in Group 2. In Romans 14, Paul has a word about people in the first group. “If someone believes you shouldn’t drink and sits down with someone who believes it’s alright to drink, isn’t it rude for the one to be critical of the other?” (Paraphrase-Mine) Simply, people who don’t drink should not be bad-mouthing people who do.

I have consumed alcohol during my lifetime, not very much and not very often and usually not in public. But I have made it a point of not criticizing those who do drink. For instance, my wife and I attended a Christmas Party one year sponsored by a Sunday School Class we were teaching. Someone in the class asked me if it was all right for them to bring some wine to the party. I told them that this was not really up to me to decide but I did mention that I would not feel it appropriate to have people getting drunk. It so happened that several people brought alcohol to the party where some drank and some didn’t, including my wife and me. No one got drunk. They handled their drinking responsibly. No one was offended by this situation.

My experience confirms several things already dealt with in this section. A person can drink alcohol without getting drunk and without getting addicted to it. Alcohol can be present even in a Christian setting without people misusing it or others being offended by it or critical of others who use it.

Yet attitudes toward drinking are a lot different today than they were when I was growing up. People in general and many Christians feel much more comfortable with alcohol and drinking than before.

This may be because alcohol has become so much a part of our social life or because more Christians believe that moderation rather than abstinence is the acceptable way to deal with the question to ‘drink or not to drink’. They may also believe that handling alcohol this way enables them to relate to other people in their social circle.

So, it is difficult to give you a ‘black and white answer’ to this question. Each person has to make the decision him or herself. But each person should carefully assess their family background, and their ability to drink within safe limits. Those who have grown up in a stricter home where drinking was not allowed may continue not to drink or they may decide to experiment with drinking. Those who have grown up in a home where alcohol was used may continue to drink or may want to not drink. This is especially true if they have grown up in an environment where alcohol was abused and/or they have lived with an alcoholic. But more often than not, children of alcoholics may become alcoholics.
Frankly, it’s easier to either tell people they can’t drink at all than to let them try to control is something that is not easy for most people. On the other hand to offer no guidelines at all sets the person up to misuse alcohol and become addicted to it.

Here’s my personal counsel: Drink seldom; do not get drunk; do not become addicted and think of the impact on other people when you do drink.

**MODERN REASONING**
Everyone can drink! It’s not a problem. In fact, it can’t hurt you…just don’t drive if you’re drunk.

**RESPONSES**
1. Even though God made alcohol a possibility He expects people to use it wisely.
2. Because alcohol affects every person differently, it is wiser to not drink at all.
3. Careless drinking can easily lead to other kinds of activity, which is not healthy.

**RESOURCES**
Dejong, Alexander. *Dying for a drink.*
Kraft, William. *When someone you Love drinks too much.*
Hostetler, Jep. *Ten things parents should know about Alcohol and Drug Abuse.*

**FACT**
Most young people drink regularly by the age 15. One-third of the auto accidents in the 15-20 year age group are attributed to alcohol.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* Alcohol is a beverage used for many different reasons and affects people in many different ways.
*Activity:* Have a member of your group pretend to be ‘drunk’. Ask them the following questions:
1. Why did you get drunk?
2. How did you get drunk?
3. How did you feel then? (Maybe based on what others have told you.)
4. How do you feel now? (Maybe based on what others have told you)
5. What could happen to you when you are drunk?
6. How could your being drunk affect others?
AUTHORITY

The reason ‘authority’ is an issue is that our attitude toward authority has a lot to do with how we respond to other issues we’re dealing with in this book. First, we need to define authority. Then we need to look at the different types of authorities.

DEFINITION
Based on Noah Webster, THE Authority on words, the term ‘authority’ is defined as power or might to command or act; dominion; control; derived from opinion, respect, or esteem; influence conferred by character, station, mental superiority; a person or persons exercising power or command.

MEANING
There will always be someone in our lives who has power over us and control over what we do. They are people we should respect (Even though that may be hard to do); they are people we should also cooperate with as much as possible because they are usually there to help us have happy lives. They are also people who we can talk to and ask to respond to our concerns.

TYPES OF AUTHORITY
God’s Authority: According to the Bible, God is the highest authority because He is the Creator and Ruler of all heaven and earth. A word that is very much like ‘authority’ is ‘dominion’. It means that God has rule, control, and power everywhere over everything. The Book of Daniel talks a lot about God’s authority. (Daniel 4:3; 4:22; 4:34; 7:14; 7:27) In the Paul, Peter, Jude and John all repeat what Daniel has already said. (Ephesians 1: 21; I Peter 4:11; I Peter 5: 11; Jude (vs. 25); Revelation 1: 6) In other words, God has authority over all his domain or dominion. “Everyone will know that the High God rules human kingdoms. He arranges kingdom affairs, however he wishes.” (Daniel 4:17)

Governmental Authority: Authority and dominion are things that God has given to human beings, too. At the very beginning of creation, God gave these things to the first man and woman. (Genesis 1: 26, 28) Then in the New Testament, God tells us that He gave authority and power to governments that he set in place to rule people on earth. He hoped, of course, that they would rule by following Him and His example. Romans 13:1, 2 “All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it’s God’s order. So live responsibly as a citizen.”

Church Authority: When Christ was about ready to leave the world, He made it clear to His followers that He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth. This was important because they were the ones who would begin the church on earth. “All authority has been given me on heaven and on earth”. Matthew 28:18 (NKJV) Christ gave this authority or dominion to
these early Christians who were still human and made mistakes. But He reminded them that their positions were gifts from Him and the power was’ borrowed’ from Him. They were to use both wisely in leading the People of God, the Church; in the way He wanted it to go.

**Parental Authority:** Part of God’s authority and power has not only been given to governments and church leaders, it has also been given to parents. Parents have authority over their children because they are the ones who have brought them into the world and the ones who are responsible for how they grow up.

Now let’s look at these four types of authority another way.

**God’s Authority:** God’s authority is before and above anyone else’s. You cannot find a higher authority figure than God. God has the right to have authority and power over people because He was here before they were and He created them. If it hadn’t been for him, humans would not be here on earth. So, since He created us, He has the right to write the rules and hold us responsible for whether we follow them or not.

**Governmental Authority:** Any authority humans have is ‘borrowed from God’; it is a ‘loan from the Lord.’ No person has any authority, power, or dominion over anyone else unless they have received it from God. This is why God expects those who have been given these things to use them wisely and well.

**Church Authority:** God’s authority and power becomes personal in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. As it has been said, “Christ gave God a face”. Before Christ came we could only know about God’s authority in our heads. Once Christ came we could know about God’s power in our hearts. This was because Christ used His power and authority wisely and well. Christ is the head of the Church, His ‘body.’ He is the only eternal pastor and C.E.O. of His ‘Christian Company’ who never will be fired.

**Parental Authority:** Again, the power and authority a parent has is a’ gift from God’, one that is to be used in the right way in dealing with their children. Parents are to remember that they are to use these things in the same way God would use them. I like the phrase: ‘We need to be led in order to lead.’ In other words, parents need to depend upon God’s authority and power in order to use/not abuse it. Parents, like leaders, need to remember that their power and position are given them by God. They are to follow the example of their heavenly father as earthly fathers and mothers. They are to lead by precept (what they teach) and example (how they live). (SEE SCHOOL).

Paul wrote this to his ‘spiritual son’, Timothy, when speaking of parents and their responsibility to their children “Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master”. (Ephesians 6:4)
OUR PROBLEM WITH AUTHORITY

God’s Authority: To start with today, a lot of people have a problem with God. As a result they have a problem with His authority. A lot of people may even believe that there is a God but don’t believe that He is the highest authority. Simply, ‘they don’t want anyone, especially God telling them what to do’. That’s why they don’t obey His rules and ‘laws for life’. They have made up their own rules instead, based on what they want; not upon what God wants.

The challenging of God’s authority has been around since the beginning of time. The devil bucked God’s authority and was kicked out of heaven with a group of his foul friends who also rebelled against what God has asked them to do which was to worship and obey Him. They thought they could be their own ‘god’ and do what they wanted to do. In fact, after they were thrown down to earth, Satan went to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and got them to question and resist God’s authority. They thought they could know as much as God knew and live without following His rules. (Genesis 3: 1-9.) From that moment, their relationship with God changed and eventually they died. “The serpent told the woman, you won’t die, and God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what is really going on. You will be just like God.” When the first humans questioned and disobeyed God’s authority, they wrecked their lives, and all of ours!

Throughout all of history people have ‘gone against God’…from the tower of Babel (Genesis 11) to the golden calf (Exodus 32), to following false gods (Joshua 24), to demanding a human king to rule over them instead of God (I Samuel 8), to human kings disobeying God (Saul - I Samuel 15), (David - II Samuel 11), (Solomon - I Kings 11), (Nebuchadnezzar - Daniel 3 and 4), (Jonah - in the book by the same name), (Herod-Matthew 20), (The people who killed Christ - Matthew 27) (Saul - before he became the apostle Paul - Acts 8), (The false teachers and false prophets - II Peter 2-3:7). This wrong response to God’s authority will continue through the rule of the anti-Christ already talked about in II Thessalonians 2. In fact, the writer says that the ‘spirit of rebellion’ in relation to authority is already present (and that was nearly 2,000 years ago!) The message: “He’ll defy (God’s authority) and then take over every so-called god or altar.”

KEY:

Our response to God’s authority will determine how we respond to human authority. If we respect God’s authority we will be better able to respect man’s authority.

(Psalm 75:6; Romans113: 1, 2) Moses put it this way in the giving of the Law to Israel in Exodus 22 “Don’t curse God and don’t damn your leaders”.

Governmental Authority: This kind of authority includes not only our President and members of Congress, but can also include people like police, those who run our city, our principals and teachers, Scout leaders, etc. Throughout history two things have happened with governments and their authority. First, leaders have not always been good people; they have been in power for the wrong reasons and have made bad choices. They have not used their power and authority wisely.
I saw a cute cartoon the other day which read: “Somewhere out there is a great person who would make a great president…. why aren’t they running?”

Sometimes, those in authority seem to make decisions that we don’t like or that seem stupid. Did you know for example that?

- Wearing suspenders in Nogales, Arizona, is illegal?
- Singing out of tune in North Carolina is against the law?
- In Brainerd, Minnesota, every man must wear a beard?
- Anyone over the age of 84 in Idaho Falls, Idaho it not permitted to ride a motorcycle?
- In San Francisco, law forbids you to spit on your laundry?
- And you can’t eat peanuts in church in Massachusetts!
- In Indiana, there’s a law against taking a bath in the winter?
- Don’t try roller-skating in a public restroom in Portland!
- Here’s the kicker: In Colorado Springs, the law upholds a dog’s right to one bite! (Oh good….and what if it's a BIG bite?)

Secondly, they have not done good things for the people they govern. (We have just seen some pretty good examples, right?) They have done things for themselves rather than for others. They have hurt rather than helped people. This is why a lot of people have bad feelings about their leaders and don’t trust and support them. But there have been many good people who have been good leaders who have done good things for the people who elected them. Yet today more and more people think any authority is bad and resist it rather than be responsible to it. Let’s not forget we are still held responsible for supporting those in authority (Even if a dog can bite us once legally!)

**KEY:**

Our response to human authority is sometimes affected by what kind of leaders we have and what kind of things they do as leaders. If they are good people and do the right things, we are more likely to follow them and do what they ask us to do. If they are not good, we may not want to follow them. With God’s help, however, we are better able to do that. "Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level. Revere God, respect the government.”(I Peter 2:13, 17)

**Church Authority:** This kind of authority includes not only our pastors and church leaders, but Church Staff, Sunday school teachers and youth sponsors, camp counselors, etc. We may not consider these people as authority figures but they really are. They are also put in place by God to be our leaders. Throughout the New Testament, the Lord explains why these people are so important to the success of the Church and why it is so important for people in the church to respect and support them. Like government leaders, church leaders are be good people who make good choices that help and don’t hinder those they are put in place to lead. Unfortunately, as in
government so in churches, people who misuse their leadership and cause people to lose respect for them, not find it easy to follow them, and who mistrust them.

Yet, the writer of Hebrews (possibly a woman named Priscilla, maybe a pastor’s wife?) put it this way: “Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership so that it won’t be drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them?” Hebrews 13: 17.

KEY:
Our response to those in authority in the church will actually make our lives better because when we respect, work with, and encourage our leaders they will be better able to meet our needs and help us with our problems. (Especially if we can’t take a bath in the winter or shave our beard off!)

Parental Authority: Because of having problems with authority, the first three areas, people today have problems dealing with the authority of their parents. Kids putting up with parents have always been a hassle. This is for several reasons: 1. Children think their parent doesn’t know about life today, or make rules that make any sense.

Parents can respond with too many rules or too few rules, which can make a child frustrated… (Although most kids wouldn’t complain about too few rules, right?) Actually having too few rules can tell a kid that either the parent doesn’t care enough to give direction. It can also force their child to make decisions on their own before they are maybe old enough to do that. On the other hand, too many rules can make a child feel that the parent is simply trying to control their life and keep them from ‘having fun’. And there are parents who probably do try to have too much control over their kids but most of them just want their kids to have a good life and the right kind of fun. …And friends!

(SEE PARENTS AND CHILDREN)

The Bible talks about kids rebelling against their parents as a mark of the end times. (This started when Christ came to earth the first time.) In Romans 1: 29-31 and in II Timothy 3: 1-5, Paul describes the kind of people who will live at the time before Christ comes back. “They will be disobedient to parents” (NKJV), “they ditch their parents when they get in the way”. Now, that is probably something that could be said of any generation in history. I remember a quote from one of my courses in college that described kids in Greece, who were rude, talked with their mouth full, which were disrespectful to their parents. (And that was four centuries before Christ.)

What the New Testament writer is talking about is an attitude towards authority, an attitude throughout the world, which will reject God/Christ’s authority and yet follow the leadership of a false ‘god’ and a false ‘Christ’. In the book of I John, we are told that this attitude has been
around for a long time. (I John 4:3) “It’s the spirit of the anti-Christ that you heard was coming. Well, here it is, sooner than we thought!”

What this means is that children not respecting and honoring their parent’s authority is part of a much bigger authority problem in the world, just before Christ comes to earth the second time.

**KEY:**
If we respond to the authority of our parents, we will actually live better and longer lives. (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 3: 1, 2; Ephesians 6: 1-3) And so will our parents!
Commandment # 5 “Honor your father and mother so that you’ll live in the land that God is giving you”. And why is that? Because even they may seem old and sometimes out-of-date, they have a lot of knowledge and experience that comes from living more life than you have, and they can help you live yours! If you listen to them, you have a safer and happier life. Who knows maybe they will longer to because the two of you have a good relationship? (Hopefully as you get older, you will appreciate having them around, and take good care of them!)

**THE WAYS PEOPLE RESPOND TO AUTHORITY TODAY**
There are many indications that the things the Bible says about people’s response to authority today are accurate. We see government leaders who are not honoring the positions in which God has placed them or honoring His laws as is evident in disregard the Ten Commandments. One news commentator described it: “We think that these are the ten suggestions not the Ten Commandments.” Meaning? We decide whether we like them or want to keep them or not. We forget that when we don’t keep these laws our lives are affected for the bad, not the good. Remember, God’s rule has reasons…and the reasons make sense and they make life better!

We even see church leaders, who are breaking God’s laws when it comes to honoring their marriage vows or giving the proper taxes to the government, mistreating children, or taking advantage of people through taking their money.

We see children who are not obeying their parents or other people in authority in their life. Some of them are kids who are taking guns to school and killing their teachers and classmates and then often standing in the courtroom without any regret for what they have done. They are not only disobedient to authority but they are defiant towards it. What they are really saying is, no one is going to tell me what to do. They often do this in groups, too. Peers who resent and rebel against authority pose a real problem in the area of crime today. These groups are called gangs. Recently it was noted that there was a nation-wide increase in murders due primarily to gang violence being involved in more murders, especially in big cities. (Often proving your worth today is to become a gang member!)

The writer of the book of Judges in the Old Testament recorded it this way in his day. “At that time there was not king in Israel. People did whatever they felt like doing.” (Judges 21: 25) or to
put it another way: ‘No one paid any attention to those in authority; they did only what they wanted to do base only on what they thought was right’. This was an early version ‘if it feels good, do it’.

Here’s a clue: The more people who go against God’s authority, the more they will go against human authority – government, school, church, and at home. The more they do what they want to do instead of what He wants them to do, the less safe and happy their life will be…though they may not believe that!

The mood of modern times is one of not trusting and not accepting authority. It’s like the tee-shirt that reads: “Question Authority!” That is partly because people who are leaders have made it hard to trust them. It is partly because of the attitude so many people have against authority. It’s not necessarily wrong to question authority or those who have it or to even disagree with it. But we’re talking a whole lot more than just questioning it or disagreeing with it; we’re talking about disregarding it! With people in that ‘anti-authority mood’, it makes it a lot easier for kids to disregard the role of their parents and the rules they try to set down in their home. This attitude also makes it tough for church leaders to do their jobs. It makes it easier for the public to not keep the laws their Nation, State, and City put there. Example: “Do Not Litter” And what do people do? They throw their Starbuck’s cup out the window; “Cross at the light.” And what do people do? They jaywalk!

That’s exactly why I believe that a respect for and a right response to authority; God’s, governments’, churches’, parents’ is one of the most important things a child or young person can learn early on. To have a right attitude towards authority can make the difference between success and failure in a person’s life.

Do yourself a big favor - have the right attitude about authority! When you do, your life will actually be better...a whole lot better.

**MODERN REASONING**

There is no final standard of authority so any person in authority is not to be trusted or obeyed. If you disagree with someone in authority you don’t have to do what he or she tells you to do.

**RESPONSES**

1. God’s authority is the basis of all other authority.
2. Honoring God’s authority will help us respect and follow all other authority in our lives.
3. Rebelling against authority results in many other problems in a person’s life.

**RESOURCES.**

Henry, Carl. God, Revelation and Authority.
Stagaman, David. Authority in the Church.
**FACT**
Crime rates except for aggravated assault actually fell between 1979 and 2000. (Rates included violent crime; property crime, murder/manslaughter, rape, robbery, burglary, theft.)

**LIFE LAB:**
Make contact with someone in authority in your community; a policeman or a political leader and have them discuss the importance of people respecting and cooperating with authorizes.
THE BIBLE

This is a hard question to answer. It is related to two other questions:
1. How can we believe that the Bible is true?
2. Can we use the Bible to prove the Bible?

Answer to question #1
It came into being because God desired to communicate with us. He did that in three ways: Creation, Conscience, and Content.
Romans 1 tell us that God clearly speaks to us through creation and conscience through the content of the Scriptures, another name for the Bible. We may also call the Bible, ‘The Divine Writings’.

CREATION: “By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes can’t see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse.” (Romans 1:20) We know that He exists because of what He has made and how He has made us. Our conscience tells us what’s right and wrong, even though we may not always listen to what they tell us…and need to be corrected. (See Hebrews 10:22)

CONSCIENCE: You have one, and it can be compared to an alarm clock! It goes off, you shut it off, you go back to sleep; and you’re late for work or school. It’s not the alarm clock’s fault; it worked. It’s your fault because you didn’t want to work! And if you ‘turn off the alarm clock of your conscience’ enough times, you will no longer hear it when it rings. It works but you don’t want it to.

CONTENT: But God always communicates too personally; by communicating to us His thoughts, feelings, commandments, promises, and warnings. He does this in writing: the Bible, His written word. He does this in person: Christ, His living word.

God spoke to people in person...before He spoke to them in print. He spoke to Adam and Eve in Eden; He spoke to Abraham when he was about to offer Isaac up as a living sacrifice; He spoke to Daniel in a dream (Daniel 7/8), as He did Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus (Matthew 1) to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) when he wrote the Book of Revelation. (Chapters 21 and 22). Doesn’t it make sense that God, The Creator, would always talk to us, His Creatures? Of course, it does. It shows how much He cares about what He has created…you and me!

I have often said a book is just like the author; the Bible is just like God. He thought it up, human men and women wrote it down. It was perfect when He told them what to write; they were imperfect and made a few mistakes when recorded it. But one thing is for sure, what God had
written down was true. In Isaiah 45:19, the Lord said this: “I have not spoken in secret, I the Lord speak righteousness, and I declare things that are RIGHT.” (NKJV)

Ever start a rumor? In our Campus Ministry days, we would play a game called: ‘Rumor’. We picked eight people from the group and told the first person something that was true. But by the time the ‘truth’ got around to the last person, it was different. People had added to it, taken from it; they had changed it. For instance, in the Old Testament, sometimes names and reigns of kings were different. In the New Testament, God permitted people to express their own opinion about things. This is what happened as people recorded and passed on what God told them thru the Holy Spirit. What is important for us to understand is that none of those ‘changes’ ever changed the basic truth of the Bible: God made us and He sent Christ into the world to save us! His ‘Divine Writings’ help us know how to become part of His ‘Divine Family’. We can always be confident of the Writer (God) and what He writes (the Bible)

So it is fair to assume first that God wanted to communicate with us and to us. How wonderful is that? That the God of Eternity, who made time, and creates and cares for all things, wanted to have a personal relationship with us! Pretty wonderful!

The Bible is simply God’s way of writing down the things that He wanted to say to us. Many like to call it ‘God’s Love Letter’. That is why it is so important that we believe that the Bible is true and that it is truly God’s Word.

Here are some facts about the Bible:
It was originally written in three human languages. (Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek).(Translations of the Bible change the foreign languages into English or some other modern language (like French or Italian); transliterations of the Bible change the English into more Modern English (like the Contemporary English Version or the Living Bible or the Message).

Forty different authors wrote it over 1600 year. Moses was the first author; the Apostle John was the last author…with a lot of other writers in between…mostly men but a few women, like Esther, Ruth, and possibly the writer of Hebrews.

Even though different people wrote it, it wound up with the same theme; God loved and rescued the world from sin through the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world. (The Old Testament looked ahead to Christ’s coming; The New Testament announced His coming and about when He would come back.)

The Bible is divided into two major sections, Old Testament and New Testament. These two sections match.
God through the use of the Holy Spirit who provided the content for the authors to use wrote all these books. We are told this in the Old Testament by the phrases. “Thus says the Lord” and “The Word of the Lord came” (Over 1,000 times in the Bible!). We are also told that in the New Testament in II Peter 1:21, “The main thing to keep in mind here is that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private opinion.” And why? Because it’s not something some human being just sat down and thought up!” Prophecy resulted when the Holy Spirit prompted men and women to speak God’s Word.

In II Timothy 3:16 Paul writes, every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or the other, always showing us truth.”

It’s time for a summary of what we have said about the Bible: A number of different authors wrote down God’s most important message to us about having a relationship with Him because The Holy Spirit helped all of them. The sections of the Bible were basically the same. God spoke His truth in languages that were known on earth. Incredible, isn’t it?

It is also important to remember that God speaking to us was not changed by the fact that God used different people to tell us those things.

For instance, Moses and Ezra told us about God’s message by giving us a history lesson; Solomon told us about God’s truths in poetry; Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah told us about the coming of Christ the first and second time in prophecies. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John explained it in stories, each one a little differently. (Like four people at the scene of the same accident each describing what they saw with different information.) Paul told us God’s message as a pastor working with churches; and John told us that message in a prophecy about what would happen at the end of the world. All the writers shared the same message only in different ways. God gave the same message through His Holy Spirit. The Message has never changed!
As we have pointed out, the Bible is called the Written Word; Christ is called the Living Word. (John 1: 13, 18; 1 John 1-4) The two of them are connected and they ‘match’. This is because the main message of the Written Word was confirmed as true by the Living Word.” Christ said to the religious leaders in John 5:38, 39, “You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you’ll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am standing right before you, and you aren’t willing to receive from me the life you say you want.” In other words, the Written Word was pointing the one Way to the Living Word; the Living Word confirms the Written Word.

For instance, there are over 350 prophecies concerning Christ in the Old Testament that are exactly what happened to Christ in the New Testament. What’s really important is that those 350 things were predicted before Christ came, not just written down after He came. After all, anybody could write them after they happened. Only God could write them before! And remember, God’s predictions were perfect. They all came to pass. Human predictions, those in various tabloid magazines, like the Star or the National Enquirer are not perfect. Most of their predictions never happen! But Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies!

The Bible also predicted other things:
The downfall of nations: Ammon, Edom, Moab, Philistia, Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, and Sidon. And today, not one of them exists!

The birth of kings: 150 years before Cyrus, kind of Persia was born, the Prophet Isaiah predicted his birth, His name, and told that he would release the Jews from captivity. (Isaiah 44:28) Josiah, one of Judah’s kings was named 1300 years before he was born. (I Kings 13: 2) the Bible, by the way, is 28% prophecy. That’s a whole lot of predictions, none of which has failed to happen so far. (Obviously we’re still waiting for all those ‘spiritual weather forecasts’ in Revelation, but we’re not worried!)

Several years ago, there was a television show called “Early Edition” where Gary Hobson got the newspaper a day early telling him what was going to happen the next day. So, he was always heading out to help someone who he knew was going to be held up or in an accident, or worse, killed. The Old Testament was like getting the newspaper a day early, telling you what was going to happen before it happened, not simply reporting it the day after it happened! It would be a little like ABC news telling you about a disaster a week before it took place. Maybe we could call that A-early B-een C-ommunicated News!

We also need to say a word about ‘other religious writings’ like the Koran and the Book of Mormon. What about them? Simply if God’s Word, the Bible is the only one true revelation of God, then all other religious books or writings cannot be true.
One important thing here is to realize that all of the worlds ‘Bible-like books’ all agree on one thing; they disagree with the Bible.
And what do they agree on that disagrees with the Bible?
Jehovah God is not the only God.
Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, or least not the only one.
We are basically good not bad.
If we sin at all, we can save ourselves from sin by the good things we do.
Everyone will go to the same heaven.
God will not send anyone to Hell.

What we may conclude from this is that all other religious writings are wrong because they all disagree with God’s Word, the Bible. Only the Bible is the true revelation of God and therefore right. It is the only God-book written by God Himself. All others are ‘poor duplicates’.

Read the Muslim Koran, the holy writings of Hinduism, and the words of Buddha and you will not find answers to these important questions: Where did the universe come from? How did the human race start? What is wrong with the world? How can we solve our sin problem? How can we know for sure where we are going to go when we die?

The Bible and every other ‘bible’ can’t both be absolutely right when they do not agree. For example: You cannot believe that there is a law of gravity and there is not a law of gravity. There is either one or the other. There is, of course a law of gravity. If we did not have it, we would float away. God’s Word (Written and Living) is like gravity. It gives us something solid to build our lives on. It keeps us from drifting away from His truth by following that which is not true.

**Answer to question #2**
Can we use the Bible to prove the Bible? This is a hard one to handle, too. More than one person has complained saying that you can’t use the Bible to explain and prove the Bible! What does this mean? Okay then…let’s not use the Bible to prove the Bible. There are several significant ways in which we can do that.

Compare the Bible with other historical books. (Like The Iliad and the Odyssey.)
The translations of the Bible were made closer to the time of the actual writing than any other book in history! That’s right. That means that there was less time for errors in translation to be made. In other words, people accept other historical books as true when the time between the original writing and the translation was made was longer than that of the Bible. If we accept these books, why do we not accept the Bible, which is actually more reliable? Look at the historical facts, people and happenings that have been in the Bible itself. For example: It is believed that a part of Noah’s Ark might be stuck on a mountain in modern day Turkey; the stables of King Solomon’s horses have been found as have the pieces of the wall that surrounded Jericho (I have been to the Holy Land and seen them!) These are discoveries made by
archeologists which show was that the actual names and places in the Bible did exist in the history and geography of the world. And of course, if you travel to Israel you will see the hill where Jesus died (The Place of the Skull that actually looks like one!) and the grave, here it is believed Jesus was laid that matches the description of the tomb described in The Gospels. It’s pretty hard for people to discredit these findings when they accept other people and events that have been confirmed by later discoveries (like the wars of Napoleon or the ruins of ancient cities like Athens or Tyre.)

People are always trying to make the Bible out to be untrue. Recently, two men who study oceans came out with a report that concluded that God did not really ‘part the Red Sea’ (when the nation of Israel crossed it). It was just s strong wind that day! And we might ask who was in charge of the wind, that day?

Here is a listing of some of the discoveries from Bible lands that give support for the Bible itself:

1. The bone box of Caiaphas, the high priest at the time of Christ mentions for his role in Christ’s crucifixion. (1990)
2. The Pontius Pilate inscription: Engraved in stone where soldiers were known to play dice games (like they did when they played dice to win the robe of Jesus.) Pilate was the ruler who handed Jesus over to the Jews to be killed. (1962)
4. The Crucified Man. A first-century family tomb with five ‘bone boxes’ found in it. One of them contained the bones of two men and a young child. The bones of one of the men show that he had been crucified. (1968)
5. Caesarea and Jerusalem. Over 20 years of digging have uncovered many articles relating to The Temple in Jerusalem, a very important of Jewish life and at the time of Christ.
6. Sepphoris and Tiberius: The ancient ruins of these two famous cities give evidence of the fact that they were actual cities which were populated at the time of Christ. Places, types of houses, utensils, etc. have confirmed that the people who lived there lived the same way people did in Bethlehem, for example. (I have actually walked in this city myself.)
7. Masada and Qumran. These two sites by The Dead Sea have revealed Roman attacks against the Jews, portions of the Actual Bible, and the place where John the Baptist lived and was head of a religious movement. (1950’s 1960’s)
8. Jodefat and Gamia: Two villages, one in lower Galilee and one in the Golan Heights show that they were destroyed by Romans in 67 B.C. Such identification of actual cities confirms that they did exist along with other peoples and cities in Bible times.
9. Stone vessels and ritual pools. Both are related to Jewish rituals found wherever Jews lived in Galilee as well as around Jerusalem in Judea.

Simply, if these people and places that are often mentioned in the Bible were proven to be a part of actual history, why would the Bible and the information about Jesus Christ not also be true?
Forty different people wrote the same book and over 1400 years. How many books could we write today with that many people writing them over that long a time that would wind up with the same single message that would make sense? (It’s hard to get two people to write a book that says the same thing and makes sense! Here’s the only answer to that question: God through the Holy Spirit directed the writing and made sure that the world’s most important message made it to every generation on earth. And you don’t need to use the Bible to prove that the Bible is right on that one. You just use common sense!

The Bible continues to be on the Best Seller list? What other book do you know about that is at least 2000 years old that is still a ‘hot item’ that sells more copies every year than any other book? The Old Testament was put together by A.D. 90 and the New Testament was ‘put together’ by A.D. 350 but the Word of God had been in place since the time of Creation.

It is exactly what Christ said: “Sky and earth will wear out: my words won’t wear out.” “Will last forever” (NIV “Will not pass away” (KJV) Matthew 24:3

This all brings us back to where we started. Remember the story of the person living next to the Water Tower? The person who is thirsty, but won’t tap into the tower? There are many people today who want to find God and know truth by which to live their life but won’t come to Him, won’t believe the Bible, and won’t receive His Son as their personal Savior? Why not? I believe that people could believe in the Bible. There is enough information and facts to prove that it is truly God’s Word to us. But they won’t believe.

They choose not to because if they believed that the Bible was true, they would have to believe everything it said: There is a God who created us, we have sinned, we do need a Savior, we cannot save ourselves, God will hold us accountable for the things we do, and we will spend eternity either with God in heaven or apart from God in hell. They would also have to change the way they live. They would have to live by the rules and obey God’s laws. Because they don’t want to believe and behave differently, they often solve the problem by saying the Bible isn’t true or you can’t use the Bible to prove the Bible.

Now it is possible that there are people who have honest questions about the Bible and that they need to have those questions answered. Questions like how we can be sure God was speaking to those people; or how can we trust a book that is so old; or what about the errors that were made when God’s Word was recorded and passed down; or what about other religious writings that claim to be true like the Bible, or why Christ is the only way to God? These are good questions and all of them can be answered.

Sometimes people say they don’t believe in the Bible, because of the way believers behave. (Now, that’s a whole other problem!) But for those who simply don’t want to believe and use
their feelings about the Bible as an excuse…remember this: Just because a person refuses to believe that the Bible is God’s communication/love letter to them isn’t true doesn’t change the fact that it still is! Their response to the truth doesn’t change the truth! A person will still face the consequence of disobeying God’s law and still miss the blessing of obeying it if they choose to ignore it!

Just because you don’t like the traffic laws that tell you how fast you go or that you have to wear your seat belt doesn’t mean you can just go ahead and speed beltless! Your response to the law doesn’t change it. You can still get a ticket if you break it.

By the way, if we believe that the Bible is true, because the writer is, and we believe in its laws for life are right, then why don’t we read it and memorize it, and study it more?

For those who have a problem with that, there is your cell phone. That’s right! A new service, ‘faith’ uses text messaging to deliver Scripture to just about any mobile phone in North America. The company hopes to expand the service to include other devotional messages. Want to order? Try www.mfaith.com

I believe we need to read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Bible because it is the true Word of God and it is truly the most important book in the world. It tells us everything we need to know about life.

Like the woman who was thirsty, we need to come to the well and find the living water which God gives through His Written and Living Word so that we will never thirst again!

A little boy summed it up well when he told his dad that he knew what the Bible meant. The son told him that the B-I-B-L-E was B-asic I-nformation B-efore L-eaving E-arth.

And that’s why this book was written. To help us understand how to apply what God says about every part of our life … every issue we face in real life which we can find answers for … in THE Book.

**MODERN REASONING**
Because God used human beings to write down the Bible, it is full of errors and can’t be trusted in what one believes or how they behave in daily life.

**RESPONSES**
1. The Bible is one of the three basic ways God communicates with us
2. The Bible, God’s Written Word, is in complete agreement with Jesus Christ, God’s Living Word because they are both perfect messages from God.
3. There are many facts ‘outside the Bible’ itself that prove that the Bible is true.
RESOURCES
Anders, Max. How to Understand the Bible in thirty days.

FACT
There are still more Bibles sold every year; more than any other book in the world. 20 million copies! The Bible is by far the most translated book in history. Portions of the Old and New Testaments have been translated into more than 2,500 languages. According to United Bible Societies, the complete Bible has been rendered into 469 tongues as of 2010.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: To affirm that the Bible is the only credible revelation of God and all others are not. Have people bring different ‘bibles’ and compare them with the Bible in the following areas:
1. What is the central theme; how does it differ from the Bible.
2. How do the others present Christ; is He divine or simply human.
3. What is the basis of personal salvation; something we can do ourselves or something only God can do.
BIRTH CONTROL

Let’s try to make a very difficult subject as simple as possible, okay?

HOW GOD CONTROLS BIRTH

God tells us throughout the Bible that He creates, controls, and cares for all of life. As the Creator, He cares for what He creates.

Genesis 1: 26-27 God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit create men and women ‘in their image’. This means that all people reflect the qualities of God in their life as well becoming physical beings just as Christ did.

Genesis 2:7 God actually made humans with His own hands and with His own breath.

Genesis 5: la, 2 Moses records that God created humankind in the likeness of God. He adds that God has also blessed them.

Psalm 104: 24, 27 and 30 the writer reminds us that God made all his works (which includes humans and animals) in wisdom, that He provides their food, and that He used the Holy Spirit to create them.

Psalm 119: 73 the writer remembers that God has formed him with his hands and that he has been given the special ability to understand who God is and learns about His laws for life.

Matthew 19: 4/Mark 10: 6 this is an echo of Genesis 1: 26, 27 where Christ reminds His listeners that at the beginning of creation God created male and female; all men and women.

Acts 17: 25a here the Apostle Paul explains to his listeners, “God himself gives all men and life and breath.” He also includes the fact that God gives people everything else.

In simplest terms, God is the one who decides who it to be born and makes it possible for them to have life.

Perhaps the most important confirmation of God creating all human life is found in Luke. The prediction of the birth of Jesus, where in chapter 1, verses 30-31, the wise Dr. Luke says: “But the angel said to her, do not be afraid. Mary you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.” Going on in vs. 35, after Mary asks the angel how this is going to happen since she is not married, he records: “The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. The Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”
Doesn’t it make sense that the same God who created all human life would also create His eternal SON so that He would be born as The SON of God? Of course it does!

**HOW GOD LETS US CONTROL BIRTH**

The only way people had to control birth was to control sex. This meant that they would try not to have sex at the wrong times. The wrong time would be when a woman could get pregnant—during the time of ovulation when her body makes an egg available. If the father provides a sperm to ‘find the egg at the right time’ there will most likely be a baby that his formed at the moment of their meeting. We call this meeting, ‘conception’…when a child is conceived. *(SEE ABORTION)*

But, God also gave men and women wisdom through which modern medicine came into being. Humans discovered how to ‘control birth’ by creating things that would stop the egg and the sperm uniting and beginning a new life.

Some people feel that ‘birth control’ or contraception (against conceiving) is wrong because it interferes with God’s natural way of doing things. They believe that it is ‘going where humans don’t belong’. In a way they are taking over God’s job of controlling who and when people should be born.

Others believe that God has given us these means of preventing pregnancy so that we
1. Will not have children at the wrong time
2. Will not have too many children to care for properly. They do not feel that ‘birth control’ is wrong. So they use things like birth control pills and other things so that they will not become pregnant and have a baby.

It is my opinion that the real issue of ‘birth control’ is not what we do in using it but why we use it.

**BEFORE MARRIAGE**

If a woman/couple uses ‘birth control’ to have sex before marriage and not get pregnant, then I have a problem with that. Using ‘birth control’ in this way allows them to have sex without being married. God teaches us that we are not to have sex before we are married.

There are two other ways to look at this: First, some would argue that it’s okay to have sex with someone and/or if its’ only with the person you are engaged to and will marry. Since you don’t want to have a baby before you’re married, it’s okay to keep from becoming pregnant. Second, people would argue that couples who are not married should not have a baby because they are not ready for the responsibility of having and raising a child. More than one unmarried couple has chosen to use ‘birth control’ in order to have sex and not get pregnant if the ‘birth control’
didn’t control…it failed. The girl became pregnant and the guy deserted her! (With a child, no less!)

So, the best ‘birth control’ before marriage is not having sex before marriage! Then there is never a risk of becoming a parent before you become a marriage partner; when two people able to take care of a child, hopefully!

Not having sex, called abstinence, is not popular today. It seems like everybody wants us to think that everybody is having sex, nobody waits until they get married, and everybody uses birth control.

The real truth is that a lot of people, especially younger people, don’t have sex before marriage. Many, who do have sex, don’t use any means of controlling birth. They think: ‘It will never happen to us’. Somebody else will get pregnant from having sex but we won’t.

The scripture has a lot to say about ‘abstinence from sex’ when a couple is not in the right kind of a relationship. See Old Testament - The Corinthians – I Corinthians 6:15-20; The Thessalonians- I Thessalonians 4:3-8; - The Galatians - Galatians 5:19-21.

Note: The right kind of relationship means not having sex with a person you are not married to before marriage but also not having sex with someone other than your mate after you are married. (SEE PRE-MARITAL SEX)

AFTER MARRIAGE

‘Birth Control’ after marriage is a different matter. Now the issue is not to keep from having a baby at the wrong time when a couple is not married. Now the issue is not having a baby at the wrong time because the couple is married but simply don’t want to have children at this time.

The reasons for not having children are:
1. We can’t afford a child at this time.
2. We haven’t been married long enough and we’re not mature enough to have a child.
3. We want to wait until we are through school or can buy a house or can give the child what they need. (Giving the child what they need, by the way, does not mean having part ownership in ‘toys R us’!) But, it is important to be as ready as possible before having children. It is a big responsibility and couples should be as prepared as they can be.

Some of you know about those ‘Parent and Family Classes’ in school where kids learn about being parents and taking care of a family by carrying a doll (or an egg) around for a week and paying ‘fake bills’. (Not a bad idea even though the real thing is a whole lot different, especially when you can’t give the real baby back at the end of the week!)
Let’s look at ‘birth control’ after marriage.
As we have seen already, there are some people who believe that using ‘birth control’ in any way at any time is interfering with God’s power and plan for life and we shouldn’t do it ever. Others, of course, feel that using means to prevent pregnancy is a way God uses to fulfill His plan. In other words, He lets us ‘control’ birth.

The idea of God cooperating with us is not new in Scripture or in history. For instance, after God created humans in Genesis 1 at the beginning of time, He told them to take care of the earth and to multiply and populate the earth. But he wasn’t going to mow the lawns and take care of babies for them; they would have to do that!

So it is possible to cooperate with God in using the things that modern medicine has made possible to control when we will have children.

If we chose only to do that by trying to not have sex ‘at the wrong times’ we have a much higher chance of having children at the wrong time or having too many of them.

And remember, controlling when a baby will start its life before it is conceived (Birth Control) is a whole lot different than taking the life of a child after it is conceived. (SEE ABORTION). They are not the same.

**HOW GOD DOESN’T WANT US TO CONTROL BIRTH**
In modern times, God has allowed other ways of controlling birth; by allowing couples more freedom to decide when they want to have a baby. Some couples use ‘in vitro fertilization’ in order to have a baby. This means that eggs and sperm are put in a ‘bank’ to be used whenever the couple chooses to use them. The egg and the sperm are united outside the mother’s body and then put into her body to ensure that there is an embryo. This is the conception of a child.

By the way, there are single people who use this method to have children. In this case the baby will not usually have two parents. Often a woman who does not want to be married but wants to have children will use ‘the sperm bank’ from a man she may or may not know. Homosexual couples can and do use eggs and sperm from ‘strangers’ for the purpose of having children they cannot have naturally. I believe that ‘in vitro fertilization’ should be used primarily for married couples who have difficulty having children. What is important for us to understand is that controlling birth is a very difficult thing to decide and to do.

For instance, maybe God wants a couple to have a baby before they think they are ready to help them mature and grow as individuals. Maybe God knows that a child born at a special time will fulfill a special purpose. Maybe God knows that a ‘surprise’ child will bring the couple joy in a different way than their other children. Does their using birth control prevent those things from happening OR does God simply do what He wants to do anyway using human birth control?
Since God knows everything ahead of time, He knew He would allow ‘birth control’ and how He could still fulfill His perfect plan by couples using it. Amazing, isn’t it?

One of the ‘hot topics’ today is the ‘Morning after pill ’RU 486.’ This is a pill a woman can take after she has had unprotected sex if she thinks she might be pregnant. Some people feel that this is just another means of ‘contraception’. Others believe it is another means of abortion. The main difference between this and other kinds of ‘birth control pills’ is that one is taken before you get pregnant and one is taken after you get pregnant. One thing to note is that women have died from using RU 486; usually women don’t die using regular ‘birth control pills’.

So attempting to control birth is a very sensitive issue and should be considered very carefully. This is exactly why many people, especially religious people, say that we should leave ‘birth control’ up to God. Yet in the 2000’s an increasing number of people believe that we should have some ‘say’ in this process. Dealing with human life is a process which must be approached prayerfully and carefully. We are talking about human life here!

GUIDELINES
1. The means of birth control is a recent gift from God which allows us to be involved in the process. We should ask him for His wisdom in using it. There has always been one form of natural birth control, when a couple has sex. Other new and less natural means of birth control involve the use of chemicals, devices, or other means of preventing pregnancy. Usually, however, the ‘natural means’ are riskier.

2. Birth control should never be used to keep from getting pregnant while having sex before or outside marriage. God intends for couples that are unmarried to use the best birth control possible but not having sex. (No matter what a lot of people in education, the media, and other places are saying).

3. Birth control should be used in the right way. When the couple is using a less than natural means of birth control they should pray about it, and attempt to understand God’s timing for starting a family. They should also talking to people they trust to give them advice as to whether or not they are ready to take on this responsibility. (If you ask your mother remember she’ll probably want you to start your family right away so she can have grandchildren; so it might be better asking someone else!)

4. Often, no matter what a couple tries to do to control birth, it doesn’t work. This may be when God surprises them by giving them a baby when He thinks its best even though He has allowed them to be involved in the process of controlling it! Either way, he knows exactly when we will be born and how many years of life we have. (Psalm 139:16; Acts 17: 26) Remember, when it comes to birth control, one way or the other, God really does control it!
MODERN REASONING
It is our right to determine if and when we when a child should be born. It’s up to us…not up to ‘Him’ especially if we don’t believe that we were created by God and responsible to him for our choices!

RESPONSES
1. God really does control all birth.
2. God does allow for the discovery and use of modern methods of birth control that help people to decide if and when they have their children, but not as a way to have sex in the wrong ways.

RESOURCES
Torode, Sam. Open Embrace. A Protestant Couple rethinks contraception.

FACT
Approximately 1/3 of all women who become pregnant in a given year have never been married.

LIFE LAB
Discuss these concepts:
1. What things can only be done by God?
2. What things does He allow us to help Him with?
THE CHURCH

What can be said about the church? A lot! The first thing we need to do is to define it. What is the church? The New Testament tells us that ‘the church is a group of people who are especially called out to follow a particular person and accomplish a special task’.

That means two things. First, it is a group of people who are ‘called out.’ In the days of the New Testament, there were all kinds of groups. Groups that were called to make dye to color clothes, groups that were called to make things out of iron, groups that were called to be soldiers in the army. So, the Church was a group of people (believers in Christ) who were called to follow Christ (particular person) and to carry out His worldwide mission. (A special task) In other words, they were God’s ‘ecclesia’ taken from two Greek words, ‘Ek’ (out) ‘Kalew’ (to call), His ‘called-out ones.’

There were some very interesting things about the Church at the beginning. It began when a group of Christ’s followers proclaimed the Gospel to a group of people who were visiting Jerusalem on a holy holiday (they were called holy-days then). Every nation of that day was represented at this celebration and God gave His disciples the ability to tell the story in every language! So the whole world heard. (Acts 2:1-12). This was the ‘Birthday of the Church’ called Pentecost.

Old Observation 1 The Church was the center of the community of that day. The synagogue had been the center in Old Testament times but that changed. The ‘called out ones’ were gathered together at the temple and in their homes. (Acts 2: 42-46).

Old Observation 2 The Church had people who wanted to belong to it because of the way Christians treated each other. The ‘called out ones’ looked like the person they were following. The church grew…from 3,000 to about 10,000 people. The ‘called out ones’ were completing the task God had given them to accomplish! (Acts 2:41, 6:7)

Old Observation 3 The Church was soon to face being ‘put down’ and persecuted by those who did not agree with their message, the Gospel, or want to follow their leader Jesus Christ, or want their mission to succeed, giving out the Gospel to the world). (Acts 8: 1-3)

The Church of today is somewhat different; at least in this country. New Observation 1 The Church is not the center of our community. With soccer games and dance lessons and shopping malls, the church is no longer the ‘hub of what’s happening’. The Mall, the ‘hub of where people hang out’ has actually replaced it. In fact, a church would be the last place someone today might want to hang out, especially with religious people. This leads to our second observation from today.
New Observation 2 The Church does not have people who want to belong to because of the way Christians treat each other or not living out what they believe. What? When the church started, people wanted to be a part of it because they saw people treating each other in the right way. Today people don’t want to be part of it because Christians don’t live according to their beliefs and do not treat each other in the right way. (Think of it)

New Observation 3 The Church today is not facing persecution/being ‘put down ‘for what it believes, at least not yet (In the U.S.A). No, the Church in our times is pretty much allowed to do what it wants to do. Yet, in most other parts of the world, God’s people are face being treated badly and even being killed because of their Christian faith.

So the real question for you and the members of your family is: “Why go to church at all?” There are several answers to that question. Let’s take them one at a time.
1. What is the purpose of the church?
2. What is the job of the church?
3. What is good about going to church?
4. What is bad about going to church?
5. Why the church is still important today

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH
The reason that God created the Church was so that Christ would have a way to carry out his mission on earth. The Bible compares Christ to a head and the Church to a body they need each other in order to function. Think about it. Your head thinks and tells your body what to do. For example, your stomach tells your head it’s hungry and your head tells your eyes to find something you’d like to eat. Your hand gets ready to get it, put it in your mouth and tells your teeth to eat it. (Imagine if your body parts went on strike!)

Let’s imagine trying to eat an apple. Your stomach tells your brain it’s hungry. Your brain tells you eye to find an apple and your hand to pick it up and aim it for your mouth. But when it gets there, your mouth closes real tight and says, “I’m not chewing your apple; my teeth are tired and are taking a nap…try a milk-shake instead.” Well that won’t work, will it?

And it won’t work in the Church, the Body of Christ either. As our brain tells our body what to do, so Christ tells the Church what to do. But the Church is made up of people who have wills; they can choose if they want to do something or not. Like the hand that can decide if it wants to help you eat or not, the church can decide if it wants to help Christ get the job done or not. And what is Christ’s mission, what is the ‘job’ He needs to get done?

THE JOB OF THE CHURCH
There are two things that the Church is to do. The first is to help people who are Christians **grow** in their relationship with Christ. (Edification) The second is to help Christians help other people **know** Christ. (Evangelization).

At one of our churches, we stated our purpose and function this way: To care for one another **in Christ** so that we can reach the world **for Christ**. Simple, isn’t it? But as simple as it is, churches often forget it. Churches can think that they exist only to help their own members and people who attend. The reason why they are to be helped is so that they can help others. In other words, Christ does something **to** them so that He can work **through** them.

**WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT GOING TO CHURCH?**
If we look back to the Book of Acts at Pentecost, the Birth of the Church, we see several things that help us answer this question. After some 3,000 people have come to Christ (Acts 2:37-41), we note that they did the following things. (Acts 2:42-47).
- They were taught.
- They worshipped.
- They ate together.
- They prayed.
- They helped each other.
- They shared life together.

During these activities, ‘they had a spirit of joy and gladness’. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God.”

In fact, it tells us that because they ‘**cared** for one another in Christ, (2:42-47a) they **reached** their world for Christ’ (2:47b). That’s right. Look it up for yourself. They never forgot what their real mission was to bring the Gospel of Christ to the world.

In the Book of Hebrews, the writer talks about the importance of ‘going to church’ especially as the end of time is coming. Hebrews 10:19-25. It was not merely a suggestion to go to church. It was a commandment; not an option. (Go when I feel like it.) It was imperative. (I go even when I don’t feel like it!)

So when we answer the question about going to church, we can learn from what they did. We go because we need to be **taught**. We need to learn more about the Bible and what is has to say about how to live our lives and face the problems of today. We need to worship. The term used in Acts is ‘fellowship’. (Someone has said this means that ‘all the fellows were in the same ship’!) They were all going in the same direction. We too need to be going in the same direction in our devotion to God and to one another. We need to **worship** and we need to have true **fellowship** together. Worshipping God together is the basis of having real fellowship with each
other. We need to share with one another what God is doing in our lives. Sometimes these times are called ‘testimonies’ or ‘praise reports’ or ‘God-sightings’. (We encourage one another!) We need to offer our stewardship to the Lord of our time, talent, and treasure. We extend a witness to other people as a result of our teaching, worship, fellowship, sharing with one another, and giving to God.

In one of the churches we pastored, two Sundays each month, we had a ‘roving mike’ where people could share in a praise time. Everyone is encouraged by what God is doing in other people’s lives; it causes them to expect God to do thing in their lives. We need to have good times together, which often centers on food and in our church, coffee always! We can do this at church or we can do this in our homes. (Small groups and home meetings were definitely a part of the early church.) We need to pray together, sometimes as a whole congregation, sometimes in Sunday school classes, sometimes with just one or two other people. The main thing in praying is that we talk to God; listen to God, ask God for help for ourselves and for others. Church is a place where we can find help. This is not just spiritual help, but other kinds of help. Some people need food, some need help finding a job, others need to find someone to counsel them, others may need to have someone come and visit them when they are sick or in a rest home. And hopefully we go to church because we enjoy it!

I remember speaking in a church in Iowa once. The people looked like they were attending a funeral. Finally, during the message, I just had to stop and ask: “If we made a video of this service and gave it to the neighbors, do you think anyone would want to come to our church service?” I wasn’t asked to come again. (No surprise!) But there wasn’t anything funny about the congregation having no joy in being there. They looked bored, putting in their time, getting little out of it. Nobody would have wanted to get what they had!

There are other good things that come from going to church. It has been noted that kids who attend church are more likely to resist drugs and misuse of sex. Couples who attend church on a regular basis are often more satisfied with their marriages.

**WHAT IS BAD ABOUT GOING TO CHURCH?**

And you might be asking ‘what could be bad about going to church?’ We live in an age in America where a lot of people consider church to be old, out-dated, boring, and not related to their modern lives. Church is not something they feel good about. And a lot of Christians feel that way.

1. They feel church is an obligation. It’s on the same list as brushing your teeth. You do it because you’re supposed to and because it’s good for you! So a lot of kids go because their parents tell them to because they have to not because they want to. My kids felt that way when they were growing up, especially since their Dad was the Pastor of the church! All I can say is that if you brush your teeth, you’ll be glad your parents made you do it because you have a
healthy mouth. If your parents make you go to church even when you don’t want to go; you’ll have a healthy life!

2. They feel church is **boring**. Today when we can channel surf our 500 channel T.V., when movie makers spend millions of dollars on ‘effects’ to entertain us, when we have video games that make the Titanic look like a toy boat, and the world of the internet that is fast, moving and exciting. It makes sitting through a church service pretty much a downer. For kids (and some adults), the music isn’t loud enough; there aren’t enough things to see (media, drama, visuals) and someone speaking for longer than 15 minutes without a commercial. But church is not meant to be exactly like what we see, hear, and experience every day. Church needs to be different but relevant. It should relate to our lives. It should allow us to be quiet for a change, to focus on God instead of ourselves, to help us think about what we can do to help others and not just about what we like or what we need!

3. They feel church is **not related to their lives**. When most people get most of the information from the 6:00pm news or going on line, or ‘Face-booking’ with their friends, they really feel that they don’t need to go to church or be with other church people. The fact is that these things, for the most part, can’t help us to know what God wants us to do and can help us to do. (Wouldn’t it be nice if the news people could solve the problems they tell you about?) And, besides, reading any old book is not the same as reading, hearing from, studying, and learning from the **book** (that’s been around a lot longer than most other books!). Talking to friends may be helpful but they are humans just like we are; they have the same problems we have, we need our **eternal friend**, Jesus Christ to help us. He was the Son of God/Son of Man who as God became human and went through the problems we have so He can help us go through them! He not only knows about the problems He knows about the solutions.

4. They feel that **people who go to church are often phony**. (Or always ask for money.) And they’re right! There are a lot of Christians who go to church on Sunday and don’t live like Christians on Monday through Saturday. The world likes to call these people hypocrites. This is a Greek word, which means play-actors. It describes folks who look one way on the outside but are actually something else on the inside. They are phony. The best response I can make to this complaint is that there are phonies in every organization, not just in the church. And the best way to solve this problem is not to be phony yourself! We are called to live your lives so that other people will see us as for real and not phony. People in early church times saw people as real and wanted to become part of the church because of it.

5. They feel they can be a religious person or Christian without going to a service. Although it is true that a person can be religious or be a Christian without going to church regularly, going to church does help us grow in our faith. Remember how it worked in the early church. Remember, too, that don’t go to church to become Christians. We go to church because we have become Christians. But for a person who claims to be a Christian, who doesn’t go to church, is
like saying one is a flight attendant but never boards a plane or a basketball player who you never find at the gym!

**WHY CHURCH IS STILL IMPORTANT TODAY**

So is the church of today still related and important to our lives? Yes, because the Church has never changed as to who was supposed to belong to it or what it was supposed to be doing. The times have changed but the purpose of the church and the reason it is on earth has never changed.

God has always wanted His People to come together. He wants His people to carry out His mission to reach the world. That has always been what He has wanted; it is what He *still* wants today. Becoming part of God’s family, the Body of Christ, the Church, is a responsibility as well as a privilege. Going to Church is not something that is for ‘when we get around to it if we’re not too tired or too busy to go.’ It is something we are to plan to do every week, if possible.

Apparently a lot of people feel that way in this country since 125 million Americans are in church every week. But, too many kids go to church when they are young but stop going when they get older for many of the reasons already mentioned. When they stop *going*; they stop *growing*. And it’s also hard for them to go back. They get out of the habit.

Certainly it is important to walk and grow with God every day, but it is very important to experience that with others who are seeking to do the same thing. The two are connected. We need to grow in our relationship with the Lord by growing in our relationship with the Lord’s People.

A word about the church to parents: Don’t forget to go to the service yourself. Kids learn far more from your life than a lecture. If you drop them off, they more likely they will drop out someday. A lot of ‘boomer parents’ are coming back to church today because they want their kids to have ‘religion’ like they did when they were growing up!

A word about church to kids: Don’t give your parents a bad time about going to church. They need help in helping you to grow up; you need help growing up! Going to church together helps everyone with the job they have to do. A lot of kids who do leave the church as young people for whatever reason often come back to church later on. For many, they come to church this time because they want to, not because they have to. That which was part of their past becomes a meaningful part of their present and future, especially their children’s future.

But be careful not to stay away a long time. A lot can happen and often go wrong without having church in your life. You can believe in God and be a Christian but you can’t really grow in your spiritual life without other Christians to help you!
Remember: Church ‘Detours’ can be dangerous! They can allow you to get on the wrong road. God knew what He was doing when He ‘invented the church’ and called out people to be part of it. He did it for two very special reasons: 1- For His glory 2- For our good.
In other words, church is good for God and it’s good for us!

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What’s missing?  UR!!

MODERN REASONING
Being a good person doesn’t depend on attending a church every week. Religion is a private matter/experience and you can be a spiritual person without being a part of any specific group or church.

RESPONSES
1. The Church is not just something we go to! It is something we are everywhere we go.
2. It is important to have contact with other Christians regularly in order to grow in one’s faith and spiritual life.
3. God uses His Church to make the world a better place its members show other people that Christ makes a difference in their daily lives.

FACT
Average church attendance in the United States is almost 50%, the same percentage as on Christmas and Easter.

RESOURCES
Webber, Robert. The New Evangelicals.

LIFE LAB
1. Write your own definition of the church.
2. Discuss what the purpose of the church is.
3. Write out a response on how has the church become different today from when it started.
4. Pick one of the reasons people don’t go to church and defend it.
CLONING

Ah, now here’s a question we need to investigate! But let’s make sure we make a copy of our findings! First, what is cloning? You won’t find the word in older dictionaries. No, it’s a term that’s new in today’s culture. It is to create life from something else. It is to copy something that is already created.

In the past, we believed that God was the only one who could create life. The thought of us doing that was unbelievable. Today, with modern science and scientific experimentation, humans have ‘taken over’ what God has always done before.

In the Old Testament, we find an example of cloning. Are you sure? And what do we find? Here we find humans are trying to ‘clone God’.

In Isaiah 40, for example, the writer asks a question and makes a statement:

*QUESTION: “To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?”* (Isaiah 40:18)

*STATEMENT: “As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. You look for a craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.”* (Isaiah 40:19, 20)

God makes another statement in Isaiah 42:17, “But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods’, will be turned back in utter shame.” (NKJV). The Message calls them ‘non-gods.’ What is God saying here? He is saying that people who ‘make their own gods’ are wrong. And after, all, how could anyone make anything that even compared to Him? There are two things we must see here.

1. There is a big difference between G-O-D and g-o-d-s. No one makes God. He always has been. He is the only thing in the world that no one made. Everything can only exist because someone who was already made makes them! In other words, if God did not exist, you and I would not exist. And if we did not exist, we would not be able to make things like houses, cars…other ‘gods.’ We wouldn’t be able to clone anything either.

2. Unlike God, who needed nothing to make us, we need something that God has made to make other things, like cars, and animals (By now, we’ve all heard of ‘Dolly’, that English sheep that made history and headlines when scientists cloned her from cells in another sheep, who, by the way eventually did die!)? They made her exactly like the sheep whose cells they took to ‘make
her.’ But the cells were already there; people did not create the cells, they cloned a sheep they from the cells of another sheep. God made the original, humans made a copy.

**POINT:** God makes something from nothing; man always makes something already made.

We learn another thing from the Old Testament Scriptures; God is the only True Creator and Maker of all things. For example, in Genesis, we are told God started with nothing. “The earth was formless and empty” (Genesis 1:2) (NIV) the Message, “Earth was a soup of nothingness.” And what did HE do? He simply spoke the word, “And God said, let there be” and lots of things came into being. Things like light, sky, ground, birds, animals, and finally men and women. When He describes how He made us it says, “And the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Genesis 2:7) A man named, Elihu, said it well in the Book of Job. “Look I’m human, no better than you; we’re both made of the same kind of mud.” (Job 33:6) *(See EVOLUTION)*

We see this same principle in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:3 where the writer says, “By faith we see the world called into existence by God’s word, what we see created by what we don’t see.” We use the wood that God made from trees to make houses; we make the cars we drive out of the metal God made; we make pizzas from the meats, and cheeses God derives from the cows He made.

And what does this all have to do with cloning? Cloning is to make a copy of the original! We cannot make anything ourselves without God’s help; if it was not for what is already made, we could not make anything…. (Things like ‘Dolly’.) By the way, scientists have now cloned 8 mammals: sheep, mice, rabbits, goats, cats, pigs, cattle, and now horses. So, we must ask the question. Should we ‘clone’?

**Argument 1:** Yes we should. After all, God gave us the basic stuff to work with (cells) and the brains to figure out what to do with it. After all, we think if we can improve our quality of life and create better animals and people; wouldn’t God want us to do that? Maybe….

**Argument 2:** No, we shouldn’t. After all, God is the one who made the basic stuff and He is the only one who should be able to use it. After all, we should remember that God is the only True Creator and we should not be ‘taking over His job’ in trying to create life.

Perhaps it is important that we also look at what the Scriptures teach us about thinking we can get along without God and/or try to do what He does. Back in Genesis, humans started to build a tower called Babel. The wanted to get to God by building something tall enough to actually get us into heaven! God’s response to this man-made project was to stop it and actually scatter people all over the earth!
(SEE MODERN DAY RELIGIONS) Later on, Moses built a tabernacle; a place to worship God. King Solomon built a temple for the same reason. But, according to the Book of Acts and Hebrews, no place was big enough to give God a house. In Acts 17: 24, we read, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Master of sky and land doesn’t live in custom made shrines. He makes the creatures, the creatures don’t make him.” In Hebrews 9:24, “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.” (NIV) Meaning? Nothing that we (humans) can make or do can even begin to compare to what He (superhuman) can make or do. Anything we come up with is not an original; it originates with humans. God made the world and each of us and He allows us to make everything else, but nothing is as good as the original made by the Originator!

Many people however do not believe in God or believe that He is the only one who has power to create things. They believe in the ability and intellect of humans and their power to create things. It’s our way of saying to God, “look how smart we are and how much we can do ourselves!” Think God is impressed? No!

Many other people do believe in God and do not believe that we should try to create things ‘on our own’. They are afraid that if we can use cells to create sheep, we will soon use cells to create humans. For instance, a couple that recently lost their child at a young age want to use his D.N.A. to create another ‘Teddy’. They admit that he would be a different person and have a different personality but he would still be their son. People also fear that people could create a ‘super race’ of people made out of ‘superior cells’. Every kid on the block would have blond hair, steel blue eyes, have an I.Q. of 280 and get into college with a Math scholarship at age 8 or eventually humans could actually create life without God’s help. That’s right; humans could make other humans, in a different way than they already do. The ‘creature would take over the Creator’s job.’ But are we taking over God’s job? Are we going where we are not supposed to go, doing what we are not supposed to do?

What does the Bible have to say about our doing that? In Isaiah 45, the writer uses the example of clay talking to the potter that is making it into a pot. The clay doesn’t say to the potter, ‘I don’t like how you are making me!’ (Isaiah 45: 9) In other words, ‘God I don’t like the fact that you have given me a kid with blue eyes instead of green eyes, I’m going to make me another one with the right kind of eyes or I don’t like the fact that by baby is going to have something wrong with it when it is born, so I’m going to create one that doesn’t have anything wrong with it’!

In Romans 9:21, the writer uses the example of clay another way. Here, he asks a question, “Clay doesn’t talk back to the fingers that mold it saying, why did you shape me like this?”

In other words, God has the right to take the same substance (dust, clay, cells) and make something different out of it. He can take certain cells and make another sheep, ‘Dolly’ or another person, ‘Danny’. That’s up to Him. The point of this question is that we have nothing to
do with that decision. What ‘cloning ‘comes down to this question? Should The One who is the creator produce life, make animals, and people, or should those who are created do it? It is my belief that we should leave the job of creating/cloning up to God for several reasons:

First, it was God’s idea to create us. We would not be here if it were not for Him. He is in a class all by Himself and we have no business trying to ‘be God’. (That is something the Devil always has wanted us and still wants us to do.)

Secondly, it is God who has given us all our abilities. It is wonderful that we can do so many things, compose music, Write books, and make cars and houses. But, we should show our thanks to Him by realizing that He never gave us these things so that we would replace Him or try to do what He does.

Thirdly, it is a prideful thing to try to live our lives without God’s help. When we think we are smart enough to do things on our own, we do what people throughout history have done. People who found out living without God was an attitude that displeased God and led to His ‘bringing them down’ for their failure to honor him in their lives/with their choices.

Fourthly, we take a big chance that something might go wrong when we try to do things on our own. It’s a little like the monster, Frankenstein, remember? An experiment in the laboratory went wrong and the ‘maker wound up with a monster’! It certainly is possible that when humans began to fool around with making things on their own, they risk creating other monsters! It’s like modern ‘Babel’. It is another effort by those who are created to compete with the creator; to replace Him, to live life without Him, to do things on their own.

Remember, too, what God did with the people of Babel. He did not like what they were trying to do and made sure that their efforts were unsuccessful. Getting involved with God’s work may be like ‘Babel, II’. God may allow us to experiment and use our skills to make things for a while, but then may well decide that that’s enough and ‘confuse’ what we are trying to do. He may also let us go and possibly create problems far bigger than we know how to handle.

Maybe we’d be better off if we let the Creator do what He has good at and stay away from doing what we’re very good at.

**MODERN REASONING**
God gave us the brains to create things so that should include being able to make copies of the original.

**RESPONSES**
1. God does not need us to help Him make things that only He should make.
2. We cannot make anything without what God has already made anyway.
3. Trying to make things on our own may make us think we can live without God’s help in other areas of our life.

**RESOURCES**

Singer, Randy. *Irreparable Harm.*

Lane, Lester. *Human Cloning: Playing God or Scientific Progress?*

**FACT**

The first animal ever cloned, a cat, was called, appropriately. “Copy Cat.”

**LIFE LAB**

Teaching Aim: Only God, The Creator of life should be the one to create it. Simulate a person painting a portrait of a live person. Discuss this: Although the artist can reproduce the person on the canvas, they cannot produce the person themselves. Discuss the difference between an artist painting a picture and humans making new life on their own.
CLOTHES/FADS

Maybe any kid reading this material will be ready to react and say, “When it comes to clothes I don’t care what the Bible says about it…. No one is going to tell me what to wear!” The Bible doesn’t exactly tell you how you should dress or what you should wear! (Whew!)

Wouldn’t it be easier if God had put all the rules about everything on one page of “the God Manual?” How convenient to look in the index under “Dress Code” on page 316!

As a matter of fact, the Bible gives confusing messages about clothing. Take for example how people were dressing in the Garden of Eden. Fig leaves were in! Or how about the people in the New Testament, in the city of Corinth, to be exact, when women were supposed to wear veils over their head and faces? Then there is Peter telling ladies that their beauty should not be with braided hair, jewelry, and fine clothes. I Peter: 3:3-8
(I think most modern girls only look that way when they are going to the prom!) Is there anything in there about the ‘grunge look’? Well, maybe...John the Baptist in his camel hair outfits!

So to find a particular clothing style as the ‘norm’ in the Bible is impossible. It’s obvious that people are to wear clothing (no clothes went out when Adam and Eve got kicked out of Eden!) But the question is….what kind of clothes were they supposed to wear? In answering that question, we have to deal with two other questions.

First, what should our appearance be? Secondly, should we follow the fashion trends of the world in which we live?

APPEARANCE

Answer 1: The Bible doesn’t comment on what clothes we should be wearing in the 3rd Millennium A.D. (B.U.M. Sweatshirts, mini-skits, and would you believe, bell bottoms?) but it does talk about the appearance of a Christian.

Although the Scriptures can be viewed as open to a lot of interpretation, it’s pretty clear about how a Christian is supposed to look. The New Testament addresses the life and practice of a Christian, of course, something the Old Testament could not. It talks about several things in relation to a Christian’s appearance.

1. It should be becoming to a follower of Christ. In a sense it says that we are to be living advertisements and walking billboard for Christ (II Corinthians 3: 3-3). “Your lives should be easy to read by anyone looking at you. Christ Himself wrote it, not with ink but with God’s living Spirit.” Simply, it should focus on Him more than on us. We are not trying to show
ourselves off, we are trying to show Him off! (I know…try telling that to a kid in Middle School who wants to be popular and fit in by being like everyone else. sounds pretty ridiculous.) It reminds me of a poster I saw the other day: “Remember you are an absolutely unique person…just like everyone else!”

2. It should be **distinct or different.** (II Corinthians 6:17). There is always a fear here that Christians who dress differently are viewed as ‘weird’. To be different does not mean ‘out of it’/’nerdy’. What it does mean is that a Christian will not wear everything that everyone is wearing if what everyone else is wearing is immodest or improper. Example: A girl who is trying to dress distinctly as a Christian would not most likely be wearing a see-thru blouse to school or a really low v-neck dress to the prom. Or a guy who is a Christian and dressing distinctly is not sporting a ‘thong bathing suit’ at the Youth Group’s trek to the beach.

3. It should be **clean and presentable.** (Well so much for the grunge look….) but, wait a minute, is there anything wrong with baggy jeans and an over-sized sweatshirt? Probably not. Having your tie-dyed sweatshirt worn for 3 weeks straight without visiting the washing machine? Yes, I know it’s fashionable to have jeans that look like Martin Luther wore them with holes or have sweatshirts that could stand alone… (This is probably what the wearer should do!)

But honestly, how attractive are we or how effective is our advertisement for the Christ in our life if we wear clothes that are too sexy or too dirty? People say that if we ‘dress funny’ we can turn people off. For instance, what kid in your school would want to be like you if a guy wore blue suede shoes or a girl who wore a poodle skirt to school today? (You might need to ask your parents about those two items) I mean, no one would think that Christians were ‘cool’; they would think we were crazy. (Old styles do come back; you know… how many times have mini-skirts returned?) But to dress exactly like everyone else is not always the best guideline to go by. We can look cool without looking crude!

**FASHION TRENDS**

Answer 2: The Scriptures have quite a bit to say about following the fads what is fashionable in society. For many people having the right clothes is a BIG deal. They figure clothes make the man or woman; it is the basis of success. They also use clothes as a way to think of themselves as superior to others who don’t dress as well! A lot of girls are spending $250.00 for a hand bag and $100.00 for a swimsuit!

This is why, by the way, some schools require uniforms to eliminate that problem! A Christian, however, has been re-made to thinking a new way. So they are encouraged to think more about how they look on the inside than the outside. Let’s look at why:
Ephesians 2: 1-3 “It wasn’t so long ago that you were mired in the old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn’t know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat.”

Titus 3:3 “It wasn’t so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our wants and desires”

I John 2:15-17 “Don’t love the world’s ways. Don’t love the world’s goods; the love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world; wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father, that just isolates you from Him.”

All these scriptures suggest to us that we are not to live and look like we used to. This might be hard for some of you to get because you’ve been a Christian since age 2. (You have no ‘used to’ life). But, to be new in Christ means to think and act differently. It has been said that Christ loved us too much to let us stay the same; He died to make us different, but not weird!

For everyone else, having things, likes clothes, is a BIG deal. But Christians are called to look at it another way: Christ is not nearly as impressed with what we wear on the outside as how we look on the inside. In the Old Testament, God says to Samuel when he was ready to choose a king. “God will judge persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.”(I Samuel 16: 7)

In the New Testament, Christ put it this way in The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) “All this time and money wasted on fashion. Do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out in the field and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby compared to them.” (The Message)

In fact, people can use clothes to cover up things about themselves they don’t want other people to see. They can also use them as a way of covering up things that are missing in their lives. Let’s remember that under those clothes, we are all naked. That’s how God sees us, right through our $400.00 suits and $600.00 dresses! And besides, God is not as concerned about our clothes as He is our character. For instance, a man in his G.Q. suit (Gentleman’s Quarterly Magazine) working in a bank can look good and be addicted to cocaine and another man who is dressed in a Nike tee-shirt with holes in his shoes can be a missionary to homeless people (which he used to be!)

And speaking of homeless people, we also need to consider how much we’re spending on clothes. Too many people today (adults and kids) spend too much money on either the ‘name brand clothes’ or just too many clothes. (Look at our drawers and closets!)
The average couple in this country spends $1,200.00 on their senior prom!

By the way, is there anything wrong with sales and thrift shops? (Funny thing, a lot of today’s styles look like the clothes are from these places anyway!)

The New Testament also tells us to be ‘adorned in righteousness’ to put on ‘spiritual clothes’, which Christ has given us as new believers. This is part of how we are ‘living billboard’ advertising what Christ has done in our life. These clothes are not made of cloth; they are made of ‘character’ qualities like love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, goodness, and self-control. In fact, Christ also tells us that when He comes back someday we will be ’dressed in our deeds’!

That’s right, who wants to trade in their Gucci handbag for a joy as an accessory? But then it won’t matter how many outfits we had now. What will matter is how we’re outfitted when Christ returns to earth. God puts the focus on heavenly fashions!

But so much for all this talk about ‘spiritual clothes’; let’s back to the original question: what kind of clothes should a Christian wear today? Answer: Clothes that are becoming to those who claim to be Christians. The key here is to have the right kind of thinking/attitudes on the ‘inside’, which will help you make the right decisions about attire on the ‘outside.’

We need to comment on something really important that goes along with clothes and friends. (SEE PEERS). That’s self-image, how we see and feel about ourselves. It is so easy to try to ‘dress up the outside’ in order to try to make up for what we don’t think we have on the inside.

Our self-image, though, really depends on what we are inside. For people who say they are Christians what they are on the inside should depend more on the fact that God loves me and accepts me for who I am than if others love and accept me.

But that’s a hard thing for a Middle School guy (and especially girls) to ‘buy into’ when their friends emphasize how they look, not what they are really like, right?

A lot of people’s acceptance of other people in this culture is being ‘cool’ and a lot of that has to do with clothes!

Clothes Goals for Kids:
Don’t try to be like everyone else, chose clothes that are right for you, don’t spend too much money on them, make them appropriate and clean and remember to look good on the inside first and what you wear on the outside won’t be so important!

Clothes Goals for Parents:
Talk about your values when it comes to money and material things. Set limits and decide what is acceptable and what isn’t and stick to it! Make your kids earn that expensive stuff they’ve got to have. Have frequent reality checks on your family values.

**MODERN REASONING**
You should be able to wear whatever you want, stay up with the fads, and worry about what everyone else thinks and spend whatever it takes.

**RESPONSES**
1. When it comes to how we look and dress, it is best to follow God’s guidelines instead of our peer group or advertisers.
2. Putting too much emphasis on how we look focuses too much attention on appearance on the outside rather than character on the inside.

**RESOURCES**

**FACT**
The American Teen-ager spends 34% of their money on clothes each year. In a single year, teenagers spend approximately 122 billion over all; 1.3 billion of that amount with on-line stores.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* Sometimes what people wear becomes important for the wrong reasons.  
*Activity:* Select two people from your group. Give one ‘ugly/old clothes’ to wear and ‘cool/new clothes to the other one. Discuss: Did how these two people dress make you feel differently about them…how and why?
CULTS/OCCULT

Reader Beware: You are now entering subject matter zone which is potentially dangerous! Why? Because the Devil himself does not want you to read it/ know about him/ know how he operates. He would like to ‘keep you in the dark’ about these things. In fact, that’s what the words cult and occult mean; to hide, to conceal.

For starters, this is the very opposite of what God wants to do. God doesn’t want to ‘keep us in the dark’ by hiding the truth. He wants to everybody to know it; He wants everyone to come to the light!

God states His purpose in Ephesians 1: “It’s in Christ that you once heard the truth and believed in this, the message of your salvation, found yourselves home free, signed, sealed and delivered by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, God wants us to know all about Himself and how He operates. Christ came to make that possible. Satan does not want us to know about him and how he operates. He operates best ‘under cover’, in the dark. Christ operates best in the light. Satan operates best where there is no light. Christ tells us how Satan operates, how to expose the darkness, and how to overcome the devil himself! He tells us how to deal with him!

From the first book of the Bible Genesis thru to Revelation, the devil is consistent; he always operates the same way. Why does he operate that way? Because what he does keeps working. And that’s because we keep letting it work.

The chief term used to describe Satan is counterfeit. He attempts to duplicate God and what He does so that we will follow him and not God. After all, Satan tried to over-throw God and got thrown out of heaven. When he came to earth he tried to get the first two human beings to follow him instead of following God. And guess what? It worked! He tried it again with the Tower of Babel, it worked. He tried it again with Baal, trying to get God’s people to follow the false god rather than the true one. It worked. He has tried it thru-out history thru world religions and cults that have substituted worship for God with worship for ‘a god’. It has worked. At the end of the world, he will try it one more time thru the anti-Christ who will make people think he is the real Christ when he isn’t. It will work, too, but only for a short time and for the last time!

Simply, Satin hates God, wants to get back at Him, and uses the people God has created to get them to ‘turn on God’…and to ‘turn to him’ instead! One of the main ways the devil has done this has been thru ‘false religions.’ There are three forms of ‘false religions.’

First, there are so called churches that do not believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sin. The term church means those called out in Christ. So, if they deny Christ they cannot truly be called a church. Most of these churches say they believe in God but believe that
there or more than one way to get to Him other than thru Christ. They usually believe that you can do things on your own to earn your own salvation, things like attending their church. They basically believe that everyone is good and can do enough good things to be accepted by God without accepting Jesus Christ.

Secondly there are groups that are called CULTS. Although many of these groups call themselves churches, they do not qualify as a church because they do not believe in Christ as The Son of God. Usually they substitute their leader for Christ Himself. Example: The Unification Church makes Rev. Moon equal to Jesus.

Thirdly, there are groups that are part of THE OCCULT. These groups not only deny Christ but also actually believe in and follow Satan himself! So, why does their name mean ‘hidden’? Because they cover up the real facts about who they are and how they really operate. Let’s put it this way: If Satan knocked on your door and said, ‘Hey do you want to be a Satanist, you would probably not sign up. But, if he could persuade you to give up your Christian faith…in small ways, would you do that?

As true Christianity seeks to reveal the mystery, false religions seek to conceal the mystery. (Remember Ephesians 1:7-10, 17-21) Example: These worshippers of Satan make him equal to Jesus. This is what Satan specializes in: not telling you the truth about who he is and what he is up to. (Remember Genesis 3:1-6)

Let’s take ‘Wicca’ for example. For starters, the word means ‘witch.’ It comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for ‘wise.’ Its’ national headquarters are in New Bern, North Carolina. It is based on magic, the study of herbs, and the worship of the mother goddess and her male escort, the ‘horned god’ (Three guesses who that might be?) The worshippers honor their old goddesses and gods. Wicca says it’s not a religion that worships the devil and that Wicca gods are not related to Satan. But, it is pretty safe to say that Wicca witches and other worshippers of the mother goddess and the ‘horned god’ don’t worship God and Jesus Christ, isn’t it? What do you think? Recently, the Department of Defense actually recognized Wicca, a pagan religion of witches and warlocks as an official religion. At an Army Base in Texas, for example, twenty witches attend covens on a regular basis.

So how is it that people, many nice, innocent, church people ever get into these ‘false religions’ anyway? They either don’t know the truth or they deny what they know.

There are three groups of people who do: Those with no religion, those with the wrong religion, and those who have a weak religion.

**Those with no belief in God at all.** When anyone comes along with what looks and sounds good to him or her, they buy it. After all, we know that people today are seeking a spiritual experience
but not one that has to do with organized religion or a particular church. They often worship nature or ‘a god inside them’ or themselves!

*Those who do not believe in Christ as the Son of God* but are looking to find a ‘savior/salvation’ somewhere else. They, too, need to find a spiritual experience. Since they haven’t found the real thing at church, they may well find it outside the church in some ‘new’ group. This is true of many world religions, which do not recognize God as the creator or the world or Christ as the Savior of the world.

*Those with a weak belief* look for something new, different and exciting. These are people who claim to be Christians. But, Christianity and the church have become old, out-of-date, boring, not related to their life. Their attitudes are often a result of not attending church regularly, not spending time in the Bible, having no prayer life, not learning for themselves, but always depending on someone else like a Pastor or Sunday School Teacher to do it for them.

Remember, Satan, in John 8:44, is known as a ‘liar and a murderer.’ In other words, he tells you what is untrue in order to ruin you. And what better way to ruin someone than to convince him or her that:
1. They don’t need God.
2. They don’t need God/Christ to save them from/help them deal with their sin.
3. They can actually find God and salvation thru a relationship through someone else.

How does a person who is seeking a spiritual experience actually get involved in a cult or worse, an occult movement? By believing a lie. That’s right…. either by never knowing the truth or turning away from the truth they know; they begin to believe ‘another truth’ (Satan’s lie). After all, Satan wants people to believe and follow him rather than believing in/following God as the first humans found out!

The Bible talks about this happening. In II Corinthians 4:2 Paul explains, “If our message is obscure to anyone, its’ not because we’re holding back in any way. No, it’s because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuses to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness.” Actually they have let Satan blind them by the wrong choices they have made.

In Galatians 1:6-9, Paul states his amazement over people who have known the truth but run after something false. “I can’t believe your fickleness; how easily you have turned traitor to him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing an alien message, a no-message.” In II Timothy 4:1-7, Paul predicts that in the last days before the coming of Christ, people would “have no stomach for solid teaching but will fill up with junk food; catchy opinions that tickle their fancy.”
Here we have all three categories of people who Satan is able to lie to, deceive, and get to follow a ‘false god’ thru ‘false religion’. Those with no church background, those who have known the truth but turned from it, and those who actually follow false teachers who tell them what they want to hear not what they ought to hear. And what they want to hear is not that they are sinners and need to be saved from sin, but they are not sinners… and if they are, they can save themselves.

There are lots of choices to pick from. In his book, Larson’s New Book of Cults, Bob Larson, lists ninety-five major cult groups in this country. They all offer the message of “you’re not so bad”, “you can be your own god”; “you can save yourself.” And lots of people dine at this ‘cult cafeteria’ where there is smorgasbord of choices.

Isn’t it amazing that these people who say they can’t have faith to believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ can trust in other humans who teach them so many other things about religion? Thought: We all have faith; we just put it in different places. If people can have faith in humans to teach them about what is false, they can have faith in God to teach them about Truth!

Ever thought about how we use faith every day? We cross a bridge and don’t know who built it; we eat in a restaurant and we’ve never met the cook; we fly in an airplane without ever knowing the pilot. Yet, we place our faith in the bridge to get us across the water, the restaurant food not to make us sick, and the plane to get us safely to where we need to good (with our luggage, too, hopefully!). But why is it that people say they can’t believe in God because they have never seen Him and because of that they can’t trust him? Let’s put it this way: Everybody has a faith, they just don’t put it all in the same place.

Actually Peter warns people today about the kinds of people who will try to mislead them. In his second letter he states. “There will also be lying prophets among the people then just as there will be lying religious teachers among you, telling clever stories in order to recruit a crowd of mixed-up followers who can’t tell right from wrong.” (II Peter 2:1-3)

These are some of the ‘facts’ people will be told:
1. There is no God that created the world and everyone in it; the world started by itself.
2. We are not here by special design and for a special purpose, we have simply evolved from a lower species, so we are no more important than an ape! (SEE EVOLUTION)
3. We are not going to have to give an account of how we lived our lives—since there is no God, we will not have to report to anyone!
4. God loves people too much to send them to hell. (SEE GOD).

But the reality is that God, the Creator, makes people. They are here for a purpose. They will give an account for the way they live their lives. They will face the consequences of their choices, too! And that’s why deep down inside they know that there is a God and they want to
find him and have a relationship with him. Satan knows that. That’s why he tries to provide a substitute god, substitute religion, substitute salvation for people thru himself!

Maybe you are asking, “How does one avoid getting involved with a false religion a cult or the occult?”

Here are several considerations:
1. What does the group say about the Bible?
2. What does the group say about Christ?
3. What does the group say about salvation and life after death? The right answers to these questions will help people avoid getting into the wrong group.

**Consideration 1: The Bible.**
Cults/the Occult will substitute some other ‘bible/writing’ for the Bible or make their writing equal to the Bible. In other words, they will take the word of their ‘bible’ over God’s Word, the Bible. For instance, the satanic ‘bible’ is used and followed by Satanists and it is obviously opposed to the teaching of the Bible. This is especially true because Satan not Christ will win in the end. We know that this is absolutely not true. (Read Revelation 20) This thinking may also be the result of people not believing that the Bible is true. They say you can’t use the Bible to ‘prove the Bible.’ Because they claim that the Bible isn’t true; they say Christ isn’t true either! Again many ‘outside facts’ prove that Christ did live, serve, and die on earth; to fulfill God’s purpose in saving us and restoring our relationship with God! *(SEE -THE BIBLE)*

**Consideration 2: Christ.**
Cults/the Occult will substitute some other Christ or savior for the true Christ. This happens in two ways. Either they will say that you don’t need Christ to provide a relationship with God or you need Christ plus another ‘savior’. For instance, in the case of The Latter-Day Saint Church (Mormons) one can believe in Jesus Christ, which they say they do, but also in Joseph Smith to be a prophet of God in order to go to heaven. Satan, of course, always wants people to believe in him (the false ‘god’) than in (The True God) and he will continue to try to get people to worship ‘him’ rather than to worship HIM. *(See Isaiah 14: 12-15; Genesis 3: 1-4).*

**Consideration 3: Salvation.**
Cults/the occult believes that a person is not sinful or that if they are, they can ‘save themselves.’ This belief is also true in world religions and some mainline churches.
What is interesting is that if you ask many of these people, “when you die will you go to heaven” they will tell you they hope so if they are good enough and do enough good things. (Mormons aren’t sure…just ask one!) In other words, they are not sure of getting into heaven because that depends on what they do for God not on what He does for them! Christ does not save them, they save themselves. Instead of trusting what **He did**, they trust what **they can do!** *(Find out the truth for yourself in Ephesians 2:1-10)*
It is through making the Bible and Christ to appear ‘false’ that leaders get people to follow false religions, the cult, and the occult. These leaders are people like David Hubbard, Reverend Sun Moon, Jim Jones, David Koresh, and other cult leaders.

One of the things people must be aware of today is that Satan is becoming **bolder** in making his power and presence known. How do we know this? For one thing, Halloween has become so much more celebrated as a major holiday. The celebration of Halloween dates back some 2,000 years; it was a feast to the ‘Lord of the Dead’. It is a pagan holiday. In the church the eve of November was set aside for honoring those who had died. It was called ‘All-hallows Eve’ eventually came to be known as Halloween. What was meant to honor the dead became a holiday to glorify death.

It has been discovered that people are spending almost as much for Halloween as they are for Christmas…. lights, costumes, etc. We know of actual ‘Halloween Carols’, which are Christmas carols with Halloween words. What used to be a nice safe little holiday for cute kids in costume to go trick or treating has become a ‘high unholy day for Satan’. As the time of Christ’s return comes closer and closer, this holiday will become more and more celebrated. That is because there is a whole lot more to it than pumpkins and costumes. We need to be very careful about how we celebrate it, if at all. It can become an easy way for people to get involved with things far more serious, things that can lead to actual Satan worship, which is what he wants, of course. One little girl in her letter to God said, “Dear God, I’m wearing a witches costume for Halloween this year, is that alright with you?” I’m guessing that God would say ‘no’!

For another, there is increased interest in satanic activity such as witchcraft, black magic, tarot card/palm readings, and astrology—trying to determine one’s life decisions by the stars. There’s a difference between astrology and astronomy. The first is not a true science, the second is. This can lead people, especially children, into other kinds of activity like Ouija Boards and Dungeons and Dragons or Pokémon (The Pocket Monster). A lot of people believe that the Harry Potter Series makes kids think too much about the wrong kind of spirits by getting them to dabble in magic, spells, and sorcery. On one hand they take them too seriously; on the other they don’t take them seriously enough. We need realize that there is a real Satan but also remember that there is a real God who will conquer him!

Too, there is more and more written about Satan, demons, and angels. And remember not all angels are good and bring light. A host of these angelic beings were kicked out of heaven with Satan when he tried to over-throw God, and they are now called’ demons’. They are bad and bring darkness. It is good to know, though, that only one third of the angels that left heaven are bad ones; the other two thirds who stayed there are good ones. God has Satan outnumbered two to one!
I hope by this time I have let you know how serious it is to get involved with the cult/occult in any way. Unfortunately, one of the ways that can happen is when people, even church people either don’t believe in Christ or do believe but ‘drift away’ from what they believe and open themselves up to false teaching.

This is really what happened all the way back at the beginning of time, in Genesis 3. Here Eve got away from trusting in God and what He said to her. Forgetting all that God has already given her by his care for her, she became really attracted to the serpent (who was Satan disguised). She believed what he said instead. Sin came into the world, and Satan got his way with the first humans and all human beings afterward! “He was a killer from the very start. He couldn’t stand the truth because there’s not a shred of truth in him” (The Message - John 8:44). He is always out to ruin our lives by not telling us the truth.

One of the ways he tries to do that is to get us to believe the wrong things about God and do the wrong things in worshipping and following ‘other gods’. Some of those ‘other gods’ are things we have all already talked about in this book. What’s different about the cult/occult is that unlike sex, alcohol, or drugs, religion/worship seems so innocent and so ‘good.’ The problem is this temptation is based on the same lies that will lead a person into something that will ruin them, just like sex, alcohol, or drugs!

By turning away from the light of Christ and turning to the darkness of Satan, a person can miss finding a right relationship with God or continuing in that relationship. This, of course, is exactly what Satan wants. He always wants to keep people from either ‘knowing God’ or ‘growing in their relationship with God’

Again, in II Corinthians, Paul describes people who follow Satan and mislead others this way: “They’re a sorry bunch, false apostles, lying preachers, crooked workers, posing as Christ agents but sham to the core. And no wonder! Satan does it all the time, dressing up to be a beautiful angel of light. So it shouldn’t surprise us when his servants masquerade as servants of God.” It’s a lot like Halloween...Satan wears a disguise, promises a treat but gives you a trick instead! We need to be on the lookout for these people who are false followers of Satan trying to lead us away from the truth.

An illustration will help. Bank tellers are trained for their jobs by learning how to recognize money that is true and money that is counterfeit or false. And how do they do that? They spend two solid weeks looking closely at true dollars…not by looking false ones. By spending so much time looking at the real thing, they can spot something phony instantly. This is the task of every believer in Christ, to keep looking at the truth so they can spot that which isn’t. This is why every child and young person is encouraged to go to Church and Sunday school or small group Bible study, or Youth Group.
When children and young people focus on what is true they will be better able to not follow what is false. To go after what is right helps them not to go after what is wrong. This is why it is so important that children be trained in the essentials of the truth and know how to explain what they believe as they are growing up. (SEE PARENTS)

MODERN REASONING
Christianity is old-fashioned/out of date. People need new religions for a new age. All religious are the same and they all lead to the same God any way.

RESPONSES
2. Satan tries to get us to follow ‘another god’ rather than the True God.
3. People who follow a ‘false religion’ try to find things God promises to give them without believing in and following him.
4. The best way to not be misled into what is false is to stay close to what is true.

RESOURCES
Boa, Ken. Cults, World Religions and the Occult.

FACT
There are 5,000 new cults started in the United States every year!!

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: These movements are based on ‘bad religion’ because their teaching are false taught by a human leader who often thinks they are ‘god’ and misleads their members.
Activity: Identify items in daily life that are the real thing and items that are substitutes, such as jewelry, cars, purses, etc. Discuss the differences and compare this to the differences between true and false religion.
DATING

For the kids who have been reading this book, this may be the most popular chapter. So, where to start about dating?

Why not start in the Old Testament? (You mean people were dating in the Old Testament…well, why else do you think the Old Testament talks about being getting married and having children!) By the way, Adam and Eve probably didn’t date. They were created as adults and were immediately married.

Dating in the Bible:
One thing that often happened in Bible times was that parents picked out their children’s partners. (That’s right) It took a lot of the frustration out of trying to know whom to date, having the heartbreak of ‘breaking up’ or deciding whom to marry! (Ah, but that’s no fun….is it?)

In America today, however, kids usually pick who they want to date and whom they want to marry. They are willing to put up with having to decide and being hurt on order to make their own choices! Makes you glad you live and date in the U.S.A. doesn’t it?

In Genesis 24, Isaac gives us a picture of both dating and an arranged marriage. Here Isaac has something like a pre-arranged marriage because his father Abraham sends him to a select group of girls from which to find a wife. (The Old Testament version of ‘The Bachelor’?) Actually Abraham asks for the Lord to give Isaac a specific sign indicating which woman he wanted for his son. He sent him to the home of relative. Actually the woman Isaac was directed to, Rebecca, was a relative of Abraham, his niece to be exact! Isaac accepted this direction/selection from the Lord and eventually married Rebecca. She became his wife and the mother of his twin sons, Esau and Jacob. They didn’t really date for long because their marriage looked like a’ done deal’. The story reads this way: “This is totally from God. We have no say in the matter, either yes or no. Rebecca is yours. Take her and go; let her be the wife of your master’s son as God has made plain.” (By the way, Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah so he probably had a pretty good idea of what kind of woman he wanted!)

In Genesis 29, Jacob gives us a picture of Old Testament dating. All this started when Isaac didn’t want his son to marry a ‘home town girl’, someone who lived in the neighborhood. The reason was that the neighborhood girls weren’t ‘good girls.’ So, just as Isaac was sent off to live with a relative, so was Jacob. Here he goes to his uncle, Laban, who has two daughters, Leah and Rachel. He fell in love with Rachel and had to work seven years in order to marry her. But Uncle Laban had other ideas. In a sense, he ‘pre-arranged’ Jacob’s marriage to Leah by giving her to Jacob when he thought he was getting Rachel. (Boy it must have been dark that night!)
And we could say that Jacob dated Rachel for 14 years!! We assume that they did not live together, either.

In Judges 14, The ‘Terminator of his day’ was a young man named Solomon. He insisted on marrying a girl his parents disapproved of. She was a Philistine woman; you may remember that Goliath, the giant was a Philistine. It was a bad choice. So he divorced her and wound up getting involved with a woman named Delilah. (The famous lady who gave Samson a free haircut.) It was also a bad choice, which not only ended the relationship but also ended his life. But Solomon’s situation is different than Isaac and Jacob because Solomon had a choice. There was no pre-arranged marriage here, even though his parents would have liked to have had it that way.

In I Kings, Solomon, who was King David’s son, must have dated a lot. After all, he had 700 wives and 300 other ‘girlfriends’. (He probably spent most of his life dating or kissing!) A lot of his marriages, though, were pre-arranged. He married certain wives in order to strengthen his rule over nations, by marrying their princess, etc.

In Matthew, in the New Testament, we discover that Joseph is engaged to Mary. This was a time known as the ‘betrothal period’. This was a year spent in preparation to actually live together. In a sense, they dated and were engaged at the same time!

But frankly, the Bible doesn’t tell us much about how to date. It doesn’t sound like most people did that. They got their partners picked for them and presto… they got married.

I guess we’ll just have to ‘read between the lines’. These couples had to have spent time together even before they had their arranged marriage. So what did they do? Did they date?

What is the purpose of dating?
1. A person needs to figure out what kind of a person they want to be married to. (After all, most girls in Junior High /High School are pretty sure they don’t want to marry any boy they date! Ask most girls and they’ll tell you boys are idiots! That might be why girls date older guys. They want someone more mature than the guys they go to school with.

2. To learn how to relate to another person of the opposite sex. Up till Junior High /High School most kids have ‘crushes’ on other kids. Scotty and Suzie sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S I-N-G! (You remember?) But then as kids get older they start thinking more seriously about people they like and would like to get to know. Now, Scott asks Sue out for a date. And wouldn’t you know they usually go with a whole group of other Scotts and Suzies!! (Their parents like it that way so it won’t be so easy for them to be K I S S I N G!) Guys start to figure out how to act around girls, what to say, and what to do, etc. And girls learn the same things, only sooner!

Actually dating is whole lot like animals when they go through their ‘meeting’. They
get acquainted by spending time together, and getting to know about the other one.
It’s interesting to see birds ‘date’. They often do these ‘little dances’ to get each other’s attention.
And, don’t a lot of kids go to little dances to get acquainted? And they also fight off other birds
that want to ‘interfere’. What’s important to remember is that relating to the person of the
opposite sex is not just about sex. Getting to know another person is about learning how to relate
to them in every area of their life. When a couple becomes involved with sex too soon in their
relationship, it may keep them from learning as much about each other in the other areas. Sex has
a way of making all the other stuff boring! *(SEE PRE-MARITAL SEX)*

3. Dating means getting to know about what guys are like and what girls are like.
Guys, for example, can be not very talkative. Girls can talk a lot! (At least as compared to guys.)
Statistics tell us that women speak 50,000 words a day; guys use 25,000 words so they run out a
lot sooner! This includes finding out what each other likes. Guys like physical things, sports, and
fast cars. Girls like physical things, too, but things like shopping malls, clothes, and magazines.
Now males and females can like the same things, of course. But they definitely like different
things. Guys are more interested in sex; girls are more involved in love (without the sex). More
than one guy has asked a girl to prove her love for him by having sex with him; and more than
one girl has given herself to him either to find the love she didn’t feel from her father. Often her
boyfriend was the first person to tell her that ‘he loves her.’ (Sadly, it happens all the time.)

4. Dating helps people decide about who they want to marry. They figure out what they don’t
want in a mate and what they do. They figure out whom they want to be married to and whom
they don’t. It’s kind of like a process of elimination! Scott decides he doesn’t really like the fact
that Suzie has a bad temper. Sue decides that she really does love Steve after all! That’s how it
goes. Unlike the kids in India whose parents picked a man for their daughter to marry, U.S.
parents let Scott, Sue, and Steve, decide who they would walk down the aisle with! It some ways
it would be simpler to have your parents do it for you and then you wind up learning to love the
person after you’re married. Not really… I think it’s better to learn to love them before! When
two people date to find out what kind of person they want to marry, how to relate to a boy or girl,
and who they might wind up spending their life with there are certain things they should keep in
mind. I suggest they ask the following questions about the person(s) they date.

Question 1. Is this person I can respect for the things they say and the things they do?
(Or are they not dependable, always late and never call me to let me know?)

Question 2. Is this person who treats me with respect for who I am?
(Or are they rude to me and/or put me down in front of others?)

Question 3. Is this person someone who likes what I like?
(Or do they enjoy lots of things I really don’t?)
Question 4. Is this a person who puts pressure on me to do things I don’t want to do?  
(OR can I be myself, do what I believe in, not be made to be someone else, and can I say ‘no’  
without feeling bad?)

Question 5. Is this a person others feel good about?  
(Or do people let me know in different ways that they aren’t sure about this person for me?)

Question 6. Is this a person I could take home to meet my parents?  
(Or is this someone I have to sneak out to see because if they knew, they wouldn’t let me date  
them?)

Question 7. Is this a person I can share things with that are important to me?  
(Or do I have to be careful about I say because I might hurt their feelings or cause them to break  
up with me? /or does this person not respect what I believe?)

Question 8. Is this a person that wants to form a friendship (Or do they want to ‘get physical too  
fast’?)

As a Christian, I honestly believe that God has the right person in mind for each person IF they  
are willing to wait for that person. Of course, to do that one does have to date to know what kind  
of person they want to be with. (Some people wind up with the first person they date!) But  
because choosing the person we want to spend the rest of our lives with is so important, it only  
makes sense to ask God to be a part of the ‘selection process’.

My wife and I have prayed for our children’s mates since they were babies. We believed that  
somewhere in the world there was a right person for each of them. Many parents have prayed  
this way. Guidelines for dating are important. And that’s what this section of the book is about.

Asking God for help and following His guidelines can help you in:  
1. Deciding who to date.  
2. Deciding who to marry.

The story is told of a little girl who attended a wedding and noticed how the couple was dressed.  
She asked her mother, “Why is the bride dressed in white?” “Because, the mother responded, the  
bride is so happy!” The little girl shot back, “Then why is the groom dressed in black?”

God made couples to find the right person to spend their life with; He wants them both to be  
happy. In this culture, dating is the means to marriage.

But here’s a rule I go by with couples. A relationship doesn’t always end in marriage; sometimes  
it ends in maturity. In every dating relationship there’s the opportunity to grow and become a
better person as a result of getting to know someone whether you wind up at the altar with that person or not! Every relationship helps to prepare you to be who you need to be and to be ready for the person who God has in mind for you!

So take your time, go slow, grow up, figure out what you want, don’t decide too quickly or for the wrong reason. Next to your relationship with God, your relationship with your mate is the most important one on earth!

**MODERN REASONING**

Dating is for having fun. If you really like someone, just move in together or get married. You can always find someone else if it doesn’t work out.

**RESPONSES**

1. God does have ‘the right person’ in mind for every person.
2. God sets down rules that make dating helpful not harmful to future relationships.
3. Dating may not always lead immediately to finding the person you want to marry; it may lead to finding out how to be a more mature person when you do!

**RESOURCES**

Johnson, Greg. *258 Great Dates while you wait.*
Watkins, James. *When Can I start Dating? Questions about love, sex and a cure for zits?*

**LIFE LAB**

*Teaching Aim:* To understand that dating is a way people in our society meet members of the opposite sex and eventually help them find a life partner.

*Activity:* Role-play someone asking another person out. Have the person ‘doing the asking’ talk about the feelings and expectations they have. Compare those with how the group feels.

Develop two lists:
1. What qualities should you look for in a person you date?
2. How do you know when you are in love?

**FACT**

According to experts it only takes 210 seconds to decide if you are interested in dating a person…or want to date.
DEATH AND DYING

Yes, we must deal with a serious subject because each of us will have to deal with it in real life…someday. There are three areas we will explore: What is death? How do we respond to it? How do we deal with those who die?

1. What is Death?
The simplest answer to this question is: Death happens when life stops. It refers to physical death. When a person dies, their body ceases to function in the way it did before.

It is interesting that in the New Testament, the apostle Paul used the idea of a corpse to describe someone who could no longer respond to temptation. A dead person is no longer alive and cannot respond as a living person. Death has changed everything for someone who dies! The Bible does not avoid the subject of death. It mentions it some 765 times in the Old and New Testaments.

Perhaps the most interesting portions dealing with death are found in Joshua 23:14 and Hebrews 9:27. “Everyone has to die once, and then face the consequences.” Joshua says, “I am about to go the way of all the earth.” (NIV) “As you can see I’m about to go the way we all end up going.” (The Message) David said the same thing in I Kings 2: “Then David joined his ancestors and he was buried.” (The Message)

What does this mean? It means that everyone will die. The statistics are one out of one! The only way this would not be the case is for those people who will be alive when Christ returns to the earth and ‘takes them to be in heaven with Himself.’ (See I Thessalonians 4:13-18.) This is something we refer to as ‘the Rapture’ (although that word is never actually used; only referred to in the Bible).

Whether we die or Christ ‘takes us’, everyone will go somewhere; they will continue to live after death in another place.

In II Samuel 12, David has lost his baby son in death. He makes a significant statement: “He is dead. Can I bring him back now? I can go to him, but he can’t come to me.” In other words, someone living can go to another place, but the person who has already died, is already there! (We assume that David is talking about heaven.) But there are different views as to what happens when we die.

**Re-incarnation:** The word means ‘to become a body again’. It means that although we die we come back to earth in another type of body than we left with. People who believe in re-incarnation believe that if you are a good person, you may be poor in your first life but come back as a wealthy person in your second life! If you are a bad person…well,
you might come back as a FROG! (And pray for a princess to come kiss you!) You keep going through the cycles until you become ‘a perfect person’.

**We all go to someplace good:** This means that everyone goes to some place like heaven, a place of light and happiness. The people who ran the planes into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 believed that they were going to paradise and have beautiful women take care of them forever! (That’s why they were not afraid to die!) Too, a lot of people have written about their ‘after death’ experiences…even criminals. It seems that everyone arrives on a sun-lit beach with gentle winds blowing…music playing, and there is love and peace. Yet, the Bible describes life after death as for some as a place of darkness and conflict. Interesting!

**Death is not permanent:** For a lot of people watch a lot of T.V., death is not a big deal. Somebody dies, they are off the show. (But they might show up on another network next week!) It’s interesting that we use the term ‘passed away’ when someone dies. It seems easier to say that than they died. They are gone and we just don’t see them again. It all seems so quick and painless…so we don’t think it’s that bad. Maybe that’s why kids and adults take so many chances; they don’t dread death, or don’t realize that life does end, at least on earth. (They do things like get drunk; get behind the wheel of a car, and hit a tree!) To them death is no big deal, they either come back as a frog or they show up on another network next week!

2. How do we respond to death?
A couple of things are clear from how people define death. One, it does end physical life. Two, we are going to have to give an account of how we lived our life to God eventually. And that makes sense, because He is the one who gives us a life in the first place, right?

It has been said that ‘a person doesn’t know how to live unless they know they are ready to die’! Think about that one!

**View 1:** “When I die, it’s all over” This person believes that this life is all there is. When it ends, there’s nothing after. To put it in other words, if a person thinks that this is all there is, they will try to ‘live it up right now’ because I only get one chance. It won’t matter how they live because no one is going to hold them responsible for the way they live it, the choices they make, and the things they do.

My outlook is, as the Scripture described it in Isaiah 22:14 “Let us eat and drink, you say, for tomorrow we die.” (NIV). Maybe today we would say, “Let’s party hearty because tomorrow we’re out of here!” (Boyce Revised Version)

**View 2:** “When I die, it’s not over” This person believes that there is more to this life than the one we live on earth for a few years. The Bible, in fact, says, “The days of our lives are seventy years. (Maybe) they are eighty years” (Psalm 90:10-NIV) so, not very long. We will live
somewhere else after we die. We will be responsible for the way we live and the choices we make.

The person who believes in re-incarnation, of course, believes that we keep coming back to earth over and over again. We’re ‘re-cycled.’ The person who believes in the Bible believes that even though there is life after death, it does not mean that we return to earth as another type of being. (No mention of coming back as a frog!)

It reminds me of the story of the woman who was involved in a car accident by a Shell Service Station. She was unconscious for a short time but when she ‘came to’, the first thing she saw was the service station sign with the ‘S’ burned out. She panicked until she realized that she was still living on earth….especially since she was a Christian woman!

Let’s define those two words.

    HEAVEN: To go to be with God, eternally.
    HELL: To go to be apart from God, eternally.

The concept of death ending life is in the Bible. In Genesis 3, after the first human beings sinned against God, the Devil told Eve that if she ate of the fruit God told her not to eat, she would not die. (Even though God told her that she would.) She believed a lie and guess what? She and Adam did die! They didn’t go ‘drop dead on the spot’ but they did eventually die! We believe that because they did believe in God, despite their disobedience, they did go to be with God in heaven.

The concept of life continuing after death is also in the Bible. In different places in the Bible, people like Moses (Deuteronomy 34) and Enoch (Genesis 5) and also Elijah (II Kings 2) all ‘went to be with God.’ In fact, we know that they continued to be alive because two of them showed up in the New Testament (Moses and Elijah - Matthew 17 and Revelation 11) that’s right…read it for you. We believe that these people went to Heaven.

But we also believe that people can go to Hell. In the New Testament, Mark 9:45, 46, the writer talks about going to hell, ‘where the fire is not quenched.’ (Put out). Many people believe that this is not a real fire because if people are to live there forever they don’t seem to burn up. But, it is believed that fire is a symbol of a place where people are apart from God, people’s desires are never satisfied. Someone has said, everyone goes to one place or the other: Either smoking or non-smoking.

Point: If you think you’re only going to live once and then die, you won’t think about living forever. You will focus only on earth, not heaven or hell. If you think you are going to live forever, you will think about eternity and about the choices you make while you are living here.
Now there are a lot of people who think people who believe in heaven and hell are nuts! Most of these people, however, believe that everyone goes to heaven. They don’t want anyone to even talk about Hell. They say that’s negative and besides, God loves people too much to send anyone there anyway. So if we all do live forever, we all live in heaven.

Let me give you two illustrations:

1. Does God love people too much to send them to hell?
   Now, I’ll admit it’s pretty hard to say that God is doing a loving thing when it seems God sends someone to Hell… be separated from Him forever. He is like any good parent who makes their child faces the outcome of their own choices. (We call those consequences) Again, if a parent really loves a child, they make them take responsibility for the things they do…like cheat on a test, or call the teacher a name, or go to a party and do things they shouldn’t. As a matter of fact, a lot of times the child has to face their ‘discipline.’ They cheat, get caught, get an F’. They call the teacher a name, get suspended from school. They go to a party and do things they shouldn’t, they get a ticket for driving while drunk or worse, kill themselves or someone else.

   The point is that when someone is separated from God after death, it is not because God doesn’t love them or doesn’t want them to be with Him, but that they chose not to believe in Him; they have to face the consequences of their choice. Remember, God allows them to make these choices; He does not make them make these choices!

2. Does everyone go to heaven?
   Let’s compare God letting everyone go to heaven to a teacher who has a class of 30 kids. Twenty-five of them cooperate with the teacher, obey the rules, and get along with each other. Those other 5…well, they are trouble, all the time! They disturb the others, they make noise, and they have food fights, don’t do their homework, they bully others and have to stay after school in detention.

   So it comes to the end of the year and it’s time for the class field trip…to this absolutely fantastic, ‘The Biggest Water World in the World’ attraction. Oh sure, the ‘Fighting 5’ have messed around. In fact they have made the whole class stay after school more than once…. BUT, the teacher says, ‘everybody gets to go.’ (Why, the teacher doesn’t think it’s fair to punish them and spoil their fun…so they get to go.) About this time the other 25 are thinking what good is it to try to cooperate with the teacher, obey the rules, get along with each other and do your homework when the bad kids get to go anyway?

   It helps us understand why God doesn’t allow everyone to go to heaven on a free pass! I mean, how would it be fair to those who believe in Christ, if everyone else who didn’t believe in Christ got to go to heaven, too? The Bible makes it very clear. Everyone does not go to heaven. (Everyone does not land on a sunny beach with warm breeze and nice music!)
Christ said two very important things about death/dying. The first reference is in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (NIV) This verse is important for several reasons:

1. It shows that God does love everyone and does not want them to die and have nothing to look forward to.
2. He loved and cared enough for them that He was willing to give His only Son to die for their sin in order to forgive them and let them go to heaven.
3. He loved and cared enough for each person that he wanted them to spend eternity with Him, but God gives us a choice.

The second reference is in I Thessalonians 4:13-17, “And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don’t want you to be in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus. He’ll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise; they’ll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the same time will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Master. And then there will be one huge family reunion with the Master!” What this says is that not everyone will be in heaven; only those who are ‘in Christ’.

Point: How one believes now will decide where one lives then.

One of the hardest things for people to understand is not only how God could ‘send anyone to hell’, as they see it, but why good people would have to go there. After all, we can understand why people like Nero (Rome), Adolph Hitler (Germany), Joseph Stalin (Russia), and Pol Pot (Cambodia) Saddam Hussein (Iraq) would go there; but those nice people (next door) who pay their bills, and have good kids, and distribute cookies at the Juvenile Home every Christmas. Why would they go there?

The difference is between those who depend on what they do to get into heaven and those who depend on what Christ did to get them into heaven. The writer of the letter to the church at Ephesus, modern day Turkey, put it this way: “No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and the saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work He does.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

There are two problems with our works. The first is that we don’t know how many we need to do or when we have done enough of them. The Bible doesn’t tell us what they are because they don’t save us. Secondly, if we could save ourselves by what we do then what Christ did by dying on the cross wouldn’t matter. If we could have saved ourselves without Him; He would have
come for nothing. Believing in Christ who died, but didn’t stay dead, is the best way to face death.

In the funeral services I do, I often say it this way. “For a Christian, death is not a period; it is a comma in the story of life.” In other words, death is not an end, it is a beginning. It is a bridge that takes us from this life on earth to a life in heaven, one much more wonderful than life here with sin, sickness, suffering a death. It takes us to a place where all those things will be gone!

3. How do we deal with those who die?
There are several things that we have to explain here. First, why do people die in the first place? Even though we know that death is a result of a decision, which our first parents made, it is hard to see how God would/could let that happen. But if God made our decisions for us then we would have no free choices; they would be ‘forced’ choices. Satan, Adam, Eve, all of us have free choice.

Can you imagine God deciding how we would wear our hair or what kind of friends we would choose or what we would eat? (There would be no sugar in anything!) No, we want the right to decide those things, don’t we? Here’s the catch, God gave us choice, we made bad ones, and the result of our choice is to die. Simple truth: everything that is born dies.

So we struggle with God giving us free choice. We also struggle with the results of that choice, which is death. Even though we caused this; and God didn’t, we can sometimes feel like we didn’t have a choice as to whether we die or not. We probably would have liked God to have come up with another consequence than having to die. Remember, He did warn Adam and Eve.

Secondly, where do people go when they die? That depends on what they do before they die! As we know already, those who have believed in Christ go to be with God forever. Those who have not believed in Christ will not go to be with God forever. Christ put it this way: “I tell you a truth; whosoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you a truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” (John 5:24, 25 NIV)

One thing is for sure: Christianity is the only religion that promises you life with God after death because it depends on what Christ does; not on what we do to be saved from sin. All the others make our being ‘saved’ and going to heaven based on doing enough good things to make God ‘let them into heaven!’ “For by grace are you saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is a gift of God and not the result of works so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9 RSV)
As we have already seen, when a person ‘crosses over from death to life’, not everyone goes to heaven (light), many go to hell (dark). The Islam faith believes that heaven is paradise (like Eden) where there is honey and wine and beautiful women. But even the Muslims believe that the ‘faithful’ go there…not everyone, because some aren’t faithful. The Bible and Christianity clearly talk about there being a place where the unfaithful go, too, it’s not paradise!

“Many who have long been dead and buried will wake up, some to eternal life, others to eternal shame” and I Thessalonians 4: “When the Master comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they’ll be ahead of us.” Notice in these two portions the writers use the term ‘will’. What this could mean is that those who die could still be in the grave!

Thirdly, what do people look like in heaven? The closest we can come to that is found in I Corinthians 13 when we read, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then I shall know just I also am known. (NKJV). Meaning: we will look like we do now except we will have perfect bodies, and not be sick or die. In fact, this is what the portion of I Corinthians 15 explains: “Show me how the resurrection works. There are no diagrams for this kind of thing. We do have a parallel experience in gardening. You plant a ‘dead’ seed; soon there is a flourishing plant. The dead body that we bury in the ground and the resurrection body that comes from it will be completely different. The corpse that’s planted is no beauty’; but when it’s raised, it’s glorious.” (The Message)

We can be sure that whether we go to heaven right away or not, when we do finally get there, we will all be known, people will recognize us, and we will be perfect in every way. New brains, new bodies, same face.

Fourthly, what do we do with people after they die? There are basically two options:
1. Have a funeral, possibly show the body, and then bury it in the ground. 2. Have a cremation and burn the body, possibly keep or scatter the ashes. (My father-in-law chose to be cremated after he died.)

Some people have a problem with cremation. They believe that this not a way of doing things with the dead that God would approve of. But, let’s keep in mind that we came from dust and we go back to dust, and God really doesn’t care how we get there.

In Genesis 2:7 reminds us, “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul.”(RSV) The name of the first man, Adam, means ‘earth’, in fact. Later on in the book of Ecclesiastes (5:20) “All go to the same place, all come from dust, to dust all return.” (NIV) So, as I said, we all go back to where we started. Cremation just moves the process along a little faster, that’s all!
We should point out that some people do not believe cremation is Biblical. In the Old Testament times, the burning of a dead person’s bones was a considered a disgrace and a sign of disrespect. And they point out that many of the bodies of the ‘stars’ of the Bible were always buried never burned. But, in my mind, there is not a clear teaching either way. So it’s okay to bury or cremate. We were made from dust and we return to dust.

A little humor: A grandma told her granddaughter we were all made from dust. The little girl said, “I just looked under the bed and someone is either coming or going!”

At some future point, God says that He will remake everyone anyway. He will reassemble their parts and give them new bodies. Then being remade they will either go to be in heaven with Him or in hell apart from Him. This is what the writer of the Revelation reports: “I saw a great white throne and the One Enthroned. I saw all the dead, small and great standing there, before the Throne. And books were opened. The dead were judged by what was written in the books; by the way they had lived.”

Here’s the picture: All humans beings alive and those dead now alive, stand before God to give an account of their lives and are given an assigned seat with God or without Him!

The most important thing we can say about death and dying it that God gives us another option. Instead of dying and going to be separated from God (Hell), we can die and yet go to be forever in God’s presence (Heaven). This option is possible by believing in Christ as the one came to die for our sins and to save us from separation from God!
This is the true meaning of John 3:16. He wants us to choose Him but it is still our choice!
Death and dying is a whole lot more than getting sick and having a funeral. It is about where we are going to spend eternity.

**MODERN REASONING**
Everybody dies but death is no big deal because we all go to heaven anyway. If there is a God, He would love people too much to send them to Hell!

**RESPONSES**
1. God did not want us to die but gives us a solution to the problem through the death of Christ which makes it possible for us to live.
2. Where we go after we die depends on what we believe when we are alive.
3. Where we live in eternity is more important than whether we are buried or cremated.

**RESOURCES**
Wolfelt, Alan D.  *A Child’s View of Grief.*
Mellonie, Brian. *Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children.*
Girollman, Earv. *Straight Talk about Death to teen-agers: How to cope with losing someone you love.*

Strommen, Merton. *Five Cries of Grief: One Family’s Journey to Healing after the Tragic Death of a Son.*

**FACT** The average funeral service in this country costs $7,000.00; Cremation costs about $1,500.00

**LIFE LAB**

*Teaching Aim:* Something that happens to everyone and has impact on those important people in their lives.

*Activity:* Divide the group in to two groups. Have one half write their own funeral service and the other their own obituary or eulogy. Read them out loud to the group.
DEATH PENALTY

As we have already seen, God honors life. He made it, and He cares for it. He desires that it be lived in healthy ways. One who kills someone else is does not allow someone else to live in a healthy way. Throughout history people have debated over whether God wants to save life or destroy life. Why is it confusing?

1. God allows for people to be killed, especially in the Old Testament. He does this by telling His People, Israel, to take out their enemies, to kill pagan people. There are various accounts of this so called ‘okay killing’ in the books of Exodus, Joshua and Judges. In Exodus, God tells Moses that He is going to take the life of the Egyptians because Pharaoh, the Egyptian ‘king’ has hardened his heart against God. In Joshua and Judges, He tells the Israelites to take the life of their enemies because they have refused to believe in Him and have done things He commanded them not to do.

To put it in simple terms: God did not want or cause these people to be killed; they caused it themselves. That’s why these killings, sometimes called holy wars, were approved by God. God allowed people to be killed for the right reason; people who rejected life chose death. Yet it was their choice, not His choice. In Ezekiel 33, God does not want people to be killed. “As sure as I am the living God, I take no pleasure from the death of the wicked. I want the wicked to change their ways and life.” (The Message)

Is it fair for God to require a penalty for people who kill people when He does it Himself? It seems like He is saying, “Thou shall not kill on one hand” and then “thou shall kill” on the other, doesn’t it? It appears to be a ‘double standard: “Do as I say but not as I do.”

2. God also requires what we call ‘capitol punishment’, the taking the life of someone who takes somebody else’s life. This is based on what is said by God to Noah in Genesis 9:5-6, “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans let his blood be shed, because God made human in his image reflecting God’s very nature. “

Again it is confusing. Why did God command that someone who killed someone be killed? Isn’t that repeating the killing? And does it solve the problem? People ask, aren’t you committing murder again by taking the life of someone who kills another person?

Why did God make these laws and allow the taking of life? First, because he valued life and he didn’t want someone taking it away from someone else. Secondly, by requiring that someone die for killing someone else, he hoped other people would think carefully before they did it! We kill innocent people. God allows only guilty people to be killed. There is big difference.
In Numbers 35, God gives special regulations for dealing with ‘capitol punishment’ because there was a difference between those who killed someone on purpose and those who didn’t. First, the handling of the killer is to be done by the government. (Maybe this is why it’s called capital punishment!). This applies to the person who has committed murder (intentional killing) and manslaughter (accidental killing). In those days, the government served as religious officials. The reason they were to make the decision was because not just anyone was allowed to decide who should die for killing someone else. That job was given to those in authority (like judges) much like it is today.

Obviously we don’t believe in ‘holy wars’ today; killing people because they reject God. But, there are people who believe that God does not teach ‘capitol punishment’ at all or at least not in modern times. They believe that God may have required ‘capitol punishment’ in the Old Testament but that was all changed in the New Testament.

They base this on the Sermon on the Mount when Christ said, “You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” In other words, Christ was saying that if you are attacked by someone, don’t attack them back. They take this to mean that capitol punishment should no longer be used.

What we need to understand is that when Christ brought grace (don’t pay back evil for evil) that He did not do away with the law. (If someone takes a life, take his or hers).

In the same Sermon on the Mount, Christ Himself said, “I have not come to do away with the law but to fulfill the law.” (Matthew 5:17)

Yet, many people today, including Christians, don’t believe in ‘capitol punishment’; they believe that Christians are to love, be kind, and forgive which means don’t kill someone who kills someone else. To them, “turning the other cheek,” means drop the death penalty!

This sounds nice but it doesn’t really work out too well. Nations that do not have a penalty for taking someone else’s life actually have a higher number of murders and killings. God’s rules have reasons.

The fact is that God still loves people and thinks life is precious today as He did in Bible times. That’s why He still requires ‘capitol punishment’ now as He did then. In other words, ‘if you take a life, you pay for it with your life’. This might seem like a weird way for God to show his respect and love for each life but it is what He chose to do.

In the words of Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, “People who go out prepared to take the lives of others people should forfeit their own right to live.” Yet, the whole area of God saying don’t kill but allowing people to be killed’ is not only a problem for ‘church people’; it is a big problem.
for people especially outside of the church and the Christian Faith. They find it hard to believe in a God who kills people. They have trouble with His allowing His enemies to be killed by the Nation of Israel or God commanding ‘capital punishment.’

Many people, including Christians, feel that the idea of ‘punishing someone for killing someone’ is inconsistent with the love of God. (As per the Sermon on the Mount.) Perhaps there is something we need to understand about God. God loves everyone. He considers them precious, after all He made them. But when they break His laws, He holds them responsible, whether they turn against Him, as Israel’s enemies did or when they took the life of another person.

God is like a parent. A parent can make their child be responsible for their choices and even discipline them when they break the rules. But, the parent does not love the child any less. In fact, it is because they love the child that they cause the child to face the consequences of what they have done. More than one child has told me that they hated their parents for finding out what they did and making them deal with the mistake they made. But I have heard as many children say that when their parents did not do this they honestly wondered if they cared about them, cared enough to check on what they were doing or discipline them. Example: A girl misses her curfew before the prom so she doesn’t go to the prom. She might feel like somebody ‘ended her life’, but later on she learns to be on time!

When God deals with sin and its results, it proves His love; He does not disprove it. God cannot be only love and not holy or righteous. To ask Him to be one without the other makes Him less than the complete God He is. He must be everything that He is, a combination of the personality traits …those we like and those we don’t like!

Here’s a thought: If we have trouble with God causing someone to die, we need to remember this. We broke God’s laws, we sinned, and we deserved to die. He should have required us to pay the penalty. He says the wages of sin is death. But He allowed His very own Son to die for us. Christ was given the ‘death penalty’. We deserved to die for what we did to God but thru Christ’s death we were allowed to live! The Bible says it this way: “We’ve all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we’ve done wrong on him, on him.” Old Testament: Isaiah 53:5, “Christ suffered because of others’ sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all, was put to death and then made alive, to bring us to God.” New Testament: I Peter 3:18.

Here’s a point: If Christ hadn’t died, we would not have lived! Christ was required to die for something He never did; He never sinned. Yet God required the death penalty for Him. How much more is God right is requiring the death penalty for someone who has sinned! Remember, because God required that Christ die, we have a relationship and life with Him today. He allowed a death to bring about something that was good.
We believe that when God requires the death penalty to be enforced, even then something good can come from it. It holds people responsible for taking human life, and warns them not to kill others! Requiring death of one who kills can prevent more deaths!

**MODERN REASONING**
Because God loves everyone; he would not want or allow anyone to be killed.

**RESPONSES**
1. God always values life and holds those responsible for those who destroy it even though He allowed life to be destroyed for the right reasons.
3. God used ‘the taking of a life for one who takes a life’ as an example of what not to do and what will happen if a person does it.
4. Societies that allow people to take life without penalty actually create a greater danger for their citizens. Those who don’t, have safer communities.

**FACT**
States require capital punishment.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* The death penalty is required by God to take the life of someone who has taken the life of someone else.

*Activity:* Talk about the Animal Kingdom vs. the Human Kingdom. Why would an animal not be held responsible for killing another animal? Should ‘human animals’ be held responsible for killing someone else; Why /Why not?
DEPRESSION

For many people, depression is a way of life. Some thirty million adults are victims of depression in this country every year.

These aren’t only people who are homeless or poor, needing medication or thinking about suicide. They are rich people with nice homes, are successful in business…who even go to church. Many of them are Christians. So, one of the first things we learn about depression is that it can hit anyone.

There are basically two types of depression, which I will attempt to explain in very simple terms that you can understand.

**Short-term depression.** This is what we call having a brief period of being depressed. It’s at a ‘point of time.’ It is more or less an event. It is usually brought on by a happening, like death in the family or after having a baby. It comes from the *outside.* (About 17 million people in our country suffer from this kind of depression.)

**Long-term depression.** This is what we call having a long period of being depressed. It’s a ‘pattern.’ It is more or less an environment. It is an on-going part of a person’s life. It is usually not brought on by a happening, but something like a long illness or a medical problem. It comes from *inside* things. (About 11 million people in our country suffer from this kind of depression.)

**Definition of Depression:** A distorted emotional state, which leads to person to not think or act in the right way.

**Description of Depression:** An emotional ‘fog’, something that comes in slowly, causes you not to be able to see for a while, and does not always go away quickly.

**Dynamics of Depression:**
- Women usually have a higher degree of depression.
- Those 18-40 years old have the highest rate of depression.
- 20,000,000 people will seek help for their condition.
- 40,000 depressed people take their own life every year.

**Causes of Depression:** It’s more than having a ‘Blue Monday’.

*Physical Causes:* Often people have some illness of physical problem, which causes them to be depressed, something they usually cannot help. The human brain operates by a series of electrochemical impulses. If the chemical balance is not right, and the impulses do not fire properly, it’s possible for a person to experience all kinds of strange reactions. This can result in
long-term depression because the person simply thinks they are ‘just blue’ because of the next category of causes.

**Emotional Causes:** Often people deal with problems in their thinking, they struggle with guilt, not feeling good about themselves, having anger they cannot control, being unwilling to forgive someone, dealing with deep discouragement.

**Circumstantial Causes:** Often people deal with a crisis in their life, something like the death of a loved one, or moving and starting over in a new community, a divorce, the loss of a job, or money problems. This can be long or short term depression but tends to be shorter because it tends to end when the crisis is over.

**Signs of Depression.** There are ways to tell when a person is depressed.

Someone can be ‘moody.’ (You never know how they are going to react. Their favorite T.V, program isn’t on because of the Super Bowl and they throw a temper tantrum!)

Someone can either cry or laugh more than usual. People who change from one emotion to another are sometimes called ‘bi-polar’. They can go from one extreme to the other, happy one-minute, sad the next. (Your best friend is so excited to have been asked to the prom by this really cool guy and in tears the next minute because the store where she was going to buy her dress closes on Sunday!)

Someone will start changing the way they normally do things. These people may start sleeping 10 hours a day (after 8 hours at night). They may stop exercising and instead watch T.V. constantly. They may start being late to appointments. (Your Uncle Harvey gets up at noon, never plays golf anymore and got there for the closing prayer at your graduation…when they still allowed prayers at graduations!)

Often, someone experiencing depression will change in his or her appearance. These people lose a lot of weight or gain a lot of weight. They look tired all the time. (Your neighbor, the one who used to be able to wear her teen-age daughter’s clothes now walks around in a housecoat and is exhausted from getting the paper in the morning.)

Someone will stay by himself or herself. These people don’t go out; they don’t spend time with people. (The teacher you never did like anyway eats lunch alone in the faculty lunch room and gave up coaching the Chinese Checker Team!)

**Warning:** A lot of us feel or act like the people described and we don’t have depression. People who show the signs of depression are often just called ‘teen-agers’. Ask the parent of any teen-ager. (Although depression in some form does affect about 4 million teenagers a year) We need
to be careful not to assume that we or someone else has a depression problem until a doctor confirms it.

**Clue:** Usually a depressed person is dealing with one or more causes of depression and signs of depression. If a woman’s depression is caused by the letdown from having a baby (called post-partum), she can show all the signs of depression if only for a few weeks. If a man’s depression is caused from the letdown of being divorced from his wife, he may show all the signs of depression for a longer time. But not every person who has a baby or goes through a divorce shows the signs and has the depression.

What the Bible says about depression?

**OLD TESTAMENT**  
**Moses** (Numbers 11: 10-15) Signs: Stressed, feeling overworked, not making good decisions, wanting to die.  
**Hannah** (I Samuel 1: 4-7) Signs: Deep grief over the loss of a child, stressed out over her husband’s other wife, stopped eating, and did lots of crying.  
**Saul** (I Samuel 16) Signs: Saul is described as having a ‘black mood’ come over him, bouts of anger, obsessed with killing someone. Eventually he commits suicide.  
**David** (II Samuel 12: 11-19 Signs: Deep grief over the loss of a child, not eating, changed appearance, irritable and withdrawn from people.  
**Elijah** (I Kings 19) Signs: Feared losing his life, loss of energy, stopped eating and sleeping regularly, feeling very negative about himself, wanting to end his life.  
**Jonah** (Chapter 1-3) Signs: Changed where he lived suddenly, ran from his problem, very angry, (had a temper tantrum), very fearful, changed normal routine.  
**Hezekiah** (Isaiah 38) Signs: Long illness, obsessed with death, feeling rejected and alone.

**NEW TESTAMENT**  
**Judas** (Matthew 26/27) Signs: Major life crisis, strained relationship with a very close friend (Jesus, even), hopeless, committed suicide.  
**Christ** (Matthew 26) (Hebrews 5:1-10) Signs: Facing a very difficult task, feeling alone, and feeling no support from those closest to him.

Isn’t it good to know that people throughout history, even in the Bible, struggled with depression? Of course, we don’t feel good about their depression but at least we can feel okay about having problems with depression ourselves. After, all, God gave us minds, bodies, and emotions, all of these can cause and are affected by depression.

But it’s also good to know that not only does God understand depression but also He can help us with it.
Let’s see how God helped the people we have already met in the Bible who had depression.

**Moses:** God provided someone to come along side and help him; Joshua and Caleb to be exact. These two buddies gave his a different way of looking at things, gave him encouragement, and offered to help him with his job.

**Hannah:** God provided someone: a priest who understood her struggle. God eventually also gave her not one, but six children!

**David:** God provided a group of people in his life who helped him get over his grief by getting him into his regular routine putting on fresh clothes, eating, and facing the reality of his loss.

**Elijah:** God provided a change of scenery, food, water, and sleep which gave him energy to a new assignment with a reminder of all the loyal friends who were still there for him.

**Jonah:** God provided a place of safety in crisis, gave him a place to re-group, and restored his self-confidence.

**Hezekiah:** God provided a cure for his illness, gave him a new outlook on life, and gave him something new in the future to look forward to.

**Judas:** God provided a way for Judas to get out of trouble, but Judas refused his help.

**Christ:** God provided the strength and courage he needed to face a tough assignment (dying on the cross for our sins), helped him go through it, and accept the outcome, even though he died.

God does not leave people alone with their depression; He is there to help them, if they allow Him and others to help them. One of my favorite movies is ‘Steel Magnolias’ in which Shirley MacLaine is asked if she is depressed to which she responds. “No I’ve just been in a bad mood for 40 years!” (She obviously denies her problem and so doesn’t need or want anyone to help her with it!)

How do we help people who are depressed? We can help them **think** differently. (Mind)

People can dwell on the negative things and the past. We need to help them focus on positive things and the present and remember, though, that some people do need to deal with their past and the things that may bother them that they have to ‘get over.’

Questions:
* Are you ‘flashing back’ to the past a lot?
* Are you being especially hard on yourself?
* Do you believe that you:
  * Should not be depressed?
  * This is all your fault?
  * That you should be able to fix it yourself?
  * Are thinking a lot about ‘escaping’ rather than facing your problem?

**Focus:**
God’s help. (Isaiah 26:1-4; Philippians 4: 6, 7)

**Plan:**
Help the person not to deny the problem but talk about it seek ways to solve it, and be willing to accept help from others. We can help people feel differently. *(Heart)*

When a person thinks in a different way, they will begin to react in a different way, but often their feelings overwhelm them.

**Questions:**
- Do your moods change more than usual?
- Are you more emotional than you usually are?
- Have you lost interest in doing normal everyday things?
- Are you easily discouraged or especially tired?
- Is there some reason why you look at yourself as worthless?

**Focus:**
God’s Care Psalm 139: 13-18; I Peter 5:7)

**Plan:**
Help the person focus more on the facts than the feelings. How God feels about them, how others feel about them, what they mean to those around them/what they do for them.

We can help people Behave differently. People need to take the attention off them and focus on others, staying active, contributing to others.

**Questions:**
- Do you have a problem getting motivated for the day?
- Are you thinking about doing something to hurt yourself?
- What things have you stopped doing that you need to start again?
- Would you be willing to talk to someone about your problem?’
- How do you see yourself coming out of this situation; what do you see yourself looking for when you do?

**Focus:**
God’s possibilities in the future, more than the problems in the present.
(Jeremiah 29:11-14)

**Plan:**
Help the person get involved with re-entering one’s daily routine and re-connecting with friends, activities, and hobbies and travel. There are actually good things that can come from depression. Having symptoms of depression or depression itself can be helpful.

**A RED FLAG:** This means that your depression is telling you that something is wrong. You may have an illness, you may be in shock’ over a crisis, you may be stuck in the past or the present, unable to move ahead into the future. And by the way, it is okay to have depression and deal with it. (Unlike when your grandparents had depression but couldn’t admit it because people thought they were insane or something!)

**A CRY FOR HELP:** This means that your depression is telling you that you need to look for someone/something to help you get well. And by the way, there are a lot of things we can turn to for help these days. (This is unlike when your grandparents had depression, and didn’t know
where to go for help!) It’s like a person who is about to have a heart attack. There are certain signs or symptoms that tell them that something bad is about to happen. So the signs of symptoms of depression tell us that something bad is about to happen or is happening. We need to learn to read and heed the signs.

**KEY:**
In order to get well or solve a problem, we have to’ go through it to get through it’. You can’t avoid or run from the problem and expect it to just go away. The person with the ‘physical heart attack’ has to admit they have a heart problem, to the hospital, get medicine for it, and follow the doctor’s orders to recover. So when a person has a ‘mental and emotional heart attack’, they have to admit they have a problem and get the help they need to recover. People are okay seeking help for a physical problem but not an emotional one.

The problem with a lot of people (Even for religious/church/Christian people) is that they won’t admit they have a problem with depression. They wouldn’t think twice about going to the hospital/see a doctor for a stroke, but they won’t go to see a clinic/counselor when they are dealing with depression. The stroke is physical and it shows. You have to do something about it. The depression is emotional and it often doesn’t show. You don’t have to do something about it! (But you do!)

Too often people’s pride and embarrassment keep them from seeking the help they need with depression. They think if they were normal they wouldn’t and shouldn’t have this problem, especially if they believe in God and go to church and ask Jesus to help them!! They feel guilty for causing this problem and not being able to solve it by themselves. More than once I have heard someone say in the church, “If I or they had enough faith, I or they wouldn’t have this problem.”

Sadly, when people deny their depression problem or have someone else tell them they shouldn’t have a depression problem they usually make themselves more depressed!

How long does it take to get over being depressed? It is different with each person. Getting over depression is like getting over someone dying. (Sometimes these two are related, too). You can’t tell a person: Now, in four weeks you should be here … in three months you should be there …a in a year you should be over it! No two people go thru something the same way.

What often happens is that by expecting someone to be over his or her depression by a certain time, you add to his or her feeling more depressed! And it takes a while. Even short-term depression can take some time. In this age of remote control T.V, Fast Food (open till 1 A.M. at Wendy’s drive-thru window), Lens Crafters glasses in one hour, and A.T.M. instant cash cards; everybody expects to get things in a hurry. But when it comes to some things like getting well physically or emotionally, it takes longer than Microwave popcorn!
Does God approve of different ways to help depression? It’s not a perfect world and we do become ill, even though that is not the way God wanted it to be. But, because He cares for us I believe that He has provided ways we can get well. He made us and HE knows how to make us well! One of the ways He does that is to provide people and products. When it comes to emotional problems (like depression) the people He provides are therapists and counselors. The products He provides can be certain kinds of drugs and treatments.

Some people I have known over the years have told me that they don’t believe Christians should go to counselors and take medication for anything but physical illness. I disagree. Yes, one should use caution and make wise choices in the people and products they use but I believe God has provided these resources to help us get well. I and one of the members of my family have gone to a counselor and have found them to be very helpful. As a pastor, I am a counselor and many people see me! I give them permission to have a problem; even depression; and to get help for it!

Again, it’s funny that people will see and say it’s okay for others to see a medical doctor for cancer but say it’s not okay for you to see a ‘psychological doctor’ for ‘emotional cancer.’ It is true that some people can respond to depression in the wrong way.

Some people use their ‘illness’ to get attention. They make themselves sick by not making the right choices and doing things that they shouldn’t. They often blame others for things they should take responsibility for! We help them best when we make them ‘face the game…not help them play the game.’

Some people want to stay sick rather then to get well. They have been sick for so long that the thought of getting well scares them. So, they find ways not to get well. They become ‘professional patients.’ Like students who never graduate, they become patients who never ‘leave the hospital.’ They will have pain either way; if they stay sick or if they get well. I believe that the pain of getting well is always easier in the long run than staying sick.

Some people deal only with the signs and not the source of their problem when it comes to depression and lots of other things. It’s like trying to get rid of a weed but cutting off the top instead of digging out the root. The leaf is the sign, the root is the source. People who only make changes on the outside (Go out to buy new clothes instead of going to a doctor) are usually those people who just want attention and want to stay sick instead of getting well.

Some people use their past as an excuse for not changing. It is possible that depression is in the ‘family line’, which means that a person could have a history of depression in their family; it could be gambling, alcohol, too. This may make them more likely to have trouble with depression, but it does need to keep them overcoming it and getting well. Far from it!
What have we said about depression? Being depressed (sometime in life) is a part of being a human being. People throughout history have struggled with it. There are definite causes for it; there are ways to spot it; there are ways to help people get over it, if they want to! If and when the ‘fog rolls in’, there’s a way to help it ‘roll out’.

**MODERN REASONING**
Everyone is depressed about something…sometime; it’s not a big deal, you just live with it, especially religious people who should never be depressed!

**RESPONSES**
It is possible for religious people to be depressed. Being a Christian is not a guarantee that a person will not have depression.

1. Depression is often the result of things a person cannot control
2. Depression can be an alarm indicating other kinds of problem.
3. Good things can come from depression if a person seeks help in dealing with it.

**RESOURCES**
Minority, Frank. *Happiness is A Choice: Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression.*
Weaver, Mary. *Mommy Stayed in Bed This Morning. Helping Children Understand Depression.*

**FACT**
Depression is the SECOND largest cause of disability and number of missed days in the U.S. Work Force!

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* To help understand that depression is a common challenge for many people but also the possibilities for helping people in these situations.
*Activity:* Select two people to do a role play of a depressed person and someone who is attempting to help them. The depressed person should demonstrate the possible symptoms. The person helping them then uses the ‘plan to assess and help’ with the depression. The group should then discuss the factors in both presentations.
DIVORCE

Well if this guide had been written a generation ago, we probably wouldn’t be talking about this issue. That’s because no one talked about divorce.

Sadly, one of the reasons we need to talk about now is that it is happening way more than it used to. Too, a lot of parents and their kids are already dealing with this issue. They need to read this section carefully. We need to look at divorce from ‘double perspective’

God looks at marriage/divorce in two ways. In the Old Testament, God makes it very clear what He thinks of divorce. In Malachi 2, God says that He hates divorce. Divorce here is symbol of the broken relationship between God and His People. This thought is also reflected in Jeremiah 3:8 where God states that He does not want relationships broken. From the beginning with the first man and the first woman, God wanted marriage to be permanent…to last a lifetime.

However, under the Old Testament law referred to in Deuteronomy 24:1-5, it appears that God does allow for marriage relationships to end in divorce, even though that is not what He wanted. This allowance for divorce appears in the New Testament as well. In Mark 10: 9, Christ speaks for God when He says, in so many words, “Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art but cutting them apart.” This again speaks of an unbroken relationship. When asked if divorce was lawful, in verses 2-6, Christ informs them that divorce was allowed under The Law, which we have already seen in Deuteronomy 24. Why? Humans have ‘hearts that were hard.’ This could describe the relationship between God and people or between one person and another. This is why God sometimes referred to His people breaking His laws as a ‘kind of divorce’. In fact, God actually sets down conditions for divorce in I Corinthians 7:12-16. Is God confused? It sure sounds like it!

So let’s put these two perspectives under two different headings: IDEAL and REAL.

   The IDEAL: God wants relationships to be permanent.
   The REAL: God allows relationships to not be permanent.

The key difference here is between what God wants, the ideal, and what He allows, the real.

His IDEAL: He would prefer that when we get married that we stay married. Our REAL: He allows us to break our relationships because for a lot of different reasons they don’t work out. That brings us to our perspective on marriage and divorce. Most people, even non-religious people, know that marriage should be to one person for life. Most people know, too, that a lot of relationships don’t make it. In America today, approximately two out of every four marriages end in a divorce and most of them before the marriage is four years old. So, a lot of people know that the odds are against them before they ever go to the altar. That’s pretty scary!
Now divorce has been around a long time. Why else did God discuss it in the first five books of the Old Testament? In modern society, there are a number of things, which affect people’s view of marriage and divorce.

**Factor 1:** People take relationships much more casually; loyalty and commitment are not big deals.

**Factor 2:** People are less prone to get married but more inclined to simply live with someone. We call it ‘shacking up’ or living together. The big word is ‘co-habitation.’ What it usually means though is having sex with someone before marriage. This can happen whether you are living with someone or not… but it’s a lot harder not to have it when you if you share the same bedroom!

**Factor 3:** People grow up in homes where divorce is already present and accepted.

**Factor 4:** People are not as willing to work at making relationships work and more willing to simply walk away from them.

**Factor 5:** People are encouraged to have other relationships while married which weaken their commitment to their marriage partner.

**Factor 6:** People do not grow up with good marriage models or understanding of what a good marriage should be, so they come less prepared to their own marriage.

**Factor 7:** People look at marriage thru ‘Hollywood eyes’ thinking that marriage is all glamour and no work. (Boy do they find out that was unreal real quickly!)

God created people knows that when people commit to each other with the idea of making their relationship last a life time and are willing to work at it, they will usually be happier! Talk to someone who has gone thru a divorce and they will tell you that even though ‘they wanted out’ and it seemed like the easy thing to do, they have pain over it the rest of their lives. Actually our marriage to someone is the most important relationship we have next to the relationship we have with God! So it’s not one we should take lightly thinking, “If it doesn’t work, I can walk out!” But as we will see, sometimes a divorce is the best way to solve a problem between two people.

I compare divorce to an abortion… let’s call it a ‘relational abortion.’ In simple terms, it means that you get rid of something, thinking that you’ve solved the problem by eliminating it. What happens in both abortion and divorce, however, is that there is a lot of pain remaining after the decision. You really haven’t solved the problem, have you?
It has also been called ‘open heart surgery of the spirit ‘creating a ‘wound that never heals.’ Based on the people I have known who are divorced I would agree, even when the person remarries.

Our REAL:
One of the things we must look at in a divorce is that one of the two persons in the marriage may not want the marriage to end! This often happens, and it usually happens to women. About three-fourths of the men want to end it; one-fourth of the women want it to. Women are usually the single parent who raises their children because her husband just up and left!

There are two ways to look at this problem.
1. The partner who does not want the divorce will try to do everything they can from keeping the marriage from ending.

2. Sometimes, the other partner either does not want to work on the relationship or may be involved with a ‘third’ person they want to marry. It is very hard to work on saving a marriage if both persons in it do not want to work on making it work! So often the partner who wants to save the relationship stays in a bad marriage, or is made to file for divorce because things get so bad. I believe it’s fair to call these people ‘victims’; what happens to them is a result of what someone else has done to them. I also believe that these people should have another chance at marriage.

We must also look at the possible conditions in which God allows one person to divorce another.

The possible conditions are: ADULTERY, ABANDONMENT, and ABUSE. These possible conditions are presented in I Corinthians 7. This is a tricky passage because part of it is based on what God commands; part of it is based on God permitting Paul to express his personal opinion. I believe though, that both the commands and the opinions are what God used to instruct people about marriage problems.

We need to look at these three causes.
Adultery is when one of the partners has sex with someone other than their partner. In God’s eyes this is ‘breaking your vow’ to your mate.
Abandonment is when a partner in the relationship ‘leaves’ the other. This can happen by them leaving the house or not caring for their mate’s needs when they are still at home.
Abuse is when one mate hurts the other physically or by what they say or in other ways.

Keep in mind, however, that today we live in a ‘no fault’ society. That pretty much means that people don’t have to have a Biblical reason or any real reason, for that matter, to get a divorce. The term ‘irreconcilable differences’ is a reason often used in solving marriage problems meaning: ‘We just can’t get along and so we don’t want to be married anymore!’ And our laws make getting out of marriage too easy. To put it another way, it means, maybe we’ve tried to work on it or maybe we haven’t but it’s too much trouble to try.
This is not a culture that encourages people to work on something for a long time. After all, we can get food from a drive through, we can change channels on T.V. without getting up, and we can have our glasses fixed in an hour so we’re in no mood to take too long to fix a marriage.

Some people do try. They work at fixing their marriage for a long time but it just doesn’t work out. The IDEAL becomes the REAL, remember??

But often the ‘A’ conditions of adultery, abandonment and abuse, do apply when marriages fail. In all three of these situations, one person becomes a victim; someone else does something to them that they didn’t want to happen. The God who allows for divorce understands these things and does not approve of them.

This does not mean, of course, that because these situations exist that the person who is ‘cheated on’, or abandoned or abused, must divorce. There are ways to work out these problems. Many marriages even with these problems can be saved. But, who would want to have their partner to have sex with another person, or leave them, or treat them badly? No one, of course unless they think this is the way they are supposed to be treated, and that’s another whole story.

There are people though who have been mistreated as children who expect to be treated that same way as adults. So, they stay married even when their partner does things they shouldn’t. They think this is what they deserve and all they will ever get. They would rather stay married even under these bad conditions rather then be alone! This is truly a sad situation. These are not things that should take place in any marriage.

As we know, God ‘allows’ divorce because of the ‘hardness of men’s hearts.’ When people’s hearts get hard against God and against each other, they do things to others they should not do. Remember, too, that all of these things can be forgiven if the person is willing to stop doing them/stop making the other person a victim. Too, there are many people who are married to someone who keeps promising to stop doing these things--- but doesn’t keep their promises. They simply allow a bad situation to continue and allow the person creating the problem to continue to ‘get away with it’. It’s called ‘enabling’ someone to continue in bad habits. In our culture, we say this is also allowing them to be’ co-dependent.’ One mate allows the other mate to do things that should not be allowed because they love them and they don’t want to hurt them. This is also what we call a family that is ‘dysfunctional.’ Allowing someone to get away with something they shouldn’t be doing does not love them in the right way; it is allowing them to hurt you and hurt themselves. To love them would be to not allow them to do those things. It would be like letting your kid come in an hour after curfew and having cookies and milk waiting.

What should happen with the kid who comes in late or the marriage partner who is abusive is that they should be confronted with their bad choices and helped to change. As long as they can
get by with it, they will, right? And by letting them do these things, you are telling them that they are okay and you aren’t going to do anything about it. Actually people who do things like this often know that it is wrong and really want someone to confront them about it! (It’s true!) But you know what? You would expect a teen-ager to try to break the rules and think they could get away with it…but by the time a person becomes an adult, you would think they would act differently. Who knows, maybe because kids get away with things, they do the same things when they grow up.

One thing we have to keep in mind, then, is that just because a person is in a bad human relationship does not necessarily mean that they have a bad spiritual relationship. I have known many Christian married people over the years that have had a strong walk with The Lord and have tried hard to follow what He has wanted them to do who have had marriage problems and finally divorced. These people really feel awful because they feel they have not only failed in their relationship with another person but they have also failed in their relationship with God!! (Wow; that’s a lot to deal with!)

I have also known people who did things in their marriage that were wrong, but with God’s help and the help of their partner and often a counselor they were able to keep their marriage together. I remember such a couple in one of my churches where the man had an affair (had sex with) another person. The wife, even though humiliated and angry, was willing to take him back. The two of them did keep their marriage together and did not divorce. It can happen, even though it’s hard. Remember, too, like the abortion, divorce can be painful later on. Sometimes, however, the ‘pain’ of a divorce can be less than the ‘pain’ of being in a destructive, unhealthy marriage.

The key though is for both the husband and wife to attempt to have a strong and growing relationship with God which will help them have a strong and growing relationship with one another. This is the IDEAL. Too often, even with Christian couples, the marriage ends in a separation or divorce, the REAL situation of life. This may be because the couple assumes that just because they are Christians, their marriage will succeed. But every marriage, Christian or not, requires effort every day. There are no guarantees.

What about separation? Sometimes in a marriage, it is helpful for the two people to not be under the same roof. They need to be apart from each other so they can take a good look at what is happening to them. It is easier to do this if they are not ‘at each other’ every day. I like to call this a ‘time out.’ (A little like when a kid is sent to their room to think about what they did when they tied the cat and the dog up together!!).

It is important to remember is that this separation is not an easy way to get out of a bad marriage; it is a ‘time out’ for the couple to work on getting ‘back into the relationship’, ‘to get back together.’ It’s a way of saying, ‘hey we’ve got serious problems to work on’. It may also help both partner to appreciate each other more because they are not there physically AND to help
one or both of the mates to realize that they could lose what they have if they don’t really work at making it work! It has been said, “Marriage failure is not a matter of a blow-out but a slow leak.” Advice: Couples should watch for leaks.

One of the reasons couples often stay together is because of the children. The impact of divorce on children is very real, despite modern arguments that say that kids from divorced homes are not affected and adjust to life like kids from married homes.

The following statistics tell us there is impact:

- One million American children experience divorce every year.
- 56% of children of divorce had little contact with their fathers in the first year after divorce and no contact after five years.
- Children of divorce had the deepest feelings of anger, fear, and rejection of any child group. (Reasoning: They caused the divorce.)
- Children of divorce are twice as likely to drop out of /be suspended from school.
- Children of divorce were far more likely to live with someone rather than to marry him or her. (Reasoning: Marriages don’t work; so don’t get married.)

But it’s hard for a couple to be torn between being in a bad marriage and feeling guilty about putting their kids through a divorce. What do they do? Often they decide that putting the kids through the warfare between themselves as parents is more painful and harmful than divorcing. So, they divorce and do all they can to help their kids deal with the loss of a family and seeing different parents at different times.

I honestly believe that children usually do not want their parents to divorce even if things are really bad between them. Sometimes, however, children see what is going on and think it would actually be better if their parents didn’t stay married.

But this does not mean that a child does not feel the impact of a divorce for the rest of their life. This is true even if they know they didn’t cause the divorce and that their parents were better off apart than together! They know that the IDEAL became REAL. They may come to accept it but they really wish it hadn’t happened.

Again, this does not mean that people intend to get divorced. Most people marry with the goal of staying married. But they can and do divorce. Sometimes marriage partners are the ‘victimizers’ because they do something that causes the marriage to fail or they are the ‘victims.’ The other marriage partner does something to them that causes the marriage to fail.

It does not mean that people cannot succeed in marriage, even though they may have failed. They can find the IDEAL God intended for them to have. God doesn’t prefer but permits divorce. God doesn’t prefer but permits re-marriage.
REMEMBER: As much as God wants people to be in good marriages, (IDEAL) He does not want them to be in bad marriages. (REAL) He wants people to make every effort to have good marriages (IDEAL) but He knows that often people make choices that hurt their partners and their marriages (REAL).

What about re-marriage? That is often a question asked by people who have become divorced, of course. Some of these people have caused their divorce; some of them have not caused it but have become divorced anyway.

Often, adultery causes a divorce; usually the person who was faithful has done nothing to cause the marriage to end.

What happens to the mate who does not want the marriage to end? Are they wrong for re-marrying? NO! Why? Because adultery is like a death. It breaks the marriage and allows for this person to marry again, just as they would be able to do if their mate had actually died! (See Romans 7:1-3) When a spouse dies, the remaining partner is free to marry.

Too often people who have been given a divorce they didn’t want are told they cannot ever marry again. People refer again to I Corinthians 7 using Paul’s opinion, which states in so many words, “If you become divorced or alone again, stay that way”. Remember, this is Paul’s opinion, which God allows him to give us. But it is not the rule, it is a preference. I have seen a bumper sticker I like that reads” On the road of life, God allows for u-turns? It reminds me of those breaks in the highway marked with an arrow which says, “no turn allowed” God’s road of life is not like that…there is a place to turn around and go a different direction. God grants a ‘second chance’ to those who didn’t cause the divorce and those who did.

REMEMBER: The same God who does not want people to live the rest of their lives in an unhappy marriage also does not want them to necessarily live alone as a result of a divorce. I firmly believe that there is “life after divorce”. Although not everyone needs to re-marry; I believe God allows for that option.

One word of caution about re-marrying: People who re-marry should not do it too soon. Too soon is often the situation when someone has been dating someone else while they are married!! But it is important for two people to learn all they can about themselves and why their marriage didn’t make it before they get into another relationship and get married again!!! Marrying ‘on the rebound’, finding someone else right away is not a good idea. Usually when this happens, the person has not learned from their first mistakes and is likely to repeat them again. Too, the expectations for a second marriage are much higher and the fear of another failure much greater. So, deciding to re-marry is a very important one, a decision that should be made very carefully and not too quickly!
Before leaving this topic, we need to say a word about how a lot of people avoid divorce; they never get married! That’s right. They have decided that because of the challenge of being married and the pain of divorce that many of them experienced as children, they will simply ‘live together’ with someone. They think that this will be easier and safer than getting married. But it may often bring about divorce more easily.

Statistics tell us that 4 out of 10 couples who live together will only stay together for four years and 1 out of 10 will make it past seven years. The truth is that avoiding marriage by simply living together actually creates relationships that do not last as long as they might if the couple had been married.

Marriages may be made in heaven (IDEAL) but they have to be lived out on earth (REAL.) God made them to last but He understands and helps people in relationships that don’t!

**MODERN REASONING**
Marriage is something, which should look like the movies... and when it isn’t, you should get out of it and start over! Or how about this one: You should stay in a bad marriage but if it ends (whether you wanted it or not), you cannot re-marry because God would not approve!

**RESPONSES**
1. God wants people to stay married but He allows for exceptions when they don’t.
2. People need to be very careful before they end a relationship too quickly, no matter what other people tell them.
3. Although God wants marriage to be permanent, He does not want anyone to be mistreated in his or her marriage.
4. People should only re-marry when they have done everything to make their marriage work and learn from mistakes they made while married.
5. God would prefer that people marry, not simply live together, because being committed in a marriage helps it last.

**RESOURCES**
Smoke, Jim. *Growing thru Divorce.*
Boelts, Marybeth. *With My mom, With My Dad.*
Adrienne, Ron. *The Blended Family.*

**FACT**
40% of those who marry for the second time get divorced.

**LIFE LAB**
Teaching Aim: To explain what happens when a marriage ends. It can happen in the relationship before it happens legally.


DISCUSS

• What are the ways a marriage has a relational divorce before it has a legal one?
• What are ways a couple might prevent a divorce from happening?
• What impact does a divorce have on the couple/ on other members of the family?
• Why do people think that living together is easier? Do you agree or disagree?
DRUGS

And you might be saying, the Bible doesn’t say anything about drugs. Well, we’re out to change that idea! There are at least three prominent places in Scriptures where drugs are referred to, but not in terms that we would immediately recognize.

First, we come to the Old Testament where in the book of Isaiah, God challenges his people not to look to other sources than Himself for wisdom and power. He makes a big deal about their use of ‘sorceries’ and ‘enchantments’ (Isaiah 47: 9, 12). It was a big deal because these practices were, in fact, used by the pagan nations around Israel and Judah, and God condemned them. They were condemned because they involved Satan worship.

The Greek word used here to describe this activity was the word ‘pharmaceutikos’ from which we get our English word ‘pharmaceutical’ having to do with drugs. Oh, so the Bible does talk about this subject! (Oh YES!) This term is referred to once again in the last book of the Bible, Revelation (18: 23), where the term ‘sorcery’ is used. It refers to a day when all those drug-related activities will come to an end. But between now and then, drugs will still be in use. This statement is not to excuse the use of drugs but perhaps to help explain that drugs have been part of human life for a long time!

We must see clearly what is behind drug use. It is Satan himself who wants people ‘to turn on’ and ‘to turn to another god’ rather than to the one true God Himself. Both in the Old and New Testament, drugs were used in the worship of false ‘gods.’ The drugs were used to create ‘altered states of consciousness’ to help people ‘find god on their own’ This is why drugs have continued to be a part of mankind’s experience. People then and now continue to buy the lie that they can know ‘find god’ some other way than by believing in the True God. Drugs can be a way of doing that.

Why would people turn to drugs instead of to God? Because they need wisdom, power, and freedom from pain. For many people today, drugs are a way of ‘running from reality’, escaping rather than facing their problems. These are all things which Satan promises to them thru ‘smoking’, ‘sniffing’ or ‘shooting up’. He promises help thru a power other than God’s power. But often the ‘way out’ is the ‘way down.’

We see this again in the New Testament in the book of Corinthians. This book was written to a group of new Christians who had come out of a pagan religious system in which drugs were used to create altered states of mind thru which they ‘could find god’. This ‘god’, of course, was not the true God but the ‘false god’ of Satan. In I Corinthians 12:1-2, Paul points out that these people have become Christians and that they are no longer pagans, those who believed in ‘other gods’. He says, “Remember how you were
when you didn’t know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were
doing, must doing it because everybody else did it?” This means that they tried to find wisdom,
power, and other things thru searching for ‘alternative gods’ thru the use of ‘pharmaceuticals’
(drugs). It is a direct reference to the religious practices of the Old and New Testament. It is the
type of activity referred to in Revelation 18 that confirms that the use of drugs both for religious
practice and pleasure has happened throughout the history of humankind.

We do need to recognize, however, that God has allowed for drugs to be used for good purposes.
Some people believe, for example, that marijuana should be made legal because it does help
some people with severe pain. They believe this is different than just using the drug for pleasure.
Recently, for instance, judges in a circuit court ruled that a federal law outlawing marijuana does
not apply to sick people who are allowed to smoke ‘pot’ with a doctor’s recommendation. Eight
other states have also permitted patients to use this drug for medical purposes. Not everyone
agrees with this decision.

On the other hand, there are many good drugs that help people. For example, the drug,
buprenorphine “bupe” has been created to help people come off of heroin addiction just as
methadone helps people become free of addiction to alcohol. There are other drugs that help
people to deal with pain and to treat medical problems. These can be considered good drugs.
More common examples are what we consider OTC (Over the Counter) medications which are
used to heal and keep people healthy.

A lot of drugs harm people. These are drugs which are used for unhealthy, rather than healthy
purposes. But there is also a potential risk here: Over-using drugs to solve emotional problems,
especially with older people and children. In the U.S. for example, psychiatric drug use has
grown greatly amongst children, with drugs like antidepressants, and Ritalin being widely
prescribed by physicians. These drugs are used to correct ‘disorders’ in children, conditions that
sometimes also need to be changed through diet, counseling, and changing conditions at home.
The use of these drugs for children and teen-agers increased from 2.5 to 6.2 percent in a nine-
year period.

Recently, I read a newspaper question and answer column which told the story of a boy who
switched from Adderall to Ritalin at age 16. The dosages were increased until when at age 18, he
had become addicted to the medication. He confessed to his mother that when she gave him the
pill in the morning, he would ‘cheek it’, crush it and snort it. The mother was asking for advice
because she didn’t want him to stop using the medication, yet wanted him to use it the right way.
Here was the answer: “When Ritalin (methylphenidate) is used properly, it can be helpful for
people with attention deficit disorder. But this stimulant is similar to amphetamine. In one case a
tenager died snorting Ritalin. Your son needs professional help to overcome his drug
dependency. Doctors now have several alternatives to prescribe instead of Ritalin.”
This gives us something to think about: drugs used too freely, especially with children and by teenagers, may contribute to 1.1 million adult drug users in the United States today. Is it any wonder those years ago, drugs were called ‘brain candy’? Drugs today are often prescribed and sold to adults and children in response to a craving which has developed from accessing ‘quick fixes’ to problems which might be fixes without drugs.

Too, ‘prescription drugs’ once only gotten from a doctor can now be bought at the local drug store…you know, those advertised on T.V?

We know that anything that God has created to be good help people can also be used for bad purposes. Take food for example. Food can be misused. (SEE FOOD) Drugs can be used to save life or drugs can be used to destroy life.

So, let’s look at two very important aspects of bad drug use. First, when a person uses drugs in the wrong way, they are fundamentally looking to ‘another god’. They are buying ‘Satan’s lie’ that they can find God on their own. This is exactly the ‘line’ Satan gave Eve in the Garden of Eden. “If you eat of the fruit, you will not surely die”. Try this one: “if you use the drug, you can be your own god and you will not die.” Satan tells the ‘Adams and Eves’ of today the same thing in a different way. “Drugs will allow you to find god and they will not kill you.” The lie/line has not changed; neither have the consequences.

People may not think of taking drugs as a ‘religious activity’ but it really is. Thus, the taking of illicit drugs has no place in a Christian’s life. They have come to know the True God and they should not be looking to ‘other god’s for what He has promised to give them…wisdom, freedom, fun, and power to deal with reality and pain. In II Corinthians 11: 3, Paul says, in so many words, “Don’t let Satan lead you to other god; you have already found God thru your faith in Christ.”

Secondly, a Christian must also consider the principle of protecting their body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. To take ‘good drugs’ is one thing, like an Excedrin for a headache, to taking ‘bad drugs’ is another. (‘Speed’ or ‘Ice’ for fun, also known as recreational drugs.) Both kinds of drugs do have an impact on one’s body but the impact is certainly different. I Corinthians 6:18-20 tells us that we/our bodies belong to God and He requires that we treat ourselves in the right way. We are reflections of and representatives for Him.

A good look at our society will help us understand why drugs bought either over the counter or around the corner are being misused by so many people.

1. People are desperate for a ‘spiritual experience’. They have a need for God in their lives. God has put the need there. It can only be met by finding Him, the True God, not through finding ‘false gods.’ Much of the drug era of the 60’s was based on trying to ‘get out of ones’ senses’ to find one’s self through an encounter with the divine. (Little ‘g’ gods) This was one of the
purposes of the L.S.D. trip. In John 17: 3 Christ states, “And this is the real and eternal life that they know you the one and only true (GOD) and Jesus Christ whom you sent.”

2. There are a lot of problems from which people want to escape from living in our world today. Even though the ‘escape’ may be brief, ‘getting high’ allows them to dull their pain. Paul tells the Philippians, “I can make it through anything in the one who makes me who I am.” There is nothing a Christian cannot face and overcome thru his relationship with Christ.

3. People today have a lot more money to spend, especially teenagers, for example, who are often given money to keep them occupied. They use drugs recreationally. This means they do not use drugs for good purposes; to get well; they use them for bad purposes to get high. Too, it is tragic to think of how much money is spent on the kind of drugs that do not help people…that could be used to help people in other ways. In II Timothy 3, Paul describes people who will live at the end of time as “addicted to pleasure, allergic to God.” Pleasure has become ‘god’ to many people in our world today.

4. Peer pressure often tells people what they have to do to be accepted. It is then easy for a person of any age to give in to social pressure and begin with drugs. They often believe the lie that any drug is not-habit forming and that they can stop using it whenever they want to. Often, too, something like smoking or drinking or marijuana use can be the ‘first step’ or a gateway drug towards addiction. Peter, warns new Christians I Peter 4:1-4: “Don’t think it unusual when your old friends give you a bad time about not doing the things you used to do with them before you became a Christian. It will be hard to take but don’t give in. Christ will help you stand strong.”

And by the way, kids aren’t the only ones who have peer pressure problems. Adult ‘kids’ have the same problems. For example, nine million adults in this country are addicted to crystal methane. (“Ice”)

Most of us have seen the commercial where the father enters his child’s room after discovering that they have experimented with drugs. With cigarette in hand, the father asks, “Who taught you this stuff?” The kid says nothing, looks up at his father; the answer is obvious.

5. Drugs make money. Adults and kids are making big bucks off the drug industry in this country. It would be interesting to see what would happen to the state of things if all drug dealing were stopped tomorrow! Oddly many people who sell drugs often don’t/won’t use them. (That should tell us something…why do you think they call it ‘dope’?) They are no better than the people who use them; they count on people who will!

Ever think about the term, ‘chemical dependency’? What does it mean? It means that we become dependent on something in order to survive. We obviously depend on good things, food, sleep,
water, air, and warmth. It is healthy to depend on these things. But we can also depend on bad things. For many people these things become as basic as food, sleep, water, air, and warmth…. things we can’t live without. They help us. Yet, with the possible exception of food, these things do not control us. (Unless you’re one of these people who sleep 16 hours a day!) Yet, when cigarettes, alcohol, pornography, and drugs become things we can’t live without, we’re in trouble. The problem comes from the fact that we can’t live without them. They become addictions. These things do control us. They harm us because we have come to depend on them.

At the end of his singing career, Johnny Cash (ask your parents about the song ‘A Boy Named Sue’) amazed the MTV world and at 71 years old was nominated for 6 awards for his song “Hurt.” Part of the reason for the hit was that it told the story about the hurt that came from drug use that nearly ruined his life.

Some people have their life ruined because they die young, like more than a dozen teenagers in Ohio almost did trying to get high on flower seeds. They picked and ate ‘Moonflowers’, a type of flower common to the region. They thought the flowers would act as simply a narcotic but didn’t realize that some flower types are toxic; they could kill you! They suffered from dilated pupils, rapid pulse rates, hallucinations, (they saw weird and frightening things) and had other symptoms.

A lot of people today, especially kids are trying to ‘get high’ on everything from mushrooms to paint thinner. Many of them die or do permanent harm to their minds and bodies trying to be cool or feel good. It is a growing trend and a great tragedy!

The truth is: we are only to be dependent on the Lord. It is the Lord who has promised to fill our life with good things and supply all our needs. The writer of Psalms 104:27, 28 tells us that the Lord “opens His hand and satisfies the need of every living thing.” The writer of Philippians, chapter 4:13 tells us that “You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, His generosity exceeds even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus.” There is nothing we need or want that God cannot supply for us through Christ.

He can provide:
- A spiritual experience.
- Help with our problems.
- Pleasure and fulfillment in life.
- Meaningful friendships.
- Daily needs.

The lie is: Satan promises to provide all these things by believing in and following him. He tries to convince us that we can live our life by ourselves without God; we can live our lives anyway we please without anything bad happening. Actually there is nothing we need or want that Satan can supply for us. He only makes us think he can but he can!
Here’s the difference between what God promises and provides and what Satan promises and provides.

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<tr>
<th>GOD</th>
<th>SATAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>Lies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control that leads to freedom</td>
<td>Control that leads to bondage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Death</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
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<td>Fulfillment</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long term Joy</td>
<td>Short-term happiness</td>
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Taking drugs is really about ‘another god’ taking control of the user’s life. Satan uses them to keep the person from knowing and relying on the True God as the Lord of their life. Addiction to something has replaced commitment to someone. Something other than God has taken control of the user’s life.

So, just say ‘no’ is the right response to drugs and anything addictive. Oh yes many young people have told me that though it sounds easy, it’s not! But my response to them is: It may not be easy to say no now but it will whole lot harder to say no then if a drug takes control of your life.

Paul has two important words for us on this subject: In I Corinthians 6 he says, “Since the Master honors you with a body, honor Him with your body.” And in Titus 2, “We’re being shown how to turn our backs on a godless, indulgent life, and how to take on a God-filled, God-honoring life. This new life is starting now, and is whetting our appetites for the glorious day when our great God appears.” In other words, remember to make your choices TODAY in terms of what is coming TOMORROW!

**MODERN REASONING**

Drugs are harmless, everyone is using them, they make life more enjoyable, and you can stop using them anytime you want.

**RESOURCES**

Freidrich, Marilee. *Sex, Drugs, and Jesus.*
Strand, Ray D. *Death by Prescription. The Shocking Truth behind an Over-Medicated Nation.*

**RESPONSES**

1. Wrong use of drugs is actually following a ‘god’ in one’s life; one that takes life not gives life.
2. Wrong use of drugs is an attempt to deny rather than face our problems, which become bigger if we don’t face them.
3. Society tells us that drugs will free us when in reality they will take away our freedom.
4. We even need to use the drugs that help us carefully.

**FACT**
In a given year, 14 million Americans were illicit drug users.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* There are good drugs and bad drugs. Good drugs can help you; bad drugs can hurt you.

*Activity:* On your flip chart, make a list of drugs that are good for you/drugs that are bad for you. Talk about why some are good and some are not. Also share your own stories of someone you know (anonymously) who has overcome or not overcome drugs and what this has meant in their life.
ECOLOGY

Let’s start by defining the word. ‘E-co-l-o-gy’: The branch of biology which deals with the relationship between organisms and their environment/or the branch of sociology which deals with how people and their world depend on each other.

Better definition: It has to do with how we care for our world…the place where we live! The word is from two Greek words meaning, to care for the earth in an orderly way. We could ask, “How is that working out for us?” Well….that’s why we’re writing about it!

The Bible talks about this, in Genesis, of course, the book that explains how God created the world, remember? (SEE EVOLUTION)

We want to focus on two things:

1. He made human beings to LIVE on the earth. (Genesis 1: 26a, 27) Here, God made people to be like Him; He created them after HIS likeness, which meant that men and women don’t look like God as much as they have his personality. “God created human beings; He created them god-like reflecting God’s nature.”

2. He made human beings to CARE for the earth. (Genesis 1: 26b, 28) “Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air for every living thing that moves on the face of the earth.” God gave men and women a job.

Adam, in fact, started doing that job in Chapter 2 when he named all the animals. God named the stars and called them by their name, according to Psalm 147: 4 “He counts the stars and assigns each a name.” He invited Adam to be a part of the care process.

Just a few chapters later, in Genesis 4, God told Noah to take two of every kind of animals onto the ark to prepare for the world-wide flood. This would have been a piece of cake assignment’ before humans sinned, but after, whoa! Those animals weren’t all as nice as your pet Gerbil. But the point is that Adam, Eve, and Noah were all doing the job God gave them to do; to take care of the earth.

This job got a lot harder in every way after the first parents ate of the tree they weren’t supposed to. What happened is recorded in Genesis 3:17-19b. “He told the woman, I’d multiply your pains in childbirth. You’ll give birth to your babies in pain. He told the man, because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from, the very ground is cursed because of you; getting food from the ground will be as painful as having babies is for your wife; you’ll be working in pain all your life long. The ground will sprout thorns and weeds, you’ll get your food the hard way, planting and tilling and harvesting sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk”.

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Is this true? Ask any woman who has had children. PAIN. Ask any man or woman who has done farming. SWEAT. (By the way, I’m not so sure that men pulling weeds is as tough as women having babies, what ya’ think?)

The ‘ecology responsibility’ is talked about again in the Old Testament in Psalm 8. Hear what it says about what we as humans are to do. “You put us in charge of your hand-crafted world, repeated in us your ‘Genesis-charge’, made us lord of sheep and cattle, even animals out in the wild, birds flying and fish swimming, whales singing in the ocean deeps.”

It comes up in the New Testament, too. In Hebrews 2:5-7, “What is man and woman that you bother with them; why take a second look their way? You made them not quite as high as angels, bring with Eden’s dawn light. Then you put them in charge of your ENTIRE handcrafted world.”

The most important thing about ecology is that we realize we as humans have responsibility for our world, which is really God’s world; He has loaned it to us and has allowed us to use it! Just in case you were wondering what the angels are good for and what they do, God assigned them to care for us. (Now that’s a full-time job!)

So what does all this caring for the world in an orderly way mean today? It means the same thing today as it did at the beginning of the world: you and I are to take good care of the world God gave to us.

There are some big problems when it comes to our doing our job, though…Wouldn’t you know?

PROBLEM 1- We have less respect for God’s authority in our lives. We don’t follow His Ten Commandments. We break his rules. We don’t want someone telling us what to do. So, when it comes to caring for the world, we don’t take that commandment seriously either.

SOLUTION 1- We need to regain respect for Who God IS and What He SAYS. We need to stop taking His name in vain (See SWEARING) and breaking his laws. Because when we do we not only hurt Him, but we hurt ourselves. His rules have reasons; they are made for our good, not to make life bad for us

PROBLEM 2- We have too little appreciation for what we have. We take things for granted, we feel God ‘owes us these things’, we want more and more (even though we have so much already), and we think that all the things we enjoy will be there forever.

SOLUTION 2- We need to have a new appreciation for all that we have and the kind of life we enjoy in The United States. I have often said that’ most Americans need a three day vacation to anywhere but here. Why? So they would realize that the rest of the world doesn’t live the way
we do!! Frankly, I think we are pretty spoiled and act that way, too. I remember years ago seeing a ‘Dennis the Menace’ cartoon, which shows Dennis sitting on a mound of presents at Christmas time with the caption underneath “Is this all?” That says it pretty well.

PROBLEM 3- We take too little responsibility for caring for things. Kids may leave their room in a mess...but adults; ‘big kids’, leave their world in a mess.

Let me share a story: I lived on a Greenbelt, beautiful, with three ponds, loads of trees, and wild life. There were several streams fed by run-off rainwater flowing into a large natural creek behind the ponds. After a big rainstorm, all the stuff people threw into the street washed down the sewers, into the streams and into the creek. YUCK! (And you probably don’t want to know what washed down!) And being the ‘neat freak’, which I am, I would take by garbage bag when I’m walking my dog, Buster, and pick up the junk! But as I’m doing it, I’m thinking, ‘if the person who smokes these cigarettes or drinks this pop or beer, or brings this plastic bag home for Wal-Mart, or drinks this 64 oz. ‘Slurpee’ from 7-11 would JUST THROW IT AWAY THEMSELVES! (Then it would look a lot better and I wouldn’t have to pick it up!) That leads us to our next solution.

SOLUTION 3- If everyone would do their part, the world would look a lot better. As the logo on the trash can says, “Every litter bit helps.” And the opposite is true, “Every litter bit hurts”, right? Or the other logo, “Trash...put it in its place!” How long has it been since you threw something in the street or on the lawn instead of throwing it away the right way? So whether it’s pouring motor oil out on the ground, or dumping chemicals into rivers, or polluting the air with car fumes or hair spray, possible hurting the ozone layer, we are not following through on the commandment to ‘care for the earth.’ By the way, doing these things affects ‘our ecological system.’ It throws our environment out of order. If affects the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. It even affects our health.

PROBLEM 4- We think that someone else will do the job for us. Even though this attitude does affect how we keep our earth up, it also spills over into other things...like parents expecting the school or church to raise their kids, or the government to solve all our money problems, or the neighbor to go vote in the next election. It’s too easy to say, “Let George do it” (Which was especially popular when you had two different men by that name as President!) We expect the guy walking his dog to pick up the stuff we throw in the street before the rainstorm, remember?

I read a cute little article in a political magazine the other day that said: “Anybody who thinks that somebody will do what everybody else should do results in nobody doing it!”

SOLUTION 4- Unless everyone does their job instead of expecting someone else to do it, a lot of jobs won’t get done. What happens is that too many people do too little and too few people do too much. It’s not fair. And what’s more, the too many never learn to do their job of keeping
things up. Like a parent who keeps picking up his kids dirty clothes, the neighbor who picks up the used diaper someone threw out of their car window (and that’s a whole lot worse than a Slurpee container!) lets them keep getting by with it.

And speaking of garbage, did you know we Americans have more garbage than any other nation in the world? That’s mostly because we use so many more things; especially plastic cartons and metal pop and cosmetic cans…so we have more to throw away. It has been said that our garbage tells us a lot about our life-style. Check it out! (Well, maybe not.) Ice Cream cartons, Pizza boxes, Beer bottles, storage bags…you name it, we toss it. The garbage dumps and landfills are filling up across American. We are drowning in our own trash!

There are other ways in which we ‘trash’ our environment, besides putting garbage bags full of our stuff in their yard!

~ We can pollute our earth by the wrong use of weapons. We can destroy human life and plant life.

~ We can litter our world with ‘bad language’. When we say things that are disrespectful for God or dirty, we make the ‘air’ polluted…whether we get it on T.V. or use it in our conversations.

~ We can mess up the environment by smoking, (SEE SMOKING), not making sure those businesses or too many cars don’t put ‘smog ‘in the air. I realize that most of you reading this book won’t be smoking or aren’t old enough to work out the business and car problems, but you might be able to pass along these suggestions to your parents.

Every Fourth of July, as Americans, we celebrate July 4th, our nation’s birthday. It’s great. We have a ‘freedom party’ and on the way home, we drop our leftovers from Kentucky Fried Chicken on the ground 25 feet from the big bin! We are hummin’ “God Bless America.” Well, my fellow citizens, if we don’t pick up after ourselves and do the job God gave us in caring for our world, we may lose our freedom in more ways than one! God has given us a great gift; the blessing and privilege of living on earth and enjoying all its beauty and its benefits. He expects us to take the responsibility of taking care of it.

FORMULA FOR ECOLOGY: PRIVILEGE + RESPONSIBILITY = BLESSING

If your parents buy you a car for graduating from High School and give you the keys…and you forget to check the oil and let the engine burn up, they have the right to be mad at you, right? (And don’t say they didn’t keep asking what that strange noise was.)

God has given us a world as human beings and He has given us the ‘keys’ to caring for it. If we forget to check and see how our world is ‘running’, and it gets ‘used up’, God has the right to be MAD too, don’t you think? Your parents want you to enjoy the car but expect you to take care of
it. God wants us to enjoy the earth He created. He too, expects that we will take care of it. He hopes your car and your earth will be around for a long time.

Right about now you might be asking, “What’s in all this ecology stuff for me?” Try a decent place to live for a long time and for your children to enjoy. That’s what! And right now you might also be asking, “How do I do my ecology part?” Well, let’s see start by re-reading the chapter!

**MODERN REASONING**
The earth will always be here so we should enjoy it any way we want to; after all, someone will always be there to care for it!

**RESOURCES**
Hellwig, Monica. *Guests of God. Stewards of Divine Creation.*
Moore, Mary Elizabeth. *Ministering with the Earth.*

**RESPONSES**
1. God has given us the earth to take care of.
2. Everyone on earth is to do their part in caring for it.
3. How we care for the earth today will decide what kind of world we and our kids will live in tomorrow.

**FACT**
The world’s forest area has shrunk 8.6 billion acres as a result of human misuse. In 1800 there were 7.1 billion acres of tropical forest; there are 3.5 billion acres of it remaining. (The result is drastic change in weather patterns affecting the earth as well as the destruction of animals and plants.)

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* To discover the purpose and function of the world eco-system.
*Activity:* Using magazines, newsprint, etc. have group create a ‘world collage’ and then write on the back of it: How we should take care of it; what a world that is taken care of should look like.
EVOLUTION

The concept of evolution centers on the verb, ‘to evolve’; the concept for creation centers on the verb, ‘to create.’ To evolve means something starts on its own without any person involved at its beginning. It is a PROCESS. To be created is to have someone directly involved at its beginning. It is at a specific POINT IN TIME.

In Genesis, the first book in the Bible, (Chapters 1 and 2), the very verbs indicate creation rather than evolution. The words, ‘said’ ‘moved’, ‘breathed’, all indicate that a PERSON brought something into being at a specific point of time. What is obvious is that this person was God and the specific point of time was at the beginning of the world.

Obviously no one was around when this happened. God, in fact, asked Job this question in Job 38 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Which of course, Job didn’t!

That is a good question, though. How do we know what happened since no one was actually there to see it? It is believed that Moses, God’s ‘secretary’ in Genesis, was guided to write by the same God who created the world. That’s not hard to believe is it?

These are the FACTS of creation based on the Word of God itself. Why would God give us anything but the facts? Why would He lie to us about something so important? He told us the truth.

What’s important to remember is that even though God did not tell us everything about creation, he told us enough. He told us enough to believe that He Himself made the heavens and the earth and every human being. People often simply do not want to acknowledge God being involved in our lives as creator or anything else. Taking the ‘evolution position’ is based on this response to God Himself.

Did you know that the theory of evolution was started more out of desperation than to discredit creation? In the 19th century, people were so upset about the tragedies in the world that they could not believe that a Good God and Creator of Life would have made a world that had become so awful. Their solution: Eliminate the Creator and Creation.

The people who believe in evolution say that everything started with a BIG BANG. Suddenly the world wasn’t and then it was. No one started it; it just started on its own. This is how they ‘got rid of God’. There are actually two major theories relating to how life began. It’s another way of looking at Evolution vs. Creation.
• The Quantum Mechanical Theory. Everything came about randomly, in other words, without design and purpose. It just happened.
• The Chaos Theory: Though it looks like everything just happened, there is definite order and purpose behind it. It didn’t just happen; it came about by design.

Can you imagine us saying that about anything else, like a baby or a bicycle? No! There were parents before there was a baby; there were parts before there was a bike, right? Ah, but who made the parents and the part? ‘Quantum’ says those things just appeared. ‘Chaos’ says something produced them. And did you know that scientists have given us at least ten theories about the origin of the world, and they all disagree with one another.

I saw a bumper sticker once that summed up both Creation and Evolution: God spoke and ‘bang’ it happened! There you go! At least there is ONLY ONE Creation explanation and it’s based on Biblical fact rather than human theory!

For example, those who believe in evolution believe that there is 3 million year gap between the first amoeba and the first human life, leaving lots of time for lower species (animals) to evolve into higher species (humans). Creationists believe that everything; the world, animals, humans were all created at the same time because there didn’t need to be a lot of time for animals to become humans…because they didn’t! Those who oppose creation claim that what Moses wrote is subject to error. This is because the Bible is not a reliable source of information. Could it be that they simply do not want to accept the Word of God as truth? Many critics of the creation account try, for example, to disprove the first eleven chapters of Genesis as false.

In these first chapters of the first Book of the Bible are very important truths about creation, man and woman, sin, and God’s dealing with sin through a worldwide flood. If you can cast doubt on the creation account, you can question everything else that follows. Those who place more confidence in evolution over creation say it takes more faith to believe the ‘God account’ than the ‘man account’.

But does it really? Doesn’t it take more faith to believe in a theory than a fact or to believe what a man says over what God says? It takes faith either way, doesn’t it? It’s not if you have to have faith; it’s what you put your faith in! What it really comes down to is this: Do we put more trust in what God says about creation, life, the future, etc. or do we put more trust in what human beings say about those things?

Let’s take a look at how Creation and Evolution are different.

**CREATIONISM**
The universe was created suddenly.
*(God created everything)*

**EVOLUTIONISM**
The universe emerged by natural processes.
*(God played no part in creation)*
The earth began recently.

*(God made the earth)*

The earth began billions of years ago.

*(The world began by chance)*

Features of the world were formed by a flood.

*(God made mountains)*

Features of the world were a result of a gradual process.

*(They were made by themselves)*

Life appeared suddenly.

*(By God’s design)*

It came from prior non-living substances.

*(By blind chance)*

All living things have stayed the same.

*(God didn’t use one thing to make another)*

Some things started one way but evolved.

*(Without plan, design, or guidance)*

Humans and apes were not created the same way.

*(God made humans by a special design)*

Humans and apes came from the same source. A common ancestor.

*(We are just fancy monkeys)*

The creation account is confirmed by the word of the Psalmist who wrote in Psalm 33:6-11, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them, by the breath of his mouth, He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses...Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast.”

In Isaiah, one of the prophets echoed the confirmation, “But now this is what The Lord says, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel. (Isaiah 43:1) This is an ‘echo’ of Genesis two where God; made human beings from the dust of the earth and breathed into them the breath of life. And again “You heavens above rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I the Lord have created it. It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it, my own hands stretched out the heavens, and I marshaled their starry hosts.” (Isaiah 45:8, 12)

The New Testament also confirms the creation account in Acts 14:15, when the writer, Luke, encouraged people “to turn to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” Again in Acts 17:24 the writer repeats this truth about God being Creator when he describes Him as “The God who made the world and everything in it, He who is Lord of heaven and earth, He himself gives to all mortals life and breath, and all things. From one ancestor, he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth.”

The Epistle to the Colossians adds the fact about Christ being involved with God in the creation of the world and everything in it. “He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of
all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, all things have been created through Him.”
Colossians: 1:15-16.

Creation involves God, the Father, Christ, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe to be the meaning of Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness.” All three persons of the Godhead were involved in creation. God – “In the beginning God.” - Genesis 1
Christ - “In him were all things created.” Colossians 1
Holy Spirit - “The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.” Genesis 1

As we look at the opening chapters in Genesis we also see two other things which explain how creation took place by God’s design and direction.

We see first of all that God created all things ‘after their own kind’; In other words, He (God) created zebras and polar bears. But he didn’t need zebras to reproduce polar bears. Being made ‘after their own kind’ meant that zebras couldn’t produce polar bears! Yes, over time, animals did change somewhat, different size, etc., but zebras were still zebras and polar bears were still polar bears. This change is called ‘mutation’ …not evolution. This fact is especially important when we look at human beings.

Those who believe in evolution explain that monkeys became human beings, during the process of many years. This is easy to argue because monkeys resemble humans. Of course, humans resemble monkeys. But, if God didn’t need zebras to make polar bears, He didn’t need apes to make humans. The question we need to ask is ‘why aren’t there monkeys changing into humans still around today’? Actually, 1 Corinthians 15: 39 confirm this fact rather well. “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.” In other words, every species is made after their own kind, not made from another. Monkeys do not become humans! (Even though humans may look and act like monkeys, right?)

Secondly, we see that God created animals and humans differently in another way. He spoke the animals into being; He breathed humans into being. In Genesis 2:7, we read. “And God breathed into man the breath of life and man (humankind) became a living soul.”

Perhaps the real reason behind using evolution to explain the beginning of life instead of creation is that Dr. Freud wanted to give humans credit for something only God could create life. After all, humans are coming very close to producing life today! (SEE CLONING) There were also other theories which supported our ‘evolving’.
The Theory of the Earth in 1795 claimed that the earth was millions of years old; not several thousands.

* Those who believe in creation believe that the earth is young (6,000 years old) because God did not need a lot of time for lower forms of life (monkeys) to evolve into higher forms of life (humans).

Principles of Geology called ‘uniformatism’ believe that all species came from a single cell again supporting the idea that humans came from animals.

* Even though the Bible records that the animals were created first, it does not support the fact that we human beings evolved from them.

Computers actually prove evolution to be in error. Computers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology tell us that the evolutionary theory just doesn’t hold up. Why? Because the computers calculate that if changes took place every second, 10 billion years would not be enough time for a single cell to have changed into a complex multi-cell organism like man. 10 billion years is more than twice the amount of time given for the age of the earth by evolutionists and four times the amount of time they claim that has passed since life ‘suddenly appeared’.

There are, however, also two types of evolution. The first tells us that God did not create all life. The second called ‘theistic evolution’ tells us that God did create all life, but after He got it going, walked off and no longer was directly involved in caring for what He Created. At least the second kind of evolution gives God credit for creating life. The error, though, is to assume that He stopped caring for what He did create.

If we go with the theory of evolution, we either assume that God was not involved in creating life or that he was but detached Him from the world He created. In the first case, God did not create us. In the second case, He did create us but didn’t stick around to care for what he created. Either way, evolution takes a personal God who was directly involved with bringing the earth and creatures into being out of the picture.

I personally believe that people often, not always, want to believe in ‘evolution’ because they don’t want to believe in a God, especially one who doesn’t fix wars and stop people from dying. It’s not that they can’t believe, they simply won’t believe! Humans who believe God does not create them do not have to be dependent on him, be grateful to Him for life, or be responsible to him for the way they live it. When you explain that the elements simply ‘made themselves’, then came together and started life on their own, you can remove the need for a God.

Some people believe that Satan himself used thinkers of 150 years ago to produce a theory, which flew in the face of historical biblical fact that people had believed in for years. This was
for the purpose of keeping people from recognizing and acknowledging God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Culminator of all life.

CREATION CONSIDERATIONS
*When people tell us that we evolved from things that just came together, we ask: where did that ‘something’ come from?

*When people say they cannot believe the word of God but can believe the word of people, we ask: how do they know these people are reliable and can be trusted?

*When people say that God did not begin life, we ask: where does a person turn for help besides themselves when they get into trouble?

*When people say that humans started out as a lower form of life (monkeys) and became people, we ask: why there aren’t monkeys still turning into humans today?

Let’s look at one more fact about creation vs. evolution. In Job 40, God said it best when he told Job, “Look at the behemoth (possibly a hippopotamus or the elephant), which I made along-side you and which feeds on grass like an ox?”

What does this mean? It says that:
1. God did create the animals and humans alongside each other.
2. That a long process of time wasn’t necessary for humans to come into being.
3. Everything was created at once, and even though Job or anyone else wasn’t there to see it happen… it’s still true!

Bottom line in the Creation-vs-Evolution debate: Either God made everything from nothing or everything came from something, apart from God. You can’t have it both ways!

Let’s look at another way. In I Chronicles 16: 26, the Bible says, “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heaven.” (RSV) “All the popular gods are stuff and nonsense, But God made the cosmos.”

Could it be evolution has created an idol based on stuff based only on theory mislead us away from recognizing and giving credit to God who made the heaven and the cosmos?

The Discovery Institute, an organization dedicated to review of school textbooks, puts it this way: The Institute holds that certain features of the universe and living things are best explained by an ‘intelligent cause’ rather than undirected processes such as natural selection and random mutations, key components of evolution theory. And who else would qualify as the ‘intelligent cause’ but God Himself?
The statement of Job makes it quite clear in the book named after him, chapter 26:

He spreads the skied over unformed space,
Hangs the earth out in empty space,
He pours water into cumulus cloud bags,
And the bags don’t burst,
He makes the moon wax and want,
Putting it through its phases,
He draws the horizon out over the ocean,
Sets a boundary between light and darkness,
Thunder crashes and rumbles in the skies.
Listen! It’s God raising his voice!
By his power he stills sea storms,
By his wisdom he tames sea monsters.
With one breath, he clears the sky,
With one finger he crushes the sea serpent,
And this is only the beginning,
A mere whisper of his rule!

This could not be written of any other power. The world was made by God and no man-made system of thought can make it any different. God is the Creator, humans are the created. He made them; they did not and cannot make Him. Just because critics of God disagree with him doesn’t mean that he is wrong and what he told us is false.

By the way, a lot of other famous people agreed with Job.

- Francis Bacon, originator of the scientific method.
- Robert Boyle, the father of chemistry.
- Johann Kepler, founder of astronomy.
- Isaac Newton, considered the greatest scientist that ever lived.
- Samuel Morse, who invented the telegraph.
- Louis Pasteur, biochemist who developed the way to pasteurize things. (Like milk)
- Charles Babbage, developer of the first computer system.
- Matthew Maury, regarded as the creator of oceanography.
- George Gallop, creator of the polling process.

Let me make my point yet another way, through one of my favorite stories: A man confronted God and said, “I can make anything you can make.” “Oh, is that right?” said God. “Yes”, replied the man. God said, “You can’t make a man”. “Oh yes I can, replied the man”. “Okay”, said God. The man walked away. “Where are you going?” asked God. “To get some dirt,” replied the man. God shouted after him, “Hey, make your own dirt!”
MODERN REASONING
Life did not begin with a personal God who created it at a point of time; it came into being thru a long-process that did not involve God. This means that God is not a part of our life at all.

RESPONSES
1. The Bible clearly indicates that a person was directly involved in the beginning of the world and all life.
2. The principles about creation have been around a lot longer than the theories that men have thought up about evolution in the last 150 years.
3. The real motive behind evolution is not so much to explain now life began but to eliminate a personal God from beginning it.

RESOURCES
Johnson, Phillip E. Defeating Darwinism. Darwin on Trial.

FACT
Science is JUST discovering that 12 stars have their own planets and that there are 105 extrasolar planets previously unknown to man.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Evolution is a theory about how the world started and how human life began.
Activity: Make a cake. Group 1 tries to make their cake having no ingredients provided. Group Two proceeds to make their cake with ingredients provided. Cake one represents the concept of Creation - God making the world from nothing. Cake Two presents the concept of Evolution - the world was made from elements already there.

Discuss the meaning behind now the two cakes came into being and comparing Creation and Evolution
EUTHANASIA

The first time I heard this word, I thought it had something to do with kids in Japan; ‘Youth-in-Asia’; I’m serious! But is has to do with something very serious. Euthanasia has to do with killing people…old people, seriously ill people, possibly even children born with serious birth defects. In fact, ‘to euthanize something’ means to put it to death.

In the Greek language, used to write the New Testament, the word is taken from two words, ‘eu’ - ‘good’ and ‘thanatos’ - ‘death’ meaning ‘death is good.’ Today, that can mean that putting someone to death is good for two reasons: They are old and ‘need to go’; they are in pain, and ‘want to go’.

This is a serious subject that needs careful consideration. We must first consider it by looking at the character (or personality) of God. One of God’s characteristics or personality traits is that He knows everything about us, including when we are to be born and when we are to die. For instance, in Psalm 139:16, the Psalmist confirms that God knows all about our life; and how long it will be. “The days of my life were all prepared before I’d even lived a day.”

In Psalm 37:18, the Psalmist confirms this again, “The Lord knows the days of the upright.” (NKJV) Whether people are upright or not, God still knows how long they will live.

We must also look at the power of God. The God who knows about the length of our life is the one who is able to: Shorten our life. In speaking of the ungodly man who has opposed His people, the writer of Psalms says, “You have put an end to his splendor and cast his throne to the ground. You have cut short the days of his youth.” (Psalm 89:44, 45) (NIV)

Lengthen our life. In dealing with King Hezekiah, the prophet Isaiah records, “Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: Go and tell Hezekiah, this is what the Lord, the God of your father David says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears: I will add fifteen years to your life.” (Isaiah 38: 4, 5)(NIV)

In fact, in the Old Testament (Psalm 68:20) we read: “Lord God knows all death’s ins and outs.”

In the New Testament (Revelation 1: 18) we read: “See these keys in my hand?” “They open and lock death’s doors; they open and lock Hell’s gates.” If God has the unlimited knowledge and power in dealing with death then we must realize that humans have limited knowledge and power in dealing with it. In the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, Christ says:” Has anyone by fussing in front of a mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch?”

What do we learn from dealing with these three things?
1. God is the only one who knows how long we will live.
2. God is the one who determines how long we should live.
3. We are not the ones who can do either one.

With the discovery of modern medicine and ways to prolong life, people believe that they can actually extend a person’s life. After all, God apparently does allow that. According to the Old Testament, a long life was considered 60-70 years. The average life span in the Greek and Roman times was only 35 years. We obviously have a lot of people who live longer than 70 years, often because of better medicines, etc. But there is a BIG difference between extending a life and ending a life.

The Scriptures teach us that God knows how long we will live because it says HE knows all our days before we come into being. This is what it says in Psalm 139 “The days of my life were spread out before you.”

Simply put, we think we can ‘play God.’ We can take over doing the things that we thought only He could do. God brings about death naturally. Humans bring about death unnaturally. In the words of one critic of euthanasia, “As much as we would like to think otherwise, euthanasia is killing.”

Let’s consider these examples. When God allows a baby to die through a miscarriage it is the body’s way of eliminating a fetus that for some reason is into able to develop into a full and healthy human being. The same is true when an older person dies of a heart attack, sometimes instantly or from cancer sometimes very slowly. This is a natural means of death. But when one person takes the life of an unborn child that is healthy, but may be abnormal in some way or takes the life of an old person who is an otherwise functional adult; this is an unnatural means of death.

Of course, in modern times, doctors and non-doctors would argue that abortion and euthanasia are natural! But this does not agree with what we know about God and his knowledge of and power over all the life He has created.

Others agree with God. In Florida, the governor stopped a husband from having the feeding tube taken from his wife whose heart stopped beating 13 years before because of a problem in her body those doctors could not solve. Her parents had kept her alive since that time. The Florida State Senate had just a short time before making a law that forbids someone to end the life of another person in any way. Some would argue, of course, that God did allow her life to end when she died years before and that God would not want for a person to live being kept alive by a tube. Something that would have not been possible until recently. Often, however, the case of this woman is not what we are dealing with. She could not really assist in the decision.

We are usually dealing with one of two situations:
1. Someone asks to die and may ask our help in making it happen.
2. We want to hurry a death along because caring for them may be an inconvenience. In these situations, the person is able to be part of making the decision.

Both of these pose problems. The first is caused by the patient who wants to live a shorter life than God intended. The second is caused by the friends of the patient perhaps who want the same thing. And why do people feel they can do these things? We believe that we can ‘be god’ and ‘do what God does.’ Isn’t it interesting and sad that through the knowledge and very ability God has given us, we think we can ‘replace Him’ in extending or ending life. Either way we ‘take things into our own hands’ and ‘out of His.’ (SEE CLONING)

This appears to be reflected in the fact that between the mid-70’s and the mid-80’s, support for euthanasia went from 38% who favored it to 61% who favored it. My take on that is that the less we believe in God and His laws for life, the more we will believe in ourselves and our ability to ‘make our own laws.’ These revised laws have a lot to do with how we view and value life, at all stages.

Here’s the connection: If we think we can create life and take life of the ‘young’ we then assume we can destroy and take away the life of the ‘old.’ (SEE ABORTION)

The reason for ending the life of an old person or a young unborn person is often because we do not want to be bothered with these people. Both unborn babies/sick and old people interfere with our freedom to enjoy life.

THE EXCEPTION: There certainly are situations when a sick/older person is very sick, suffering, and wants to die. So, the person enables them to die by what is called, ‘a mercy killing.’ The person who helps them thinks they are not acting of selfishness or to get rid of someone who is not truly enjoying life. They believe they are doing what is best for the person who wants to die by ending their pain and suffering. Yet many people say that to relieve someone of suffering does not make the means right. Even when someone requests it, it is not right to end their life.

For some people, dying actually helps them in other ways. Famous people have made lots of money even when they’re not alive, that is then added to their estate. Elvis Presley, for instance still makes about 40 million this year; Charles Shultz (The Peanuts Guy) – 8 million. Others include former Beatles John Lennon and George Harrison, Frank Sinatra and James Dean. But, none of these had their life taken, except in the case of John Lennon who was murdered. All the rest lived out their natural lives, some died young (Elvis/James Dean/George Harrison) some died old (Charles Schultz/Frank Sinatra)
THE ERROR: Beside ‘playing God’, the person who takes the life of an older person to help him or herself by getting rid of an inconvenience may also be forgetting something. What if someone, someday decides that THEY (the person who took the life of an old person) are now the old person who needs to have their life ended? Maybe now it’s different when YOU are the person that someone wants to eliminate!

If we believe that God truly does love every person and does have a plan for their life, then we need to realize that God will fulfill His special purpose for all the days that person lives…according to HIS schedule not OURS! We need to let Him be God and we need to be careful not to try to ‘play God’ and ‘take over for him.’

I could give many examples of people I have known who lived much longer than people thought they should, because they were suffering and honestly did not know what purpose they were serving by still being alive. In fact, more than one old person has said, ‘Why does the Lord have me here…I have no value…I’m not doing anything worthwhile, why doesn’t He just take me home?’

One person that stands out in my mind is a man by the name of Walter Thorell. He had been the Chief Executive of Operations for a large manufacturing company in the city where I lived. He had a severe stroke at the age of 85 which left him without speech and unable to move in the lower half of his body. And he lived for 7 more years!! Many of us asked WHY? What was the purpose of his ‘hanging on’ those last seven years? He obviously couldn’t run a company. He couldn’t even talk; he couldn’t walk. So what was the point of him lying in bed for all those years? Why didn’t someone just ‘pull the plug’ or give him a permanent sedative?

Two things:
First, Walter didn’t ask to die. He could hear and he could have nodded his head ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Actually he wasn’t in pain, even though it was painful for him not to be able to converse or move. Any ‘mercy killing’ in this case would have been either because we thought his life was serving no purpose or his family wanted to be free to enjoy theirs. They could have easily made that decision knowing that he was just lying there and that they wouldn’t have to come see him every day if he wasn’t!

Secondly, God wasn’t through using Walter’s life. It wasn’t until Walter’s huge funeral that we understood why perhaps God had allowed his life to last as long as it did. Among the people who stood up and said something about the impact of Walter’s life on theirs were several nurses and members of the medical staff who commented on how they could see Walter’s faith even during this time of his ‘silent suffering.’ They could not only sense his hope but that of his family who faithfully trusted the Lord to know and to do what was best. No one needed to ‘take Walter’s life.’ God did that when ‘He was ready for Walter.’
There is an example of a request for a ‘mercy killing’ in the Old Testament (I Samuel 31) Here Saul had been wounded and asks his armor bearer to ‘finish him off.’ But the man refused. This may have been because Saul was the king. Kings and everyday people are individuals for whom God has a special purpose, one that He knows will be fulfilled through each day of their life, whether they see it or we see it or not. This is an early version of ‘Walter’. And it makes a point: God does not want people to end other people’s life…even those people urge us to do that. That is a decision that is up to God.

We never fully know and understand God’s purposes: The purpose for our being born the purpose of our being alive, and the purpose of our dying. The same God who begins the life of a human in the womb is the same God who brings life to an end; at the exact time He wants it to be over for reasons we may not always understand, especially if the person is suffering.

Elena Slough of Trenton, New Jersey, lived until she was 114 years old, the third oldest living person in the world. (She outlived her 90 year-old daughter who died three days before she did). Who would have known that she would have been born when Benjamin Harrison was President (1889) and die when George Bush was President (2003)? And who would have known why? But who are we to question those things? God had a purpose for every one of Elena’s 114 years! The decisions we make as to what to do with older people start with our attitude. This is an attitude of trust in the Creator/Caretaker of all life to bring about life and bring life to an end in His own time and for His own reasons. This leads to an action of not taking a life, even when a person is suffering or asks to die. Many people who have suffered for a lot of different reasons have wanted to die. This is certainly true of young people who are not sick and suffering physically but are sick of suffering through life itself and make the decision to end their own lives. (SEE SUICIDE). They self-terminated their life.

The decision to kill older people has to do with an action; the act of helping the person to die. Only when people have convinced themselves that this is the right thing to do can they actually do it! (I wouldn’t want to be the person who makes that choice!)

This is exactly why God didn’t want us to do what only He should do. He didn’t want to take on a responsibility He never intended for us to take. He did want us to take the issues of life and death into our hands.

We are human; our knowledge is limited; and our choices are imperfect. To assume the responsibility for whether a baby should live or die or whether an older person should live or die is a huge task. This is why should let God do it. Frankly, I wouldn’t want to stand before God someday and realize that I made a mistake when I took a life of anyone young or old. Of course, God can handle our mistakes. He can always take that child or old person to be with Himself, but we are still held responsible for the choices we make!
Remember, too, that God wants people to live. He honors and blesses all who help people live not die.

MODERN REASONING
Old people are often in the way of those who are younger; they have lived long enough or someone really wants to die so it’s okay to help them.

RESPONSES
1. Older people deserve the right to live as long as possible especially because of all they have given to us.
2. Younger people and older people need what each other have to give to them in order to be fulfilled in life.
3. Younger people should think carefully about what they do with older people because someday others will possibly treat them in the same way.

RESOURCES
Admunson, Darrel. A Different Death: Euthanasia and the Christian Tradition.
Blocher, Mark. The Right to Die?

FACT
A person who allows someone else to put them to death takes 9% of all deathbeds in The Netherlands where euthanasia is legal.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: To explain the practice of taking the life of an older human being.
Activity: Pick one of your older relatives and discuss what you would do if they wanted to end their life and wanted you to end it.
FOOD/EATING DISORDERS

Hey, if we thought that talking about music and clothes was touchy…we probably haven’t seen anything yet…because now we’re talking about food!

Food is one of those things, like sex, which God made good. And like sex, food is one of the things that can ‘get out of control.’ Yet unlike sex, food is one of those potential problems that isn’t as obvious as others unless a person is way over-weight or too thin. But there’s a whole lot more to ‘food abuse’ than we think.

To get a picture of the food situation we can take first at the Old Testament. Here God encouraged certain types of food and discouraged other types. He doesn’t talk so much about eating too much food as He does about the eating the right kind of food. What was the right kind of food? Our Biblical reference is Leviticus 11. God had His reasons for permitting and restricting certain kinds of food. We may conclude that the main reason for these restrictions was to promote good health.

Eating the wrong kinds of food produced two things:
1. It contributed to shorter life due to the problems that would come from eating pork, for example! Obviously, the people who sell ‘the other white meat’ would disagree and tell us that now they are producing thinner pigs with less fat! (I saw some of those when I visited Nebraska once and them are r-e-a-l ugly!)

2. It made His people look like everybody else who lived around him or her. He wanted His people to be different and distinct from other people. We will return to this second point later on in this section.

Another Old Testament text reflects God’s perspective on the kinds of food that He considered good for us. In Daniel chapter 1, we find Daniel and his three friends ‘away from home’; because of God’s people being sent into exile for rejecting God. Simply, Daniel and the guys were part of a ‘think tank’ for the King who wanted to train them in the ways of Babylon so they could teach other Israelites who had been exiled. Part of the training (3 years of it, to be exact), was eating the king’s diet, which consisted of among other things, royal food (probably lots of red/fatty meat) and lots of wine. But Daniel asked that he and his friends be excused from eating that diet and ate a non-meat (we call it vegetarian) diet. After all, the guys were tested, Daniel’s group was healthier. That does not mean, by the way, that we are all supposed to become vegetarians! What is important to note here is that God prescribed certain kinds of food for the same two reasons already noted, to assure getter health and to make his people distinct from others. That diet did reflect the times. In the Old Testament, people did eat meat. However, their livestock weren’t artificially fattened or full of hormones.
In the New Testament, people ate a great deal of fish, lentils, and olive oil. They also ate yogurt; they called it curds. (And we can bet that the lentils weren’t deep fried!)

By the way, people who eat more fruits and vegetables in their diet are proven to be healthier! This has been proven out, for example in Japan where over the past decade the desire for beef has gone up and so have the cholesterol rates of the Japanese. (Even though they eat more rice and less potatoes than we do!)

This perspective from the Old Testament comes in handy in modern America where we have produced foods that are a whole lot less healthy for us. And, don’t forget, we are a lot less active than we used to be. Food, environment, and activity all factor into the food problem. What we put in food to make it tasty (Beef tallow at McDonald’s) and to make it look good (Waxing apples) have created problems with food we didn’t have in the past.

In the New Testament, however, there are four food themes.
Don’t worry about it.
Don’t indulge in what is questionable.
Don’t over-eat.
Don’t cause someone to think that they are a better person because of what they eat or don’t eat. Sounds like a set of unusual reasons, doesn’t it? Let’s look at them:

1. Don’t worry about it: In Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, He says that we are not to worry about what we will eat or what we will drink. In the same Sermon when Christ taught His disciples to pray, He taught them to pray for ‘their daily bread.’ Too many people today are more concerned about having ‘a half a beef in their freezer’ than having daily bread. I believe what Christ was saying here was that we should eat to live, not live to eat. (Planning our days abound what we’re having for 3 meals…. and snacks in between, even!)

2. Don’t eat what is questionable, food that is not good for you. Well, determining that depends on whom you talk to. Some people have eaten steak and potatoes every morning for breakfast and have a cholesterol level of 22…and other people splurge and have Caesar Salad dressing once a month and their level is 500! Obviously a diet of Coke and Godfather’s Pizza won’t work out too well. Better to eat more fruits and veggies and less fat, you know! And yes, I have wondered how a person could actually eat fruits and veggies five times a day, unless of course they snack on celery! I’ve often asked God why He made things that were good for me, yet taste so bad and things that were bad for me taste so good…know what I mean?

3. Don’t over indulge in it. Actually the Bible is talking about self-control, something that applies to a lot of different areas of life…too much T.V, too much shopping, too many milkshakes, etc. (I know a whole lot of people mad at me now!)
In I Corinthians 6:19, 20, God reminds people who are now Christians to remember that their bodies are now God’s Temple, purchased by Christ, occupied by the Holy Spirit. How they treat their body either ‘honors the temple’ or ‘dishonors the temple.’ See, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that’s no excuse for stuffing it with food. Paul goes on to say, “Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for?” In other portions of the Bible, Paul talks about the fact that in terms of eternity, we should worry more about our spiritual diets than our physical ones. Actually that principle would apply to several different things when it comes to eating: what we eat, where we eat it, and how much we eat.

Christians have the Holy Spirit in them. They have the ‘fruit of the Spirit’, one of which is self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). Self-control obviously applies to how many times we put our fork in our mouth, right? God tells us that taking control of both what we eat (Old Testament) and how much we eat (New Testament) is important.

4. Don’t judge someone else by what they eat. In Romans 14, Paul gets after some Christians for judging other Christians by what they eat. For instance, a person who has been around for awhile might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table while another with a different background might assume that all Christians should be vegetarians and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ’s table wouldn’t it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn’t eat? To be exact, some were like Daniel and his guys, in the Old Testament; they eat only vegetables. Others were like the rest of the guys in the king’s court; they eat meat, but hopefully not the kind offered to idols, of course! Paul says that someone should not be rated by what they put on their plate! Now this may seem to contradict what we just said about not eating like everyone else, but it doesn’t. Why? Paul explains that what is more important than what people eat is that their sensitivity to those around them when they eat and drink.

For example: If my ordering a big expensive meal somewhere causes my ‘brother’ who can only afford to eat at Burger King to feel bad, then I probably shouldn’t take him with me when I eat out.

We need to look at one more New Testament text about food: I Timothy 4:4. Here the writer warns the young pastor, “Timothy people will say that you should not eat certain foods if you are going to be a truly religious person. Certain foods here include basically meat. So, if you don’t eat meat, you are godlier than someone who doesn’t.” Let’s put it this way: ‘Prime Rib may keep you out of heaven!’ (I don’t think so!) Sounds a little like what we just talked about in Romans 14, doesn’t it? And what does God say to this ‘no eat meat’ policy? “Everything God created is good, and to be received with thanks. Nothing is to be sneered at and thrown out. God’s Word and our prayers make every item in creation holy.”
Actually the Devil can use food to really trip people up. He can take something perfectly good (after all we have to eat, don’t we?) and turn it into something bad. Instead of our controlling food, it controls us. We can be obsessed with food. Having it or not having it and people can use food as a means of control. When people feel out of control in other areas of their life, they can control what they do with food.

One example of that is called anorexia. This is a condition where a person finds eating very unpleasant and who either eats very little or nothing at all. Often people with this problem think they are too fat, especially compared to other people. They are never happy with their weight, they are constantly dieting. By not eating, they not only lose weight but they make themselves under-nourished so that they can get sick more easily and may die.

Another example of that is called bulimia. This is a condition where a person finds eating pleasant, but not the possibility of gaining weight. So they make themselves vomit up the food. This way they can have the satisfaction of eating and the satisfaction of not gaining any weight at the same time. They are literally, ‘sick of eating’.

The both of these eating disorders are a form of self-destruction; we could call it ‘self suicide’, dying little by little. The person not only wants to take control of some area of their life, and to improve their self-image or but they want to destroy themselves because they are not in control of their life and do not feel good about themselves.

And that brings up another topic related to food; dieting. There are new diets and diet books published every week in this country. While people in many parts of the world are trying to get enough food to eat, many Americans are struggling with eating more than enough. Americans spend 15 billion dollars a year on ‘Low Carb’ Diets...that’s a lot of meat and vegetables.

Food is a BIG problem, literally, in this country where 1 in 50 adults is now seriously overweight. This figure has nearly quadrupled since the 1980 when it was about 4 million. By contrast, ordinary obesity (weighing too much for one’s size and body type) doubled from one in ten to one in five. This works out to mean that 1 in 3 Americans have a weight problem…and many of them are children. In fact, in a recent survey it was found that teenagers in the United States have higher rates of obesity than those in 13 other nations. This was due to eating more fast foods, snacks, and sugary sodas and a more inactive life-style.

God, nonetheless, has created food for our good. Like anything else, however, we are the ones who make food to be ‘bad’ if we choose to misuse it. We have pointed out several ways in which food and or drink can be misused.

We conclude with a reflection about food and the future. In Matthew 24, Christ is telling His disciples about what will happen in the last days before the world as we know it comes to an end. He compares these days to the days of Noah before the flood came. And this is what He says:
“For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying…” In other words, the world will be ending and people will still be ‘living it up’. One of the ways they will do this is through food and drink.

I have often thought how our own country is possibly facing hard times, but as long as the restaurants and bars area open and people are having good times, no one seems to care. What is even sadder is that often people are not thankful to God for these things, which they simply take for granted. People in richer countries often have too much food to choose from. Look at our grocery stores. Have you checked out how many kinds of cereals and pet foods there are lately? They don’t appreciate it. They can easily eat too much of it, forgetting that many other people don’t have enough of it. They can let it control them in one way or another, and then diet because they are fat! Food is a problem for many people, for many Christians.

Even though there is nothing wrong with eating and drinking. God made these things to be good, we can get too caught up with them, and they can became too important in our life. It’s important to remind ourselves that there are two types of food that ‘fill us up’. The first is physical food. The second is ‘spiritual food’, the kind Jesus talked about in His Sermon on the Mount. Here, he told his listeners, “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.” Maybe the real challenge facing us with food is not even so much what we eat or how much we eat but if that’s what really satisfies us. Oh sure, we feel full at the moment (until the next meal) but inside the person isn’t really satisfied. Christ said, “It takes more than bread to stay alive, it takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.” (Matthew 4:4.) The one who was the Bread of Life spoke these words.

Is it possible that we live in a land where people not only have FULL stomachs but EMPTY hearts? A healthy diet is more than rice cakes, soy milk, and tofu to take care of the body; it is ‘enjoying spiritual food’ to take care of the soul inside the body!

**MODERN REASONING**
We’ve got plenty of food and plenty of different types of food, which ‘nature’ gives us to enjoy. Since we’ve got to eat to live; let’s eat whatever and whenever we want to!

**RESOURCES**
Fitzpatrick, Elyse. *Love to Eat/Hate to Eat.*
Boone, Cherry. *Starving for Attention.*
Mintle, Dr. Linda. *Breaking Free from Anorexia and Bulimia.*

**RESPONSES**
Food can become a ‘god/idol’ in our life is we live to eat rather than eat to live. We can use what we eat to try to control our live when we use we abuse misuse it.
Food can distract from other things which are more important.

**FACT**
Americans eat 13 billion pounds of chocolate annually. That’s 25 pounds of candy per person and enough Oreos to make a round trip to the moon six times!

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* Food is something God made to be good, enjoyable, and helps us to be healthy.
*Activity:* Have one person from your group represent those who abuse food by eating too much and one who abuses food by eating too little. (The second group includes those who may binge on food but regurgitate it.) Have each one then prepare a three minute speech on why they treat food the way they do and have the group discuss how to use food in the right way.

(Eating Disorder)
*Teaching Aim:* Food can be used in a bad way rather than a good way.
*Activity:* Select two people. One to over eat and one to under eat. Have the group talk about the dangers of both kinds of eating.
Develop a list of resources (Books, agencies, support groups) that can help people who are struggling with an eating disorder.
GAMBLING

Well it may not be a hot topic in God’s book but it is definitely one in today’s world. In a given year, Americans wagered $61.6 billion, 5.7% over the year before. (And that does not include $2.2 billion over the Internet.) And all but three states have legalized gambling, 37 states have lotteries. So, it’s not only a hot topic, it’s a huge problem!

In the Bible, gambling is only spoken of generally, but it helps us to see the difference between ‘good gambling’ and ‘bad gambling.’

Gambling is found two places in the Old Testament.

The first is referred to in Leviticus 16 when Aaron needed to make a decision as to which goat he was to be used for sacrifice unto the Lord. (Leviticus 16:6-10) The called it ‘casting lots’ in those days. But it was like our ‘rolling dice’.

The second reference was in the Book of Esther where we read of the Feast of Purim, a word taken from the word, ‘Pur’ which was the name of a dice. (Esther 3:5-9) (Esther 9:24-26) The dice was used to determine what course of action a person should follow. Again, they called it “the casting of lots”. In this case, the person ‘rolled the dice’ and by it determined that the Jews, God’s Chosen People, should be put to death. When the plot was stopped and the Jews were not killed, they celebrated by having a feast, which was a combination of our Thanksgiving/Christmas called the Feast of PUR-im. (Esther 9:18-24)

It is spoken of again in the New Testament in two places.

The first is in Matthew 27:35 where it is recorded that the soldiers ‘cast lots’ for the cloak of Jesus. (Just as Psalm 22 had predicted.) “Then (they) throw dice for my clothes”. The cloak was special in that it had no seam in it. To they played a dice game to see who would get it.”

The second is in Acts 1:21-26, where the apostles chose a replacement for Judas who had betrayed Jesus. Again it says that ‘they cast lots.’ Actually they took two straws, the shorter one
represented the wrong choice, and the longer one represented the right choice. Thus they anticipated ‘drawing straws’ to select the winner.

Note, that in two of these situations, ‘gambling’ was to acquire the wrong thing. (Esther/Matthew), the other two had to do with ‘gambling’ to acquire the right things. (Leviticus/Acts). The two were for the purpose of doing what God did not want them to do. The other two were for the purpose of doing what God wanted them to do. There are some tips here:

Tip 1 There is a difference between ‘throwing the dice’ (determining something by casting lots) to find out what God wants us to do and doing the same to do what we want to do.

Tip 2 We obviously don’t ‘throw dice’ to find out what God wants us to do today. This was a way of doing it in Bible days but that has changed now. We are encouraged to use other ways to discover what God wants us to do. (I mean, doesn’t it sound a little weird to think of throwing dice to find out God’s will…especially if you should spend $500.00 for a pair of jeans, or $90.00 on a pair of tennis shoes…(common sense should help you figure that one out!)

Tip 3 In the case of Haman in Esther and the soldiers in Matthew, their ‘gambling’ was for the purpose of getting something God had not approved.

The real problem with gambling centers on several things:

Gambling causes us to put our trust in something else other than God.

When people gamble they are trusting luck instead of God to provide their needs. They are looking to luck rather than to The Lord. Those ‘needs’ are usually money by which to buy more things and get rich. (Note: In the two instances of ‘gambling’ in Leviticus and Acts, the people were actually ‘throwing the dice’ trusting God to provide their need for wisdom. In the other two instances in Esther and Matthew they weren’t.)

Today, nobody gambles/ ‘throws the dice’ to find out how God can provide their need. What’s funny is that people say that they can’t put their faith in God because they can’t see Him, it’s too risky. Yet they can trust in a poker game or a slot machine or a lottery ticket to give
them what they need; it’s not too risky! To put it another way, ‘gold can never really replace God.’

**Gambling causes us to never be satisfied with what we have.**

We’ve all heard stories of those people who take a three-day vacation. They fly to Las Vegas (which someone re-named ‘Lost Wages’), where they spend three days gambling. And then they come home with a story that goes something like this, “I had won $300.00 but I actually lost $500.00!” And why is that, we asked? “Because after I won the $300.00 I was sure I was on a ‘lucky roll’ and I could win even more”. What happened? They wound up losing all the money they won, plus some. The reason for this is because they were not satisfied with winning just $300.00; they wanted more. In other words, enough is never enough. And that goes back to putting our trust in something else other then God to supply our needs. “By faith” gamblers rely on a ‘little god’ (that someone has made) to supply their need. But, their need is never met because they can never win as much as they want to. Some people do come to the casino with $25.00 in nickels, lose it or win more and STOP…but not too many!

**Gambling may cause us to get involved with other addictions.**

Too often, people who gamble become people who take chances in other ways. They not only take risks with their money, but they take risks with their bodies and their minds. Often, although not always, people who are ‘hooked on gambling’ put themselves in places where it might be easier to do things like drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or take drugs. The problem is that no matter how much we have of money, alcohol, and other drugs, we never get our needs/wants satisfied. I believe that this is because God will not allow us to ever find real satisfaction without him. He will not allow for anyone or anything to take His place. These things are idols, ‘substitute gods’ we make by ourselves and put in God’s place. They don’t work to give us what we really need and we wind up empty and angry.

**Gambling causes us to hurt other people in our lives.**

If gambling only affected the person doing it that would not be good. But it never affects just the person who is doing it. It affects the people in this person’s life—often the people they love the most. Why? The money that should be ‘coming home’ to pay the bills and care for the needs of others is being ‘blown at the Riverboat Casino!”
It is interesting to note where surveys have been taken, that the poorer people are, the more prone they are to gambling. They are always hoping to ‘get rich quick.’ So when they gamble, they go into more and more debt. Rich people gamble too, but they obviously have a whole lot more money to start with! Many people pay for a person’s gambling habit in ‘other ways’ because the money gambled away is the money that should be used to care for them. Many gamblers have not only lost their money, they have lost their marriages and families, too.

*Why you shouldn’t start gambling.*

True Life Situation #1- The guys at school are placing ‘bets’ on who is going to win the high school basketball game this weekend. It’s only 50 cents and you saved that much not buying pop at lunch. So you get in on the action.

True Life Situation #2- The kids play cards on Thursday nights. Its poker and people use nickels to ‘bet on their hand.’ It’s harmless…you’re sure of it.

True Life Situation #3- The group you hang with pool their cash to buy a lottery ticket at the little grocery store down the street. You’ll only do it this once, just for fun. You say to yourself, “You never know, you might win…and after all you’d give the 2 million to remodel the library at your school… (Maybe, but not likely!)

What happens is that what starts out is something small and doesn’t cost you a lot turns into something big that does. It’s kind of like an “A Money Joint.” You start with marijuana and wind up on crack cocaine! The basketball game becomes a Race Track; the poker game becomes a Crap Table in Las Vegas; the lottery ticket becomes your ticket to non-stop days at the Slot Machine.

I have heard many stories of people who thought it would be harmless to just walk through a casino in Reno, have five dollar’s worth of nickels, promising themselves they will quit after they use them up (and don’t win) they will stop. They think “what could be so bad about that…I’d spend that much on lunch!” (Yeh, Yeh, Yeh)
What’s at stake here is being obsessed/getting addicted. It’s always the ‘next time’; ‘all I need is a little more routine.’ Like the plastic rabbit that causes greyhounds to run around a track for people who sit in the stands and bet on them; getting all I want is always just ahead of me but I can’t reach it! John D. Rockefeller was once asked, how much money he would need to be happy. He answered, “Just a little bit more.”

Other reasons to guard against gambling.
Although the Bible does not say a lot specifically about ‘gambling’ it does have a lot to say about being controlled by the wrong things. These are things that are ‘replacements for God’, things that actually ‘take over our lives and things that can ruin our lives! The Scriptures tell that God does not want anything controlling our lives other than Him.
And, of course, he's right.

For instance, God says “That we are not to be mastered by anything.” (Nothing is to be our master. 1 Corinthians 6:12); “We are not to fulfill the desires of our sinful nature” (We are not to give into the things that are wrong/bad for us-Galatians 5:16) “We are to say ‘NO’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” Titus 2:11 (We are not to do the same things that everyone else does because we are looking to someone different for our needs and wants than they are!) “You can’t worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you’ll end up hating the other; you can’t worship God and money both.” We cannot have two ‘gods’ running our lives at the same time- Matthew 6:24.

People think that ‘gambling’ is an OKAY sin/addiction because it doesn’t seem to hurt people, at least as much as being an alcoholic or a porn addict. But it is not okay; It can and does become a hurtful habit! It hurts our relationship with God because we find ‘another god’ to trust in; it hurts us because we never have enough ‘winnings’ to satisfy our craving for more, just like any other addiction; and it hurts others in our lives. Because it cheats them out of the resources they need, it causes them to lose their most important resource - US!

People are willing to gamble their lives away for pleasure or for money. But what they gain is not worth what they give up! Satan makes us think that we’re not giving up that much. But he always promises what he can’t really give to us, empty promises that he cannot fulfill!
Remember, the first gambler was Eve in the Garden of Eden. She was willing to find another god to satisfy her needs and one bite led to another, and she and Adam lost their relationship with God then and lost their lives in death later! Satan convinced them that what they were giving up for what they wanted to get was no big deal. They tried to find what they were looking for in the wrong place, they gambled on God being wrong and Satan being right. Result? They lost; we all lost, big time!

So when it comes to ‘taking a gamble or placing a bet’, gamble on God; place your bet on something far better than a basketball tournament, or a poker game, or a lottery ticket. Place it in someone who can really make good on what He promises, and fulfill your needs without harming you life!

The word of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount says it well: “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths or corroded by rust, or worse! Stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is will be the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” (Matthew 6:19-21)

MODERN REASONING
What’s a little bet now and then? At a card-game, in a casino, on a game? Life is risky anyway, so take a chance; you’ll be the one to win this time!

RESPONSES
1. Gambling starts with us trusting money more than God in our lives.
2. Gambling can lead to other risky behaviors, which allow us to be controlled by something other than God in our lives.
3. Gambling always hurts us and those we love.

RESOURCES
Eades, John. Gambling Addiction: The Problem, the Pain, and the Path to Recovery.
FACT
In a given year, Americans spend more on gambling than on movies. (Exceeding 50 billion in a given year)

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Gambling is using money in the wrong way one which costs people much more than just money.
It may seem unusual to consider this topic an ‘issue’ in this book. But after all, He is the one we’re quoting on all the issues! That’s why it’s important. First, understanding God is the BASIC Issue and secondly, the ‘God Issue’ is the basis of all the other issues! In order to take a good look at God, we need to look at some of our questions about Him!

OUR BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD
1. Where did God come from?
2. Why is God a ‘he’?
3. How did God really create the world and us?
4. Why did God create us when He knew that we would mess up?
5. Why does God ask that we worship only Him?
6. How is there is ‘only one way’ to get to Him?
7. How will God end the world?

QUESTION 1 Where did God come from?
More than one kid has asked this question, haven’t you? And more than one parent has said, “I’ll get back to you!” Well you might answer the question this way: God is the only person in the entire world who was not created. God created everything. This is really hard for us to understand because everything we have was made by something that already existed…things like our bikes (out of metal that already was), things like pizzas (out of food already grown), our clothes (out of material already made).(See CLONING)

God has been called ‘the uncaused cause’, the only thing in the entire universe that didn’t have a beginning. We could say, “God just always was!”

It’s a ‘faith thing’, so we need to accept what we can’t explain. I compare it to using electricity. I don’t understand where water comes from or how the hydroelectric plant works, but what I do understand is that when I flip the switch on the wall … suddenly I can see! God is like that! You and I can’t explain Him or where He came from or when He started. But when we come to Him, and ‘flip the faith switch’, suddenly we can see.
And remember, when we come to God, we come by faith. And everyone has faith; it is just a matter of where they put it. So, believing there is a God by faith is not that unusual!

QUESTION 2 Why is God a ‘He’?
There are two clues that tell us that God is a ‘HE’ in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1: 27, Moses recorded, “And God spoke, Let US make human beings in OUR own image, make them reflecting OUR nature.” This was God, THE FATHER, Christ, THE
SON, and God, The Spirit in this ‘holy huddle’. Again in l: 31, God is quoted. “God looked over everything HE had made; it was so good, so very good!”

We really can’t say why God is a male any more than we can determine when God started and where He came from. As God always was, God has always been ‘HE/HIM’. A lot of people have trouble with this idea of God being only a male/man because they think that this is a ‘put down to woman.’ As we will see in further study, even though God is male, He has all the qualities of men and women. This is why it says that HE created them in HIS own image, male and female to reflect HIMself. (Genesis 1:27). (God is described as a spirit, without a body, so it’s okay to describe Him as male or female!)

Throughout history, though, people have looked to men to provide leadership in society based in part on this idea that ‘God is a guy’! Although it is true that men have some abilities and can do things women can’t, the same thing is true the other way. Women certainly have abilities and can do things men can’t. (Just ask any woman!) So, it’s not right to say God is male because men are better than women. Of course, the fact that God is a ‘He’ is why so many verses in the Bible describe God as ‘our Father’. Obviously fathers are male! Again, without being able to explain the fact of what sex God is, we can accept the fact that we are His children and can become part of His family by asking Christ to be our Savior and that we can pray to Him and get power from Him. And that’s more important that explaining why He is a He! What’s important is that SOMEONE whose name is God exists and is there for us.

**QUESTION 3 How did God create the world and us?** Some of our answer is already covered in this book. (See EVOLUTION)

Unlike God who always was and came from nothing, the world and each of us were made from something already made; we don’t need God to explain the formula. For instance, God used the chemicals, and gases, and particles, which He has already created to make the world. When the earth was without form, darkness was over it, and God moved on the face of the waters, God simply put together the gasses, particles, and atoms, which He had already made. I like to think of a jigsaw puzzle sitting on my card-table at home. You know the 5,000 piece one that has the picture of a giant sunflower on it…. and all the pieces look alike? The pieces are all there on the table; I have to put them together to make something complete and beautiful. That’s the way the creation was with God except for one BIG EXCEPTION…I didn’t make the pieces of my puzzle, I put together the pieces somebody else already made; God made the ‘pieces of His puzzle’ AND put then put the puzzle together.

The basic difference between how God made things and God made us is that to make things, God spoke the word with words like “Let there be” or “Be fruitful” or “God called”. God took direct action as described through words like, “God said” or “God created”, or God made”. As a
result of these words and these actions, a whole lot of things came into being...like light, dark, earth, sun, moon, stars, animals, fish, and birds.

But when it came to us, human beings, God did it a little differently. In so many words, God made us. ‘He formed us out of the ground and breathed into us the breath of life.’ It does not say that He made anything else this same way. So, we are different from everything else that was created. We are therefore special, distinct, and given the highest place in all of creation. We also were given a special assignment: To have children to populate and over-see the world. See, God has something special in mind from before time and the world began. That’s why HE created US! (SEE CLONING)

We are also special in another way. God made/created us in His own image. In other words, He made us to look like Him. And we might ask the question, how do we look like Him? People have been trying to answer that question for centuries. (Some people are sure that God couldn’t have created some people to look like Him because…some people are, well, not so wonderful to look at.) No matter what we look like, we all look like God in some way. That’s because we don’t so much look like God physically through our outward appearance; we look more like God on the inside through our unseen qualities. For instance, men are often described as ‘strong.’ God is strong. Women are often described as ‘soft.’ (This is not a put-down; it is to point out how men and women are different.) God has both ‘strong’ and ‘soft’ qualities. After all, God is strong enough to make the worlds and soft enough to pick up a sparrow when it falls to the ground. We can say that God is both ‘male and female.’

There are a lot of people today who want to make God a ‘she’, however. They take all the ‘hims’ out of the Scripture and the HYMN books. So, ‘Lead on O King Eternal, becomes ‘Lead on O Rulers Eternal, which really messes up the beat of the song!

Some even have a name for a female ‘god’, that name is ‘Sophia’, which is the Greek word for ‘wisdom.’ Actually this name refers to a ‘goddess’ whose is a product of human wisdom...something man thought up, not God. God was, is, and always will be ‘HE’.
But He made all men and women to reflect Him!

Like a car that shows off the designer, we are to ‘show off’ God, our designer. Every car reflects the person who made it. Ever seen the label on a General Motors car? It reads: ‘Body by Fisher.’ The label on you and me reads. ‘Body by God’. (And everything else, too) Both men and women can ‘show off’ for The God who made them.

QUESTION #4 Why Did God create us when He knew we would mess up?
The real answer to that question is another question.” Why would God take such a big risk to create/make us when He saw ahead of time all the trouble we would get into?
The best answer is “I don’t know!” What I do know is that He knew all about us before He make you and me.
First, we need to know that it is part of God’s personality to know everything, and know it ahead of time. Nothing takes God by surprise or catches Him off-guard. Man’s sin was not a surprise to Him. He knew about it before it happened. You don’t see God running around heaven having a nervous breakdown panicking because humans sinned. Not only did He know it would happen, but He knew how to take care of the problem after it happened. That’s right! He had a plan in mind all the time…to send Jesus Christ into the world to forgive our sins and help us overcome them.

So the best answer to this question we can come up with is that:
1. God planned to create us even knowing we would sin/fail.
2. He planned to use even our mistakes to turn out to be something good. (Think of that!)

And that’s exactly what happened. As we study the Bible, we see all kinds of people who made all kinds of mistakes. Cain killed his brother, Moses got mad and lost his temper, Abraham lied about his wife and told people she was his daughter, Aaron made a ‘golden calf to worship’ instead of helping people to worship the True God, Saul let his position as king go to his head and disobeyed God, Peter denied Jesus, the disciples deserted Jesus, etc. But perhaps the biggest mistake of all was when God’s own people, killed Jesus Christ, His own Son. (Ah, but God even used that for good!)

Secondly, we also see that God used each of these other situations to do something good, even though people didn’t think so at the time. It’s the same way He uses our ‘mess-ups’ to day. Even though He doesn’t want us to make mistakes, He can use those things to teach us lessons, make us better people, and to often create more trust in Him. I always say, “God makes miracles out of my messes, but I hate giving him so many messes to work with!”

Apparently it was worth it to God to create humans He could share with, people He could do His work through, and individuals He could show His power to, even when they ‘blew it.’

**QUESTION 5 Why does God ask that we worship only Him?** The answer to this question comes as a result of the first four questions. If God has always existed and created the world from nothing, and created us knowing that we would fail Him…then I’d say, **He deserves to be worshipped.** What do you think?

The key here is that He also deserves to be worshipped because there is no other ‘god’ like Him who has done these same things. In fact, there is a big difference between a G(od) and (g)ods. There is only one of Him; there are many of them. In the Bible, idols are known as ‘non-gods’. In other words, they didn’t even count. That was because someone else created them; they did not exist by themselves, they needed humans to make them. The ‘created ones’ made their own ‘created one’. (Reminds me of the golden calf episode)
In our world today, we have a lot of gods we worship. Oh no, they may not look like the old idols. They are maybe news ‘idol-gods’ made out of plastic (credit cards and i-Pods) and paper (money, lottery tickets, and pornography).

God has every right to ask us to worship only Him. There is no other God like Him. He does not welcome competition from any idol or other religious leader. When we worship these things, we insult and hurt Him. He knew we would do it and let us do it, but He doesn’t like it! There is a problem we must look at. The problem is: some people have a hard time trusting God as their heavenly father. That’s because they don’t have a good relationship with their earthly father. They can’t trust a father; they have been deserted or abused by a father. So, they really don’t want anything to do with another ‘father.’

Our Heavenly Father is different from our earthly ones. But it’s hard to convince some one of that. It takes time but hopefully will someday allow them to trust in God as their father who will help them trust men, fathers in particular. It will also help them to feel the love and acceptance they have so needed from a male! Moses references it this way, “For the Lord your God is the God of gods.” Deuteronomy 10:17.

**QUESTION 6 Why does God say that there is only one way to get to Him?**

We can find part of our answer in Question 5. Because God created us and provided a way to save us, He gets to ‘call the shots’ as to how that is supposed to happen. We can compare Him to our parent. Our parent gives us birth, they help us get started in life, so when they ask us to pay back the loan they took out to get us thru college, we are obligated to do that, aren’t we? And there’s only one way to pay it back and that’s with money. (Unless you want to work it off…but that would take a lot more than mowing the lawn once a week!) But unlike our parents, God took out the ‘sin loan’ and made Christ pay it off when He paid the price of His life! So, if we do it God’s way, we get salvation free!

Creating the world was not the only thing (G)OD did that no other (g)od could do. Salvation was also something that THE GOD alone could do. The problem was that the humans God created chose not to worship Him and obey Him. They sinned; they fell short of all that He wanted them to be and all that He wanted them to do. But there was another problem: since humans made the mess, they couldn’t clean it up. They were not perfect. God could clean it up because He was!

It’s like a kid in the kitchen trying to bake a cake for his mother’s birthday. He drops the bowl on the floor, cracks the eggs over the burner on the stove, and pours milk outside the measuring cup. He hears her coming down the stairs so he tries to clean it up, with cake stuff all over his hands. He needs his mother to clean up her own birthday cake mess. She didn’t make the mess, he did. God didn’t make a mess out of life by sinning; we did. HE is the only one who can clean up OUR mess.
He did that by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, as a baby who became human, lived in the dirty world, died a terrible death, all so He could provide salvation for us to provide the solution to our sin problem, something we could not do ourselves. No other religious leaders ever claimed to do this. They have claimed to know God, speak to God, hear from God, and go into heaven to be with God, but not go to the cross for God to die for the sin of humanity. Anyway, if they did, there is no record of them being alive after they died. When Christ was raised from the dead, several hundred people confirmed the fact that they saw Him! Besides, no other human being could be good enough to offer a sacrifice for sin. Only God becoming a human being could do that!

Only the Son of God, Jesus Christ was good enough to offer a solution for sin. Christ was the perfect human being, the perfect priest (God’s Son) and the perfect sacrifice, (The Lamb of God) to ‘take away the sin of the world’. This is why Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, also the Life. No one gets to The Father apart from me.” John 14: 6

And you know what’s really amazing to me ‘Not Why is there only ONE way but why is there ANY way to God?’ After God made us and we let him down, I’m really surprised that He gave us another chance! But He did!

**QUESTION 7 how will God end the world?**

For starters, it is safe to say that God doesn’t start anything He can’t finish. No half-done projects sitting on the counter in heaven incomplete, expect maybe bringing the world as we know it to and end and making a new one. One good place to look for our answer is in the writings of Peter, in his second letter, where He explains two things:

1. God CREATED the world. (Vss. 1-8)
2. God WILL CONCLUDE the world. (Vss. 9-13)

In this part of the Bible, people are walking around saying things like well, “God hasn’t come back after this long, I don’t think He is coming at all.” This is how Peter said it in his second letter, chapter 3, “First of all these people are called scoffers(those who once believed in but now make fun of God and what He has said.) And they’ll mock, ‘So what’s happened to the promise of his coming?’ What they are hoping for is that God won’t do what He said He would do…’cause if He does, their ‘party will be over.’ They will be responsible for the way they lived their lives and the rules they broke!(Just like that time when those kids down the street didn’t expect their parents to come back from vacation early and planned that big party in the basement!)

The only reason God is waiting to finish what He started is so that as many people can come to Him through faith in Christ as possible (See II Peter 3:9). God has not forgotten what He started, not for a minute. “But when the day of God’s judgment does come, it will be unannounced,
like a thief. The sky will collapse with a bang…. all its works will be exposed to god’s all seeing judgment.” (God started the world with a ‘bang’ and he will end it that way!)

Someday, too, in the not too distant future, God will make a new world, combining heaven and earth together…think of that! Now that’ll be some HIGH RISE!

The important thing is not when it happens but how what kind of lives we live before it does. II Peter 3:13. “So my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace.” Let’s put it another way: “It’s not when but how we live until then?” (It’s not when your parents come home early from vacation, it’s how you are taking care of the house when they do!)

One of the saddest things about are world of today is people not wanting to believe in God. Many find it ‘trendy’ to not believe in, trust, or obey a higher power. The Pravda publication in the Soviet Union once wrote, “The party is particularly concerned that young people should form firm atheist convictions.” That attitude has changed in the now C.I.S. (Confederation of Independent States). But what is troubling is that the attitude towards God in the United States has changed. The Bible, the Ten Commandments, and Christian values are more and more looked down on. In Russia, however, those very things are being encouraged! Go figure!)

Benjamin Franklin (The kite and electricity guy…) once stated that there are three BIG questions we must answer about life:

1. Where did we come from?
2. Why are we here?
3. Where are we going? (Ben asked them with slightly difference language…using the word, ‘whence’, but the meaning was the same.)

The True God provides the answers to these important questions.
1. He created us.
2. He has placed us on earth for a special reason.
3. He will someday ask us if we believed in Him and how we lived our life based on our belief. Then, we will either spend eternity with Him or without Him! (Scary thought!)

So, believing in God is basic to life. It requires trusting him by faith even though we don’t have all your questions about Him answered. Whether we believe in God or not will make all the difference in how we live our life on earth and where we will live it after life on earth. God asks us to choose wisely!

**MODERN REASONING**
God didn’t start life, so we aren’t on earth for any special reason, and we are not held responsible for the way we live our lives in the here after.
RESPONSES
1. God is the only person who is not created so He is able to create everyone and everything else.
2. God created us knowing that we would disobey Him but that He would send Christ to solve that problem.
3. God provides the answers to life’s most important questions.
4. God wants us to have the best life possible by knowing and living for Him, on earth in preparation for our life with Him in heaven.

RESOURCES
Murray, William J. My Life without God. (Geared to Children)
Armstrong, Karen. The Battle for God. (Geared to adults)
Laurent, Robert. Keeping Your Teen in Touch with God. Why Teens turn away from The Church and how you can prevent it. (Both parents and youth)

FACT
The Jewish people that they would not use it considered the name for God ‘Yahweh’ so holy. Today many Jewish ‘churches’ have signs that read. The Synagogue of G-d for the same reason!

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: God is a person who is the Creator of all things and wants to have a personal relationship with every person HE made.
Activity: Have each person in the group identify their best friend, tell a little about them. Then have the group compare the qualities of a best friend and God, the greatest friend.
HOMOSEXUALITY

For starters, if we think that this subject is one that people only have to deal with in the 21st century, we are in for a big surprise! As we will see, this subject has been around as long as the Bible has been!

Why, it’s already there in Genesis 18! Here we find the city of Sodom was going to be destroyed by God. The big deal about God destroying people is something we look at elsewhere. **(SEE WAR)** One big reason God was destroying the city was because the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with other men. They preferred and practiced ‘having a love for the same sex person.’ This is called homo (same) sexuality (sex). This is different than hetero (different) sexuality (sexes).

Homosexuality for a man means loving/having sex with another man; homosexuality for a woman means loving/having sex with another woman.

Men who have sex with men are often called, ‘gays’. Women who have sex with women are often called, ‘lesbians’. These are not nice terms and I would suggest that you not use them to describe anyone you might think believes in and practices homosexual love. Simply, homosexuals are people who love other people of the ‘same sex’.

The love we are talking about here is not spiritual love (agape) or friendship love (phileo) It is sexual love (eros) from which we get the word ‘erotic’.

The men of Sodom (from which we get the term ‘sodomy’) wanted to have sex with the male messengers God sent to Lot, the nephew of Abraham, which God had warned them not to do! That’s a big clue as to how God feels about people of the same gender having sex with each other (no matter what people try to do to explain it away!). Sodom and Gomorrah are proof of God’s displeasure with any other than man having sex with women and women having sex with men. This is to be shared within marriage of two people of the opposite sex. In other parts of The Old Testament, God also warns people not to do this.

In Leviticus 18: 22 God said to and through Moses, “If a man has sex with a man as one does with a woman; both of them have done something which God can’t stand.” Again in Leviticus 20, He ‘echoed’, “If a man lays with a man as one lays with a woman (has sex) both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death.” (NIV) That seems pretty clear to me!

Of course, there are those who would want us to believe sex between men and sex between women is okay. In fact, people who believe that sex with the same sex partner say it’s okay when they have only one partner. They say that God blesses their ‘union’ because they are not having
sex with a lot of people at the same time. The fact is they are still having sex with a person of their own sex!

People who defend homosexuality respond two ways:
1. There is nothing said here about women having same sex relationships.
2. This is in the Old Testament but God changed his mind in the New Testament. As we will soon see, they are wrong in both responses. There is nothing said in the Old Testament about woman homosexuals. Leviticus 18:22 only refers to men. But we have only to look at the New Testament (written even later) in Romans 1: 18-27, to see that God does refer to them. “Refusing to know God, they soon didn’t know how to be human either, women didn’t know how to be women, men didn’t know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, and men with men, all lust, no love.” (And the New Testament is more recent!)

In dealing with their first statement, we automatically deal with the second one. God changed His mind about homosexuality in the New Testament. Doesn’t sound like it, does it? Those who argue that He did change His mind base it on the fact that Christ came to earth to bring love and peace. To do that, He didn’t tell anyone that what he or she was doing was wrong. He taught us to be kind and tolerant of anyone and anything they do.

There is a problem with thinking that way about God. God can not be fully God if He is not holy and righteous as well as loving as forgiving. He would only be ‘half God’. A lot of people want Him to be loving and forgiving, but on their terms not His. They don’t want Him to hold them to a standard of doing what is right. They want Him to be tolerant and understanding by allowing people to do whatever they want to do. God, however, is like a parent. He can do what is best for ‘His children’ by giving them a standard to live by which is for their best. He can also forgive them when they fail. God shows His love for those He has created by being both holy and forgiving.

There is something else very important to think about: God has rules and His rules have reasons. God knew exactly what He was doing when He made the rules about people have relations with each other…and the part sex would play in those relationships.

That’s why He made rules about relationships. God’s rules show us how much He does love us, not how much He doesn’t. If our parents let us do anything we wanted to do, we’d be in big trouble, If God let us do anything we wanted to do, the same thing would happen! All this tells us that God has made rules about right sex and wrong sex. When we break the rules, we put ourselves and others in danger too.

In looking at the Old and New Testament, which do say the same thing, we can draw several conclusions.
~ God did not change his mind about ‘same sex’ relationships between the Old and New Testament. Leviticus and Romans agree!
~ People who try to ignore or change what God has said about homosexuality are purposely trying to change God’s Word; to say what they want it to say; so they can do what they want to do.
~ People forget that just because you and I may not like the rules of the land doesn’t change the fact that the rules are still there; and if we break them we pay; if we play loose, we lose!

Let’s say you decide to run all the red lights on your way to school because you are in a hurry and you think everybody else should stop for you. Good luck! You may hit people along the way or you might not make it to school alive. (Of course, if you get home and your parents find out, you may not be alive, anyway!)

If we believe that God’s rules have reasons then we need to apply that rule to the area of sex. Part of the reason God made rules about same-sex relationships is because of the effects of this life style. From the book, Dark Obsession by Tim Daily, it is observed that: Homosexuals are more likely to get serious diseases than the non-gay population. Homosexuals are more likely to be addicted to drugs, alcohol than the non-gay population. Homosexuals are more likely to die early than the non-gay population.

God not only set down the rules because they were right but because they made sense; they actually were made so that people would be healthier and live longer.

Let’s put it another way:
1. They can become ill because of the sicknesses that can come from having sex with anyone who has had sex with other than just one person. For example, same-sex partners often have casual sex with a lot of people. This is also true of men and women who have sex with someone other than their marriage partner or have sex with several children. One of the most dangerous diseases is, of course, A.I.D.S. often, not always, is a result of having ‘same sex’.

2. They can become very unhappy because the relationship they have does not really make them happy and satisfy them. They often turn to drugs or drinking or something else to help them deal with their sadness. Of course, married people can be in relationships, which are unhappy and unsatisfying, but the same-sex relationships are often more likely to make people feel that way. Yet despite this, people today explain that homosexuality is okay for the following reasons:

1. People who are ‘gay’ came that way. They have no choice but to be this way. They back this up with ‘scientific evidence’ that shows that gay people have a different brain size than other people. So they go on to explain, that God made them that way! (After all He made brains, unless, of course you believe that we came from monkeys… and monkeys were
gay!) There is not a reputable study that supports this assumption that a person is born with a ‘gay trait’.

2. People who are gay stay that way. Just like they were made that way and have no choice; they cannot change. Again, the ‘human data’, i.e. real people with this problem have made and continue to change their sexual practices.

I wish to respond to these two statements with two questions:

1. Why would God make someone to be something He forbids and does not like?
   Let’s say your dad became an alcoholic. Would he blame that on someone else? Well, he might but the fact is, your Dad wasn’t born an alcoholic, he became one because of choices he made, right?

2. Why would it is impossible for anyone to change?
   Now your father is an alcoholic. He knows he has a problem. There is help available for people who have a drinking problem but your father is convinced that he cannot change. The fact is that he can. He hasn’t always been an alcoholic; he wasn’t always this way. He can get help if he wants to change. It’s his choice. But he can change!

Meet ‘Anthony’ once a homosexual. At age 12 his brother made him a sex victim. Later he became a male prostitute (people paid him money to have sex with him). Then he became the ‘boy’ of a famous rich man. He became a gay man for 9 years. He had sex with over 400 men. One Christmas he went home and met Diane. With God’s help Anthony was able to change his life style, marry a woman and join a group for ex-gays called ‘Regeneration’ or ‘Born Again’ or ‘Exodus’. (There are gays and lesbian individuals who believe you can ‘exit’ this life style.) He believes that God spared his life from AIDS and other diseases. And there are people out there who believe he can be free and are willing to help him. The key: Tony realized he had a problem. He knew the things he was doing were not natural or right and he wanted to change!

When homosexuals try to convince us that they are born that way and that they can only stay that way, what they are really trying to do is convince themselves that what they are doing is all right. They argue that even God has changed His mind about homosexuality, so should we! Why is homosexual sex not the natural way God made sex to be? Why is it then fair to call it unnatural? First, men and women were not made for same-sex relations. As much as the ‘gay community’ will laugh at this explanation, it is true. Men and women were made to fit together. Their bodies were made to fit like ‘a hand in a glove.’ Same-sex is like having two gloves or two hands. For instance, when you are putting up Christmas tree lights (The job you hate to do when it’s 10 below!) and you connect two strings of lights; you put what is called a ‘female plug’ into a ‘male plug’. You can’t make two of the same ‘ends’ fit into each other. Try it sometime. And I’ll guarantee you won’t have lights that work. I know I’ve tried it! God made people to ‘fit right’.
Men and women have sex for more than just fun. They have it to have babies...kids like you and me. It doesn’t take working at the Kennedy Space Center to figure out that men having sex with men and women having sex with women don’t make babies, no matter how much fun they have. Now it is possible for ‘gay couples’ to have a baby using another woman to carry the baby for them or to adopt a baby, of course, BUT that is not the same as having the baby themselves. And how does a couple make a baby? The sperm of the male joins with the egg of a female and presto; there can be a baby!! Well guess what? Two males have sperm but no egg; two females have eggs but no sperm. Oops! No baby. And one of the reasons God intended for couples to have sex was to make a baby.

That’s why God made the rule:
Sex should be between a man and a woman (hetero - different sexes) rather than sex between a man and a man or a woman or a woman (homo - same sexes).

One of the ‘newest things’ today is being ‘bi-sexual.’ This means it’s ‘cool’ to have sex with men and women. One of the terms for girls is ‘bisexual chics’ meaning that a girl would seek out and find relationships with boyfriends AND girlfriends. That could also apply to guys, ‘bisexual studs.’ In other words, these males and females would not consider themselves strictly or only ‘gay’ because they have sex with the opposite sex, too. It’s all kind of weird, isn’t it? But God didn’t intend for sex to be weird; He made it to be wonderful.

But that’s not how it turned out. That is why God has to warn us about using it in the wrong way. No matter how many people seem to be interested in or active with same-sex stuff, remember this.

There are not a lot of homosexual people in our country. It just seems that way because a small number of people have a big voice; and the voice is growing louder! Their volume makes up for their numbers! (Less than .01 percent of our entire population is considered’ gay’) But, they want us to think there are a lot of them. And that’s not all they want to do. One article I read said, ‘Homosexuals are not only coming out of the closet, and they are rearranging our cultural closet!’ In other words, the debate about what causes homosexuality, is it genetic or is it psychological, or is it a choice? One thing is usually left out. The culture! (Where a small group of people are trying to get the rest of us to say that to be ‘gay is okay!) Don’t forget even a group of 100,000 gay people can be wrong!

Even though the American public is not as much in favor of a homosexual life-style as are the leaders of media and education, still the homosexual minority has made great attempts to convince people that they should have the same rights as ‘normal married people.’ This also means they think they should have the same rights as other minorities, like those of a different
race or with a handicap. They contend that every their minority is like every other minority because they were born that way.

There are many people who do not believe that what homosexuals believe and do is normal. They don’t believe that they are like people in other minorities (race, handicap) because those people didn’t choose their life (to be a certain nationality or handicap) gay people do choose. So, many believe they should not have the same privileges.

One of those privileges is to be considered a married couple as any other couple. There has been a great campaign in our country to recognize homosexual marriage. It has labeled ‘civil unions’. In an effort to support this, some local newspapers (including the one in my city) have placed those married in a commitment ceremony along-side those married in regular marriage ceremonies. This is an attempt to make ‘gay unions’ normal and equal to ‘straight marriages.’

The other privilege is that of having children (without making them, of course). Today, for instance, it is common for children to have ‘2 daddies’ or ‘2 mommies’ and for them to tell other kids that this is normal…just like everyone else.

Warning: Don’t assume that gay people are always happy. Many of them are in relationships with same sex partners because:
1. They feel made that way and that they cannot change (even though they might want to) 2. They feel inadequate to ever make a person of the opposite sex happy. Men may fear women and women may fear men. (And possibly for good reasons…but) They may also have come from a home where their parent’s marriage was miserable but failed and they are afraid of having that same thing happen to them!
3. They have problems with both of their parents (like anger or hurt) so they do something that will hurt them like marry someone of the same sex.

For instance, a man may be mad at his mother or father and tries to punish them by doing something, which makes them angry or hurt. Most of the time, they may not even be aware of the fact that they feel this way or how they are acting out their feelings. (I have had several close relatives who felt and behaved this way…so I know!)

Warning: Don’t label people or put them into a box because they are homosexual. Although it may be sad to see people in ‘gay relationships’, for all the reasons we’ve already looked at, there is something far sadder!

That is either that people who want to change don’t think they can or don’t want to try. It’s easier for them to stay the way they are, believing that this is all the better it gets! People who treat them in an uncaring way may make them less inclined to change their life-style. What does that mean?
It means that when non-homosexuals are cruel and say bad things about homosexuals, they show a lack of love and understanding about the reasons why they choose this lifestyle, the pain they may have, or their struggle to change.

Sometimes people who are cruel to homosexuals may be trying to make someone else look worse than they are just because the other person does that! Let’s be honest, all of us have behavior that is not right. God doesn’t have a top ten list of sins, neither should we!

I want to be especially sensitive to those young people who are often confused about their sexuality, something that is made more common in a world that tries to confuse them. Some tell you that they have been ‘that way’ since they were young and they also knew they were different; unlike other kids. So, they assume that this is the way they came and why they must stay this way, even though many have serious doubts about it. I actually know of a school that recently opened for ‘gay students only’. The purpose of the school was to protect these students from being in a hostile culture which often interfered with their learning and to show them love and understanding.

Yet, to love someone does not mean to approve what they do. What it does mean is to accept them as human beings with problems and hurts like everyone else. God shows us how to do this. He is not mean to people who are homosexual any more than He is not mean to people with other kinds of problems. He loves them even though He does not approve of what they are doing. He loves them enough to confront them with the truth that He did not create them that way and doesn’t want them to stay that way. He understands the way they are and wants to help them change it.

In other words: We care for the life of the homosexual, but don’t condone the lifestyle. When people are tolerant of other people, people who might be ‘gay’ it does not mean that they say it’s OKAY to ‘break the rules’. What it does mean is that they remember that they themselves have broken the rules.

If we want to change, though, God gives us a chance! We need to try to love, understand, and help those who are different than we are, do different things, whether they want to change or not, but especially if they do. If we are hateful and disrespectful, how would they be encouraged to change?

Why would they want to be like us? This is especially important for Christians to think about in their reaction to people who are ‘gay’. (After all, homosexuality is not a disease you can get by being around homosexuals.)
We conclude this section with asking a question which appears on bracelets around the world.
WWJD: What Would Jesus Do?

In the case of homosexuality, I believe Christ would:
1. Uphold God’s laws about sex being between a man and a woman in marriage. No exceptions!
2. Declare that homosexual people were not ‘made that way’ but rather that they became that way for whatever reason.
3. Show love and concern for a ‘gay person’ without thinking that He was approving what they were doing or saying it was okay.
4. Believe that the person could change and give them the help they need to be different. 5. Give them the love, understanding, confidence in themselves, and encouragement they are looking for in a same-sex relationship but only able to truly find that in and a different sexual relationship.

MODERN REASONING
Everyone is free to have sex with whomever they want to have it with!

RESPONSES
1. God made rules about people having sex with people of the same sex and they have not changed.
2. Homosexuals use the wrong reasons to make ‘same person sex’ right.
3. Wrong kinds of sexual activity create lots of problems.
4. God still loves people who use sex in the wrong way, can forgive them, and can help them to change.

RESOURCES
Davidson, Alex. The Returns of Love. (A Christian View of Homosexuality.
White, James. The Same Sex controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible’s Message about Homosexuality.
Dallas, Joe. When Homosexuality Hits Home.

FACT
Gay and Lesbian youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to commit suicide from feelings of isolation, hatred and being bullied.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: A relationship and activity between two people of the same sex.
Activity: Take two strings of Christmas lights. Try to connect the same plug ends (flat to flat or plug to plug). Note: They don’t work because they don’t fit!
Then talk about how sex between two people of the opposite sex is primarily for creating new life which sex between two people of the same sex cannot do.
MARRIAGE

When I was kid (not recently), there was a song that went something like this: “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a couple with a baby carriage.” It sounded so simple then. As a matter of fact, it was a lot simpler then. But relationships, especially marriage, aren’t so simple any more.

First, however, we’re going to look at how God intended marriage to be at the beginning of time.

Old Testament
In the first book of the Bible, the second chapter, no less, God explains the basis of all human relationships. The first man and woman were created to have a close relationship with God. This was to be the basis of their relationship to each other, as husband and wife, as parents of children.

In Genesis 2: 24, after creating the woman to come along-side man, God said, “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.” This was the beginning of marriage: One man and one woman becoming one in every way.

New Testament
In the second Gospel, Mark, Christ says, “In the original creation, God made male and female to be together. Because of this, a man leaves father and mother and in marriage he becomes one flesh with a woman; no longer two individuals, but forming a new unity.” (Mark 10: 5-9)
What do we learn from these Scriptures?
  It takes place between a man and a woman. Meaning: Adults.

  It takes place between a man and a woman. Meaning: People of different sexes.

  It requires that a couple ‘leave their parents’ when they get married. Meaning: They set up their own household and start their own family.

  It results in the ‘two becoming one’ in every part of their life. Meaning? They share their faith in God, they share their money, they share their bodies, and they share in the running of their home and the raising of children.

  It is a relationship which is to last a lifetime. Meaning: Marriage was made to be permanent, not temporary, so that a couple could fulfill God’s perfect plan for their lives.

How do we explain these five things?
It takes place between adults. Marriage is not for kids; it’s for grown-ups. That may mean different things for different people. Some people can be grown up at 18 or 21; other people can be still kids at 30! So it depends on the couple. But being ready to be married is a lot more than taking a ‘Marriage and Family course’ where you carry around an egg or a dolly to see what it’s like to be a parent! I saw a cute cartoon recently with a boy and girl-playing house. She says to him, “I’m sorry I ever pretended to be married to you”. Marriage is not for actors, it’s for real life people who think carefully about saying, “I do” to someone.

It takes place between people of different sexes. No matter how hard some people today try to tell us that marriage between two people is right, marriage from God’s viewpoint is for a man and a woman. That has been the model since the beginning of time and God doesn’t plan to change it any time soon! It has been said that God created Adam and Eve…not Adam and Steve; Adam and Eve not Eve and Genevieve! (SEE HOMOSEXUALITY)

It requires that a couple ‘leave their father and mother’ when they become married. This does not mean that they stop loving their parents, or caring for their parents, or even taking advice from them. But it does mean that they no longer have to do what their parents tell them to do. After all, they are grown-ups (hopefully), have made their own home, make their own decisions. They really need to ‘leave home’. Sometimes even people who are married are still ‘too connected’ to their parents.

It results in ‘the two becoming one’ in every area of their life. This happens in five important ways:

SPIRITUALLY - This area of the marriage has to do with the couples’ relationship with God, their religious faith, and their belief system. It can include praying together, reading the Bible together, going to church together, having friendships with other Christians.

MENTALLY - This area of marriage has to do with their communication between each other, how they talk with and share feelings with each other, making decisions, and handle disagreements.

SOCIALLY - This area of marriage has to do with their being best friends, enjoying doing things together, finding hobbies they like, still going out on dates, making new friends, and getting along with their parents.

FINANCIALLY - This area of marriage has to do with what they do with their money, how they spend it, how they manage it.

SEXUALLY - This area of marriage has to do with having sex, finding ways to be romantic, if and when to have their children.
A good marriage is when two people have a relationship that is BALANCED. That means having a marriage where the couple has the same faith can be really honest with each other, are best friends, know how to control their money, and have sex only with their partner.

IMPORTANT: A Marriage that is balanced has a better chance of lasting than one that isn’t. Only God can help a couple ‘keep their balance’. He gives us’ divine design’ for marriage. A permanent relationship is what He wants. It’s The IDEAL. Anything other than that is what He allows. It’s The REAL. (SEE DIVORCE)

One of the reasons marriage is so important to God is because he uses it as a picture of what our relationship is with Him. In a way, we are to be ‘married to Him’ through our relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the picture we see in both The Old and New Testaments: In Isaiah 50: 1, God tells His people that when they turn away from Him; it feels like they are ‘divorcing Him’. It is like their relationship has been broken. “Can your produce your mother’s divorce papers, proving I got rid of her?” “Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce?” (NKJV).

In Malachi 2: 13b-16a, “You weep and wail because he who no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. ‘I hate divorce’. (NIV) What God is telling them is that because they are not honoring their marriages, they are not honoring Him.

One of the ways this is happening in the 21st century is people ‘living together’ instead getting married. I’ve heard all the reasons: “We can’t be apart; we’ve can’t afford two places; we need to see if we can get along, which usually means we need to have sex. Couples have often told me that since they intend to spend the rest of their life with their boy-friend or girl friend and since they are going to be married, they might as well move in together.”

But, I don’t agree with these reasons. Just because people have their reasons for living together doesn’t mean that the reasons are true! If twenty people told you that even if you didn’t know how to swim, you could dive in the deep end of the pool, would you do it? (If you did, you would prove they were wrong and so were you…maybe dead wrong!)

What they do breaks God rules. God has said ‘no sex unless it’s between two people who are married’. Of course, a couple can have sex even if they don’t live in the same house and sleep in the same bed, but living together makes it a whole lot easier to have sex.
What they do doesn’t make for a balanced relationship. Moving into together can cause a couple to put too much focus on sex and not enough on the other areas of their relationship, like the spiritual, mental, and social areas. And if the relationship does end, they wind up having sex with someone they didn’t wind up marrying after all!

What they do risks having a baby too early. More than one couple has ‘had to get married’ to try to avoid the embarrassment of the woman being pregnant. Instead of being able to start out as two and adjust to being married, they have to adjust to three people and one of them is a newborn!! (Not an easy way to start, and with no sleep!)

What they do takes away the excitement of waiting. Moving into together and usually having sex ‘spoil’ looking forward to something that is very special and can be the most exciting and fulfilling when a couple is married.

What they do increases their chances for divorce. When couples live together before marriage they often feel ‘a big let down’ after they are married. They feel they can leave the relationship at any time because they aren’t actually married. BUT, when they live together and finally get married, they may find it okay to have a relationship with someone beside their partner. So, living together and having sex before you are married actually increases your chance of a divorce.

For example people who ‘live together’ without being married are more likely to have marriages that don’t last. One in six couples will only be married three years. One in ten couples will not be together more than six years! In fact, couples who live together are 48% more likely to divorce. That’s almost half!

So it seems people are fooling themselves when they think that living together actually is a ‘rehearsal for marriage’ that helps them ‘live out the play.’ Without a marriage commitment ‘live in relationships’ seem to lack what it takes to keep couples together.

This is upsetting to God because He made rules with good reasons, so this wouldn’t happen. He knew what He was doing. He wasn’t trying to ‘spoil our fun’; He was trying to fulfill our happiness. He knew that if we made up our own rules, we would ‘spoil our own fun’ and we would not find real happiness in our relationships.

This is also upsetting to God because, as we have seen, he wanted the marriage partners to be a picture of His relationship with us. When the marriages go wrong, for whatever reason, the picture is not as beautiful as God wanted it to be. It is smudged. (You know, like those works of art you used to bring home to your mother that are still on your refrigerator?) A strong healthy marriage is a beautiful picture; a weak and unhealthy one is not a pretty picture.
And speaking of reasons, recently I came across an article entitled: “Are you Fit to be Tied?” In it there were reasons why NOT to get married.

I want to marry because all my friends are getting married.
I want to get out of my bad home life.
I want to have sex whenever I want to.
I want to have my own children.
I don’t want to be alone.
I want someone to need me.
I can’t live without my (boyfriend/girlfriend)
I want to prove to my parents that I AM grown up
I want to do what all my friends are doing.

Not good reasons. It is often immature people who are not ready for marriage who use these reasons to enter into marriage. Often the reasons are not good because the two people are not grown up enough to take on the task of caring for someone else much less running a home and possibly having a family.

Look at how God described what a mature husband and wife should be:

In Ephesians 5:21-33, Christ is comparing Himself to the groom and The Church to His bride. It’s an amazing picture He puts it this way: “HUSBANDS go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as CHRIST did for the church, not by domineering but by cherishing—a love marked by giving and not getting. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church.” WIVES, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. Just as the CHURCH submits to Christ as He exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.”

(Caps mine).

One of the keys here is that The God who made marriage knows how to make the marriage work. It is through a strong relationship with him that we can have a strong relationship with others. He is the DESIGNER. He gives us a DESIGN.

IMPORTANT: Since marriages are made by God to reflect our relationship with Him, people should take good care of them! How can we do that?

When we look at this passage more closely, we see two words that stand out.
Love/Submit (KJV) (NIV)
Love/ Be Subject (NRSV)
Cherish/Support (The Message)

** Cherish:** This is what the man/HUSBAND is to do. This involves 3 A’s.
To affirm her (Tell and show her how important she is) to accept her (Tell and show her what an important person she is to him.) To assist her. (Help with the house, budgeting/bill-paying, and the kids – and this also means changing diapers!)

**SUPPORT:** This is what the woman/WIFE does. She affirms, accepts, and assists too. They work together as a team when both of them work to do what needs to be done. There is not a ‘he list’ or a ‘she list’ but a ‘we list.’ What this means is that men and women are good at different things, she can fix the car and he can cook. We call that a ‘role reversal’

We’ll call this the **Cherish-Support Cycle.** It is one that begins when a couple is dating and lasts the rest of their lives. It is through this that their marriage looks like God’s design—showing the relationship between Him and His People and between Christ and His Church. God created marriage to two important reasons; First, for His glory because it would reflect his relationship with us. Second, for our good because it would bring us happiness and fulfillment. To become married and have a marriage that becomes all that it can be, we need to follow God’s design. HE made marriage and HE knows how to make it work!

Chuck Swindoll, a famous writer, put it this way: “In an age of poor marriage models, and a ‘Disneyland definition’ of life together, we need to consult the architect”. Today a lot of people think their ideal is a ‘Hollywood Marriage’ (and we know how well a lot of them work out!) Stat: The average length of a marriage in Hollywood is 42 months!

So many people know how to fall in love and make love but few people know how to make love last. A lot of us come from a home where an unhappy marriage and/or a divorce is all we have to go by. We don’t really know how to be married. We expect marriage to fail. And when we come up against these problems, we don’t know how to solve them. We need to come back to the original DESIGN and the original DESIGNER! By the way, if we forget to consult the Designer or consider his Design, he does give us a second chance, a chance to start over; but he wants us to learn from our mistakes not repeat them. He wants us to do marriage ‘his way’ because He knows that way is best for us. Remember: If we compared marriage to a car we could say. God is like a Mercedes Benz manufacturer: He made the Mercedes and He wrote the Owner’s Manual! If you want to know how to care for your car, consult the Manufacturer (God) and read ‘Operation/Owners Manual.’ (The Bible)

**MODERN REASONING**
Marriage is all about making you happy. And if it doesn’t work out, then you can always get out of it and find someone else.

**RESPONSES**
1. God has given us a design and a plan for all of our relationships especially marriage.
2. People look at the wrong designs for marriage and get married with too little preparation for it. They get married for the wrong reasons.
3. God wants marriage to last a lifetime but allows it to end under certain circumstances.
4. God expects people to learn from their divorce especially if they marry again.

RESOURCES
Swindoll, Chuck. Strike the Original Match.
Heybels, Bill. Fit to be Tied.
Shedd, Charlie. Letters to Karen. (Geared to Youth)
Shedd, Charlie. Letters to Phillip. (Geared to Youth)
Parrot, Les. When Bad things Happen to Good Marriages.

FACT
Forty years ago: Men married at age 22.6 years of age and Women married at 20.2 years of age.
Today: Men marry at the age of 26.5 years of age and women marry at 24.5 years of age, indicating that people are more ‘grown up’ when they first say, “I Do.”

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: To emphasize that the union between a man and a woman is what God intended to for humans to find health and happiness and to create life and to last a lifetime.
Activity: Have the group write a wedding vow which reflects God’s intention for marriage. Then conduct a ‘pretend wedding’. Feature a ‘wedding reception’ including light refreshments and talk about the difference between a couple being married and simply living together.
MODERN DAY RELIGIONS

Religion has obviously been around since the beginning of time but, as we will see, it has changed over the years. The ‘new religion’ of today is really the ‘old religion’ which has been around for a long time. This religion is called various things: ‘The New Age Movement’, ‘The Post-Modern Movement’. I like to call it ‘The New Paganism’. I will explain why.

Religion started way back in the First book of the Bible, Genesis, when God set up a relationship with the first humans, Adam and Eve and their children. To believe in God was basic to being a person. This was the TRUE God, the one who created the world and every human person and who established a relationship with them. The word religion, in fact, is a Latin Word that means, ‘to bind back’. God through religion wanted to bring man back to a relationship with himself. But that all changed.

In Genesis 3, it is recorded that Satan, after being ‘kicked out of heaven’, came down to earth. After failing to overthrow God in heaven, (PLAN A) he wanted to get people on earth to not believe in God but believe in him instead. His plan worked really well, as we see in Genesis 3:1-6. (PLAN B). Here the Devil disguised as something else, deceived the first couple and got them to doubt, distrust, and disobey God. (Note the ‘D’ words.) His motive was to get back at God for what God had done for him in kicking him out of heaven. His method was to use human beings to hurt God by their rejection of Him. The Devil LIED to them so that he could DESTROY them. By getting them to doubt and disobey God, he changed their relationship with God and sin, which resulted in their death. (Note another ‘D’ word!)

Religion has never been the same since. Why? The Devil wants people to worship him (the false god) instead of HIM (the TRUE GOD). Any religion that results in people turning to the false god instead of the True God is a false religion. (SEE CULTS/OCCULT)

Throughout history the Devil has simply done the same things for the same reasons. He has lied to people in order to get them to worship and follow the wrong god, something that would eventually ruin their life. Keep in mind that in the New Testament, Christ called Satan a liar and a murderer from the beginning. (John 8:44). He lies in order to ‘take a person’s life’.

In the world of Transformer characters, ‘Megatron is called Fallen, Deception, Demolisher. His evil helpers are called ‘Decepticons’. This is like Satan who IS evil and he DOES evil which is carried out by his ‘fallen angel assistants.’

In John 17:15, Christ prayed that people who lived in the world would be kept from the Evil One, the person of Satan and all the things he would try to get us to do. The main thing he tries to
get us to do is to not follow or obey God. One of the ways he tries to pull this off is by getting people to follow false religion(s).

**EXAMPLES OF FALSE RELIGION**

In the Old Testament, people who lived after Adam and Eve turned away from The True God in several ways. In Genesis 11, they tried to build a tower to God, a symbol of their trying to get to God on their own without his help. When His People entered into the Promised Land where pagan people lived, they became just like those people. They believed in false gods and followed in their ways. (Joshua 24) Here Joshua told the people that they would have to choose between following the Lord who had brought them out of captivity in Egypt or the gods of the pagan people who had done nothing for them. Joshua said, “Now get rid of all the foreign gods you have with you and say an unqualified ‘yes’ to God, the God of Israel.” It should have been an easy choice, don’t you think? Time after time the people of God promised to follow God but doubted, disbelieved in, and disobeyed God just as Adam and Eve had done. Eventually, God allowed His people, Israel, to be taken captive by the nations whose religion they had followed. He did this to get them to think about Him and all He had done for them. He wanted to ‘bind them back’ to Himself through the true religion.

In giving the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20, God had made the first commandment ‘not having any other gods before Him.’ This is because God is a jealous God. God is jealous in a different way than we are. We are jealous for the wrong reason—we want something we maybe shouldn’t have. God is jealous for the right reason. He wants something that He should have the worship and obedience of His people. So, it’s okay for God to be jealous. He wants nothing to come between Him and us and He is jealous of anything that does...things like false religion.

Often people ask why God would allow Satan to choose evil, or why does He let people choose evil? That’s a good question and here’s a possible answer. God allows everyone He has created to have the free will to choose, even though they choose something different than He wants for them. And remember, God is bigger than anything He has created and allows. He knew about our turning to false gods before the world began and before you and I were created; He can handle it.

In Genesis 3:14-19, God predicted what would happen to Satan, Adam and Eve, as a result of rejecting Him. But He also explained how He would send Christ into the world to over-come and defeat Satan and save everyone who would believe in Him. (Genesis 3:15). “I’m declaring war between you (serpent) and the woman, between her offspring and yours. He will wound your head, you’ll wound his heel.” This meant that God through Christ would overcome Satan; people who believed in God thru Christ would be safe and free. But it this message of forgiveness and salvation from sin that Devil doesn’t want people to hear and believe in! So, Satan keeps using false religion to fulfill his purpose.
In the New Testament, we see that Satan did not stop trying to get people to stop believing in God. He tried, in fact, to get Jesus himself to stop doing that! In Matthew 4, Satan tried three times to get Christ to not follow God but to follow him. If Christ had done that, of course, we would not have the Christian faith today and no way to have a relationship with God. False religion appeared two different ways in the New Testament.

The first way was for people like the Jewish religious leaders to follow the Law instead of following the Lord. This meant that they were depending on a set of rules to save them instead of a relationship with Christ.

The second way was for people to follow after ‘other religions’ like those the PAGANS followed. In I Corinthians 10: 1-13 and II Corinthians 11:14, for example, the apostle Paul warns these people about following idols—the very same thing their relatives in the Old Testament did! He says, “And now I’m afraid that exactly as the Snake seduced Eve with his smooth talk, (convincing words), you are being lured away from the simple purity of your love for Christ.” Some things never change! Satan’s purpose and plan to mislead people and people letting him mislead them!

In Galatians 1: 6-9, Paul actually tells these early Christians to watch out for things that would tempt them to turn away from Christ. “Let me be blunt: If one of us, even if an angel from heaven preaches something other than what we preached let him be cursed.” All this actually helps us understand what is happening today with religion in American today.

People who live in a nation founded by people who believed in the True God and His Son Jesus Christ actually left their land to establish this The United States and died to keep freedom of religion alive. Some Americans are now rejecting this very message. They have turned from the true religion given them by God and turning to a false religion given them by Satan.

What makes a religion false?

• Any religion that denies God has the creator of life. (See EVOLUTION) Usually today people tell you that there isn’t a ‘God out there’ who created all things and holds us responsible for the way we live our lives’ but that there is a ‘god in here’, inside us, who we can find on our own. (Sounds like Genesis 3 to me!)

• Any religion that uses another book in place of the Bible as the basis of what it teaches. (Like the book of Mormon, for example which claims to be later and above the Bible itself. Mormons claim this with ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ.’ No book is to be made equal to the Bible.

• Any religion that claims that Jesus Christ was either not the true Son of God or that He is one of several ‘sons of God’ based on the ‘so-called facts’ that try to prove that Jesus was just another human being, that He sinned while on earth and could not die for our sins. This makes no sense, of course. How can people say that Christ was a great
man, or teacher, or prophet but at the same time say that He lied about being God? How could He be those other things and be a liar? And if He lied about that, what else did He lie about?

- Any religion that says that you can ‘save yourself’ and that you do not need to believe in and follow Christ to save you. This is called salvation by your WORKS you trust what you can do to save you instead of trusting the WORK Christ can do. This poses a problem since the Bible tells us how to be saved thru believing in Christ but doesn’t tell us the thing we have to do to save ourselves! By the way, world religions, cults, and many so-called Christian churches believe in ‘our works’ instead of ‘his work.’
- Any religion that tries to convince you that you don’t actually sin; it’s just that you don’t understand enough about yourself or don’t have enough knowledge with which to ‘fix yourself.’ What they are telling you is that you don’t need God’s help to deal with sin; you can handle it! We call this humanism, putting your confidence in what a human being to do what only God can do!
- Any religion that assures you that we all go to heaven and that God loves people too much to send them to Hell! In other words, there is no ONE RELIGION, such as Christians claim; there are many religions and all of them lead to God. What this means is that Christianity is not true, since it claims that there is only one way to God thru Jesus Christ. In fact, we are told that if we claim ‘the Christian way’ is the only way, we are intolerant, unkind and prejudiced against all other religions, something that is unacceptable and not ‘politically correct’ today!

What does this all mean? I like to describe American religion today this way:
First, it is an ‘OLD AGE RELIGION IN A NEW AGE’ It is the,’ same old lie’, but all disguised as something new and different. It is the old package in a new wrapper. Satan had tried to get people to doubt, disbelieve, and disobey God THEN, he is still doing it NOW. His Motive hasn’t changed, but his methods are different. For instance, in the Old Testament he got people to worship little idols made out of wood and stone. Today he gets people to worship little idols made out of plastic. (We call them credit cards!) We don’t bow down and worship statues; we worship our cars and our condos instead, see?

I like to think of Satan like one of the kids that comes to our house on Halloween dressed in a costume so we won’t know who they are. They look one way on the outside but they are actually someone else on the inside. Satan still LIES to people in order to DESTROY them! Instead of showing up on your front porch and asking you if you would like to become a Satanist, he shows up looking like this nice sweet person with a wonderful ‘other way’ to think and believe about God…and bingo! People today have actually ‘joined Satan’s side’ by following his ‘new way’ which is actually the same’ old way!’

Secondly, it is ‘NEW PAGANISM’. What on earth does that mean? Let me explain.
After Adam and Eve turned from God way back at the beginning of Creation, people have believed in ‘creature’; they have believed in themselves instead of God, the Creator. The Bible describes this situation in Romans 1: 18-32. “What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well but when they didn’t treat Him like God, refusing to worship Him, they turned themselves to silliness and confusion”. This is the very description of the way people were before the Flood in which God destroyed the whole world because of its being ‘wicked and corrupt’, two terms, which describe our world of today. (Just watch a little T.V. or scan the Internet!) Simply, these people became pagans; people without God in their lives. But because God had created them, they still needed and wanted ‘a god’ in their life. So, instead of believing in him, they believed in themselves and the ‘false gods’ they created. They turned from the Maker who made them and worshipped the things they made! And their lives proved that what they did was wrong. Because they believed what was wrong, they behaved in a way that was wrong! And people still do that. In America we have turned back to old ways of ‘not believing in God and Christ’ and called it a ‘new way’. And who has been behind this new religion? The same old Devil who started people following what was false in the first place.

And what are the old things that people believe in as new ways today?

• That true religion does not center in God, but in us. We are to worship ourselves. We can know everything we need to know to live our lives and save ourselves. God is not the center of things. We are! It’s not about HE it’s all about ME!
• That true religion is not based on any one book or set of beliefs. It is a combination of what is good in every religion so we should pick out what we like in each one and combine them all together. A Christian can also be a Buddhist or a member of the Bahai faith.
• That true religion does not come from believing in one absolute truth and comes from God, but any truths we choose that come from our own knowledge and personal experience.
• That true religion is based more on what we feel and not what we know. If it feels right is more important than if it is right. And no one else can determine that for us; we determine that for ourselves. For people who believe this way, feeling is more important than fact. To put it another way, it doesn’t matter what you believe but if you sincerely believe it. The problem is you can be sincerely wrong!
• That true religion does not have rules and responsibilities that we are to live by in daily life. We can do what we please and not have to be accountable to anyone for the choices we make and actions we take.
• That true religion does not require that we belong to a church or denomination or even go to a church. We simply find ‘god’ in nature and in ourselves and everyone else in life everyday.

Until recently in this country a majority of people believed in a personal God who created life, who wrote the Bible, gave His Son, Jesus Christ to save people, who holds us responsible to
obey and live by His laws, and who would take us to be with Him in heaven. Not so much today. This is because over the years people have turned away from truth they have turned more and more into what is untrue. According to polls taken in America today, 23% polled said they believe in reincarnation, coming back to life many times but in a different form. Eight to nine million people claim to have had an encounter with someone who has died (a practice forbidden in the Bible - See I Samuel 28); and 14% have communicated thru a medium. (Someone alive who speaks messages given by someone who is dead and lived at another time in history.)

It is just how Paul described it in II Timothy 4:3-4. “You’re going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food, catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They’ll turn their backs on truth and chase images.” We are living in the times that Paul described in the 21st Century in America. We are also very much like the culture in Acts 17: 16-34 in Athens, Greece. Here were people who had turned away from one God and believed in many gods. (Notice the difference between the ‘BIG {G} GOD’ and ‘a little (g) god’. There is quite a difference.

Notice at the end of Acts 17 how people responded, one of two ways: They either wanted to hear more about the True God and His son, Jesus Christ, or they didn’t. Just like today. This tells us something… that while people deny God, his Truth, and His Son, there are many people who want to know about God, His Truth and His Son!

So how should respond to this ‘new age of modern day religion’?

We first of all must be certain that we know what we believe about God, the Bible, and Christ. We must understand it and live by what we believe…more than ever! Christians are becoming part of minority; they are being told they are intolerant and insensitive because they do not accept all religions as the same as Christianity. The truth is that Christianity is different from all other religions because Christ is the only true son of God.

Secondly, we must help others to understand what we believe about the True God and The true way of salvation. Even though we are told that we must accept all religions and every person’s views, we must remember that what God has told us is true and that anything that disagrees with that is false. NOT ALL BELIEFS ABOUT GOD AND OTHER RELIGIONS can be true. For example, we cannot believe that Jesus Christ is only Son of God (Christianity) and that Jesus Christ is one of many sons of God. (SEE CULTS)

Here’s an example: You go to the police department and there is only one entrance, the big double doors in the front of the building. You might like to find another way, like a side door or a back door, especially if you’re there because you got a ticket! But guess what? You can only get to the Police Department thru the front entrance. No one would either question that or make a big deal about it…but when it comes to finding a way to get to God, a lot of people question it. They don’t like the main entrance; they want their own special entrance.
Or you make plans to go to the Prom. It’s on the May 20th. But you wanted it on the 7th because you’re dating a Marine and he’s on leave that week-end! You might wish it were sooner or later, but it is on that date. You either show up in your party clothes that night or you miss the prom. No one is going to change that just for you! Yet many people today disagree with God only giving them ‘One way’ to get to Himself and they want Him to ‘change it’ for them. (John 3:16-19, John 14:6)

Or you are in an honors class; the pre-college type you take in High School. The only way to pass the class and get college credit is to get an ‘A’. The people who get a “B” or “C” or “D” or (Heaven forbid) an “F” are NOT going to pass the class and get the college credit. People don’t like to be told there is an ‘A way’ to believe; they want to get to get college credit by trying the ‘B’, ‘C’, or ‘D’ way!

What is important to remember is that all other world religions and religious cults disagree with Christianity on three important things:

~ The Bible,
~ Who Christ is,
~ What we need to do to be saved.

What does that tell us? It tells us that Satan has created all other systems as false in order to keep people from knowing God and coming to salvation through Christ. All these ‘other religions’ disagree with each other but they agree on one thing: They disagree with Christianity. (Huh?)

It tells us is that Christianity and all other ‘faiths’ cannot be the same. One is different from all the others. That’s because it is the only one that solves our problem. That problem is sin and only God can solve it; we cannot solve it ourselves. It is Christ who is the solution.

The reason false religion is so appealing to people is because it tells them that:

~ They don’t have a problem,
~ They can solve the problem themselves and don’t need anyone else to help them.

It is popular today to believe this way because modern day people don’t like to be told they have made a mistake or that they can’t fix something themselves.

A lot of people today are sincere in following false religion either because they have never known the truth or because they have known it and not wanted to follow it. Be careful to know the truth and follow the truth your whole life. It will make a difference in the kind of life you have, a true life or a false one!

**MODERN REASONING**

All religions are the same because there is no one truth or one God.
RESPONSES
1. New Religion is still based on the old lie, which Satan uses to make people worship him instead of God.
2. New Religion is based on people trusting themselves and what they can do to save themselves rather than trusting God as what HE has done to save them through Jesus Christ.
3. New Religion tells us that all religions are the same; it’s not what we believe but if we are sincere in what we believe, even if it’s wrong.

RESOURCES
Ridenour, Fritz. So What’s the Difference?
McDowell, Josh, Stewart, Don. Understanding Non-Christian Religions.
Philip Wilkinson. Illustrated Dictionary of World Religions.

FACT
The Mormon faith is the fastest growing religion in the United States and the Islam (Muslim) religion is the fastest growing religion in the world, having the second highest number of followers in the world after Christianity.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Modern Day religion often promotes ‘religious faiths’ which contradict Christianity.
Activity: Each person takes a sheet of paper and divides it into two sections: Christianity and Modern Day Religion and compare the following: Then discuss as a group.
The Truth of the Bible.
The Person of Christ.
The needs to be converted to Christ.
The importance of belonging to the Church.
The future of the world.
MONEY (Stewardship)

Money - do people think about it? The answer is obvious! In fact, it has been said, rich people and poor people have something in common when it comes to money; they both think about it all the time! The question they ask is: Do we have enough of it?

But we’re going to ask a couple of questions people don’t usually ask.
Why do we have it?
How do we use it?

Why do we have it?

ATTITUDE
Most of us think we know the answer to that question right away. To buy things, of course! But there are several reasons we have riches.

Reason #1 Riches are resources (more than money) that God had given us to enjoy and use wisely.
Reason #2 Riches are a means not an end. In other words, we are not to make getting rich and having things the goal of life. They are to be used to bring glory to God and good to others.
Reason #3 Riches are THINGS that should never replace the most important THING in our lives and that is knowing and serving God.

God speaks to us about resources in both the Old and New Testament. In fact, God talks more about money in the Bible than He does about Hell. (Of course, both are HOT topics). Here God reminds us of the right ATTITUDE towards riches.

FACT ONE: Everything we have is a gift from God. In Deuteronomy 8:10-14 He says: “Make sure you don’t forget God, your God by not keeping his commandments, His rules and regulations that I command you today. Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied build pleasant homes and settle in, see your herds and flocks flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living going up and up, make sure that you don’t become so full of yourself and your THINGS that you forget God, your God.” THE MOST IMPORTANT THING. (Capitals mine)

In Matthew 6:19-21, He says, “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corrupted by rust, or worse, stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven where it safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is will be the place you most want to be, and end up being.” (The Message)
In I Timothy 6:17-19, He says: “Tell those who are rich in this world’s wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. (THINGS) Tell them to go after God (THING) who piles on all the riches we could ever imagine, to do well, to be rich in helping others.” (Capitals mine.)

The reality is that poorer people give more to church and charity than rich people based on the percentage of their resources. Why? Because rich people are often stingier with what they have and those who have less are freer to give what they have. (You’d think it would be the other way around!)

We know statistically that 22% of the richest people in the United States (on The Fortune 500 list) have 80% of the resources while the poorest people in this country have less than .01 percent!
A ‘money motto’ puts it this way: ‘To be rich - share, to be poor – hoard.’

The writer of Psalms put it this way: “The wicked borrows and never returns; The Righteous gives and gives; The Generous gets it all in the end; The Stingy is cut off at the pass.” So, one of the big problems with riches in our nation today is that we have the wrong ATTITUDE about them. (Psalm 37:21)

We think that we got them all on our own and have forgotten that God has given them to as Americans (and Christians) we have been given so much more than most other people in the world.

For example, in Moscow, Russia the average income is about $400.00 a month. At the same time, the cost-of-living is even higher there than it is here.

**FACT TWO:** God helps us to figure out the difference between what we need and what we want! One of our biggest problems with having so much is that we have a hard time figuring out NEEDS and WANTS; more and more, people with a lot want a lot more! So what someone wants (A second swimming pool or a 6th bathroom) now becomes what someone needs, according to the way they think. In other words, the optional has become essential, get it? Let me put it another way. When I got married, (awhile back) my wife and I were amazed that we got three toasters for a wedding present. Today, couples are disappointed if they don’t get two flat-screen televisions…or a free trip to Europe for their wedding….or lots of CASH!!

Besides this getting all out of hand, I think it’s out of line. When there are literally thousands of people struggling just to have three meals a day. Because we think we got what we have on our own, we have decided that we can use them any way we want to.

This leads to the second question. How do we use it?
**ACTION**

First, we are to give it to God. To put it in simple terms, everything we have has been given to us by God—our health, our food, our clothes, our cars, and our ‘stuff.’

This is what it says in Psalm 104: 27, 28, “All the creatures look expectantly to you to give them their meals on time. You come, and they gather around. You open your hand and they eat from it. If you turned your back, they’d die in a minute.”

James 1:17 puts it another way, “So my dear friends don’t get thrown off course, every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven.”

God could ask for us to give it ALL to Him, BUT He only asks for a PART of it back! (That’s awfully nice of him…and more than fair.) And what is this part supposed to be? Let’s see. In Exodus 23:19, God commands, “Bring the choice FIRST produce of the year to the house of your God”: Another version says it this way: “The FIRST-fruits of your land you shall bring into the house of your God” (NKJV)

It reads this way in the New Revised Standard Version, “The choicest of your FIRST fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.” That same principle appears again later on in Proverbs 3:10 “Honor God with everything you own; give him the FIRST and the best.” It shows up again Malachi 3:10 “Bring your FULL tithe to the Temple.”

The point is this: God expects that what we give him will be the best, not the worst; it is to be the first not the last. After all, He has given us the best, why shouldn’t we give that back to Him? (I guess we could say that that makes CENTS!)

**FACT THREE:** We are to give God back the best we have.

God called the part we bring Him the T-I-T-H-E. In the Old Testament that amounts to a T-E-N-T-H of what we have. (10%). We’ll talk more about that in a minute.

The People of God (Israel) were not bringing Him the best they had. They were not bringing the FIRST things or they were NOT bringing anything. How that looks today, in America, is that people either don’t give God anything back of what they have; they use it all for themselves OR they give Him a lot less than they should. The average church member in this country gives only 2% of what they have back to God OR they give Him their worst; they give their ‘leftovers.’ (I like to say that God wants fresh filet mignon …not frozen fish sticks that have been in the refrigerator for a month!)

Can you imagine how God feels when people respond to Him this way? He gives them the earth, water, food, houses, health, and wealth; they give Him nothing in return. He is generous with
them; they are stingy with Him. He gives them the best of everything; they only give him junk. Someone has said, “God gave us a five zillion dollar world and he gets a five cent response!” They have an ATTITUDE problem that shows up in their ACTIONS. Today a lot of people are not motivated to give to God because of what He has given to them. Instead they are motivated to give to God because of what they can get out of it. In other words, they ask, ‘what’s in it for me?’

Well, God even has an answer to that question. Let’s go back to Proverbs and Malachi. Proverbs 3: “Honor God with everything you own gives him the first and the best. NOTE: Your barns will burst your wine vats will brim over!” (Yes, I know most people including your family aren’t really excited about bursting barns and brimming vine vats.)

Malachi 3: “Bring your full tithe into the Temple treasury, and see if I don’t open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams!”

FACT FOUR: When we give to God what we should, He promises to bless us even more!

That’s right! God has already blessed us with everything. But when we give even a part of it back to Him, He blesses us again. Christ in the Sermon on the Mount reminded us: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness (the things that are right) and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33- NKJV) These things in this sermon were things like food and clothes. Again, if we God what belongs to Him we will have the belongings we need for everyday life.

Over the years, people have said to me, ‘I can’t afford TO GIVE a portion of my income to God’. My response is: ‘You can’t afford NOT TO GIVE!’ Why? Because if you don’t, you’ll never have enough. That’s right! I have reminded them that God is the best bookkeeper in the world; He knows how to take what you give him and make it be enough to meet your needs. He even asks that you test Him to see if He won’t do exactly what He says! (Malachi 3) My Motto: GIVE HIM THE BEST AND HE WILL BLESS THE REST!!

It’s seems obvious that people who don’t honor God with their money often make a mess with it! For instance, the average American spends 20% more than they earn a year. So they go into debt to pay for the kind of life they want. The average credit card burden for most Americans is in excess of $6,000.00! In a given year, 1.6 billion Americans file for bankruptcy because they can’t repay what they owe.

I have friends in our church whose next door neighbors simply ‘max out’ all their credit cards, file for bankruptcy, and then ‘start over.’ Even our own government spends more than it makes and lives in debt all the time! Please understand, though, that a lot of nice, church-going Christian people still have money problems. But, that may be because they don’t handle money the way God has told them to!
FACT FIVE: We should be generous with God in what we give Him. A lot of people go by the rule that we are to give God our tithe. (10%) because that is what the Old Testament gives as a guide. Actually in Jewish times, the Children of Israel were commanded to give more than that, closer to 23-30%, which included sharing resources with the poor.

In the New Testament, God actually change the ‘tithe rule’. In two places in the book of Corinthians, God said this: “Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. God loves it when the given delights in the giving.” (I Corinthians 9: 6) “Be as generous as you can” (The Message) “Storing up as he may prosper” (NKJV) the point is: We are not to give God the least but the most we can give.

To put it another way, it is not how much we do give but how much we could give. Try this definition: the tithe is not a ceiling at which to stop but a floor from which to begin. That’s a good point!

The reason God says this is that we should not just give because of a quota (10%) But because of the quality of things God has given us. So, the average church member should be giving a whole lot more than 2%. God gives us a real life example of generosity in Exodus 35. Here He told the people to build a sanctuary. And they did by bringing their tithes and offerings into the temple. Here’s how they were described: “The people kept on bringing in their freewill offerings, morning after morning, one after another to Moses who said, ‘The people are bringing more than enough for do this work that God has commanded us to do”. The people brought more than enough, which might be another way of saying, ‘they brought too much’. Well, that’s a nice problem, one that most churches would love to have! Can you imagine the pastor of your church getting up on a Sunday morning and saying, “Stop giving already, it’s too much!” (I don’t ever remember hearing or saying that in any of my churches!)

On a talk show recently, I heard that tall people make more money…that’s right. For every inch taller a person is, they make approximately $787.00 per year.

Aren’t we glad that God doesn’t operate that way? He gives generously to everyone. (That’s good news for me; I’m 5’7” with my shoes on!)

And although God doesn’t bless according to how tall we are, He does expect more from those with more resources than from those with less. The New Testament teaches us that each of us is to give ‘according to how we have been blessed’ (That should usually exceed just 10 %!) So, it would tend to reason that people with lots of money would give more than those with less, right?

There is an incident recorded in the New Testament during the time of Christ’s ministry on earth. (See Mark 12:41-44) This true story based on eye-witness account tells us about a woman who came into the temple treasury to give her offering at the same time a bunch of rich people paraded in. “Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and
put in two small coins, a measly two cents. Jesus called His disciples over and said, “The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford; she gave her all.”

This illustrates that many people give superficially, they give the surplus, what they will never miss. Others give sacrificially. They give of substance…what they will miss. The difference in generosity is that one appears to be generous and isn’t; the other appears not to be generous and is! And by the way, if you’re wondering how God prospered the widow, He used her story of sacrifice to be a permanent part of The Scriptures and allowed it to be told to countless people. We don’t even know her name but someday we’ll meet her personally. She didn’t give because she had — she gave because she wanted to. She gave God her best because she was grateful for what her God gave her! (A poor unknown woman on earth has no doubt become rich and famous in heaven).

It also illustrates the most important basis of our giving to God, the giving of ourselves. When we consider how much God has given to us in sending His Son into the world allowing us to be forgiven and to have a relationship with Him, we should be so grateful that we will give back to him generously just as He has given to us. This begins with ourselves and extends to every area of our life.

Another illustration helps us to understand. One Sunday morning a young boy sat alone in church. When the offering plate was passed, he was upset. As he felt in his pockets, he realized he didn’t have any money to give. So when the plate came to him, he asked the usher to lower it three times. The third time the usher asked, “How much lower” He answered, “One more time.” When the plate was almost on the floor, the little boy stepped into the plate and said, “All I have to give is I!” This is the real meaning of giving back to God and fulfilling our stewardship!

**FACT SIX**: God holds us responsible for what we give to Him. That’s right. Even today when lots of folks think they can get by breaking the rules and get by with it. Look at this way: the Bible calls this responsibility stewardship. The word ‘stewardship’ comes from the word, ‘steward’, and one, which we find in I Corinthians 4:1, 2, “We are servants of Christ, not his masters. We are guides… the requirements of a good guide are reliability and accurate knowledge.” Another version has it a little different: “Think of us this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover it is required of stewards that they are found trustworthy.”

A steward is a ‘household manager’; ‘God’s Butler’, someone who takes care of God’s possessions until He comes back! In other words, God has given us the best of everything and we are to take good care of it while we are here on earth now. We are to make sure that we ‘invest’ it so that it will bring about dividends in heaven forever.
Again, this is what Paul told Timothy to tell the members of his congregation who had a lot of money/resources, “to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they’ll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life.” (I Timothy 6:17-19) This answer to second question is: We not only give it to God. We give it to others. All we have is from God, He only asks for a part of it back. Part of ‘giving back’ is giving it to others. We return it to Him by giving it to them.

Here’s an example from I John 3 as to how to do that: “This is how we’ve come to understand and experience the love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love, it disappears. You made it disappear.”

**FACT SEVEN:** Everything that God has given us is not just for us to have, to use, and to enjoy; it is for Him and for others. The theology of the bumper sticker puts it another way: ‘Live simply so that others can simply live.’ A lot could be said about how people today, especially Americans could live more simply and more sacrificially in order to help others who have less than they do.

Oh yes, stewardship is not just about $$$$. The resources we have been given include:
*TREASURE:* These are the physical and financial things we have been given by God.
*TALENT:* These are the ability things we have been given by God. Things like being able to play the drums or fix a car or cook a meal (Gourmet, even)
*TIME:* This is the practical thing we have been given by God. (24/7).This includes seconds, minutes, and hours.

The people of God in Exodus 35 brought too much for the building of the Temple. They not only brought money, but they used their time and their talents to make things, sew things, and build things. God’s projects require more than just M-O-N-E-Y and CASH…He commands us to bring the ‘other T’s’ talent and time. God has made us ‘managers’ of these things, things that He has blessed us with that are to be used for His purposes and invested in His work and the lives of others. In Matthew 25, God tells the story of three stewards, two good ones and one not-so-good one.

“It’s also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave $5,000.00 to another $2,000.00 to a third $1,000.00. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master’s investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried His Master’s money. After a long absence, the master of these three servants came back and settled up with them. The first one showed how he had doubled his investment. The second one showed how he had also doubled his master’s investment. His master commanded them both: ‘good work! You did your job well’. The third one said ‘I was afraid I might disappoint you so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.’ The
master was furious with him. That’s a terrible way to live, he told him. If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the best? The least you could have done would have been to invest it. At least I would have gotten a little interest.”

God entrusts us with His resources and He expects a return on His investment! He has a definite interest in how we use what He gives us.

I close with one of my favorite ‘stewardship stories.’ Another man went away on a trip and he left one of his servants in charge of building him a house for him while he was gone. The servant decided to save money but ‘cutting corners’ He hired cheap workers and bought bad materials. He rushed the project so that he could have time to enjoy the extra money he had earned by building a poor building for his master.

When the man of the house came home, he saw what looked like a beautiful house on the outside. (He had no idea of what it was like inside, of course!) So, he said to his servant why, this house is so beautiful I have decided that I want you to live in it instead. Can you imagine how the servant felt? God has given us resources, which is more than money, to use to build His Kingdom here on earth and to prepare for His eternal Kingdom in heaven. What kind of house are we building /will we have for Him when He comes back?

One bumper sticker is worth a whole book on money management:

*YOU CAN’T TAKE IT WITH YOU BUT YOU CAN SEND IT ON AHEAD!*

**MODERN REASONING**

Everything we have we have earned ourselves; so it’s ours to use anyway we want to for ourselves!

**RESPONSES**

1. Everything we have in life is given to us by God who expects us to appreciate it.
2. God knows how to help us have enough money and how to manage it.
3. God deserves everything given back to him but He asks for part of it.
4. God holds us responsible for what we do with our money.

**RESOURCES**

Compolo, Tony. *Who Switched The Price Tags?*
Walter, Tony. *Need; the New Religion.*
Blue, Ron. *Giving God’s Way.*
**FACT**
Americans make up 6% of the world’s population and consume over 50% of its resources.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* A requirement by God for people to give a portion of what they have to Him/His Work and to bring blessings to themselves.

*Activity:* Give each person in your group a dollar and consider your options:
1. Give it all to Him.
2. Cut off a tenth of it and give it to Him.
3. Give a portion back to Him that is based on how much you think He has blessed you.

Have group members talk about which one they did and why?
MODERN MUSIC

Wow! There are few topics which create more noise than this one…. literally! Oh, and in case you’re wondering about if God has anything to say about music…well, He should; after all He invented it.

Why, there were already songs and instruments in Exodus, the second book of the Bible. In the 15th chapter it says that Moses and the children of Israel sang a song with his sister, Miriam, who played along with the song on a tumbrel. (We would know it today as a tambourine). So music wasn’t invented by Elvis Presley?!

These things are also referred to in I Samuel, six times in II Chronicles, and also in Nehemiah, Lamentations, and Amos. In the books of Ecclesiastes and in Daniel music AND dancing were mentioned. In Ecclesiastes, someone threw a party that included music and dancing for people’s pleasure. In Daniel, it was included in the worship of a human god. Music, of course, was created for bringing glory to God as well as for human’s enjoyment.

In the Book of Psalms, for example, the psalms were written by/ dedicated to ‘the chief musician’ 55 times. This indicates that the Psalms were simply God’s Word, the Scriptures, put to music. (And I dare you to read Psalm 149/150 and tell me that music AND dancing was not part of God’s plan for man!) Let’s put it this way, music was given by God to give PRAISE to HIM and PLEASURE to US.

In the New Testament, music is mentioned in 2 completely different settings. The first was in Matthew 14 at the birthday party of King Herod and in Luke 15 at the ‘welcome home party’ for the prodigal son.

Singing is a part of the worldwide birth announcement of Christ’s coming into the world. In the final book of Revelation, Chapter 18, it says that music and dancing will come to an end after the downfall of the one-world government. But then music is mentioned. In the very next chapter, Chapter 19, of course when God throws a party called ‘The Marriage Supper of The Lamb’, where there is great singing! (Sounds a lot like the Hallelujah Chorus actually!)

Again, take note, (Pardon the pun!) the two main reasons for music, song, and singing were first, for the worship of and praise to God and second, for the pleasure, entertainment, and enjoyment of people. And here’s a clue as to why so many people especially in churches struggle over music and the types of music used in the church today.

The struggle is over: how does it sound; who sings it; and is it ‘good enough for God?’
People have a lot of different opinions about what God likes and what He doesn’t like, what’s good enough for him! In other words, when it comes to Industrial Rock or ‘R and B’, hymns or praise choruses… music is an issue that brings a lot of discord. (Oops another pun—it means people don’t agree on something!)

**WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO MUSIC ANYWAY?**
That question can be answered by asking another question: “What ever happened to everything;” (after the Fall of Adam and Eve?) All of life was changed. That which God had made to be good became bad. Sex was made to be good; it became bad when people used sex in the wrong way. People used alcohol in the wrong way, they got drunk.

People who used to get along now killed each other. Even the animals were affected.

The Devil tried and pulled off getting people to turn off to God and what He wanted them to do, to turn on to themselves being their own ‘gods’ and do what they wanted to do. And that affected Music? And you’re saying ‘you’ve got to be kidding!’

Nope! I’m not! Here’s why. Music was created to be good, beautiful and most importantly was to glorify God. Maybe the Old Testament music was made up of ‘love songs to God’ just as our ‘modern day love songs’ are made up for each other, who knows! But, as with other things, music began to be used in wrong ways instead of right ways. Not only was it not used to bring glory to God but also it was also not being used to bring people the right kind of pleasure and enjoyment.

There was a little plaque that used to sit on a piano when I was a kid taking piano lessons (for five years…and I survived!!). It read, “Music, the only art of heaven found on earth”.

But this ‘art’ has become more focused on earthly things than heavenly things.

We’ve gone from ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ to ‘Whole lot of Shakin’ Goin’ On’. (Anybody remember Chuck Berry?) From Mozart to Lady Ga Ga!!

Let’s face it, vocal music is just words with melodies. So whatever we can say we can sing. When it’s just music with instruments and no words, it’s not a problem…usually.

Music has had drinking songs, battle songs, love songs (of course), dance songs, worship songs, funeral songs/wedding songs…songs with themes that are about violence, sex, depression, anger, even suicide and death. And those songs have come in all kinds of style. From Gregorian chants to Rhythm and Blues to Heavy Metal to Rap to Hymns…to Country, from Reggae to good ol’ Rock and Roll.

So, there is an obvious difference between ‘good music’ and bad music’; it all depends on who you’re talking to, and who likes what. (Know what I mean?) It’s all a matter of your culture and the themes of the music
When I was a kid we used to watch something called the ‘Hit Parade’ every Saturday night. I remember when a song called “The Tennessee Waltz” and “How much is that Doggie in the Window?” were in the ‘top ten.’ That seems like hundreds of years away from The Rolling Stones hit, ‘Satisfaction’ or a group called The Sex Pistols. Doris Day (I know, who’s that?) has been replaced by Madonna. That gives you some idea of the contrast! When my kids were teen-agers, we asked them to consider what kind of music they listened to based on three things:

1. The words
2. The background and life-style of the artist
3. What they thought the artist was trying to promote… (Sex, drugs, violence, suicide, or peace, love, unity, etc)

The words could be awful, the artist could be arrested on drug charges, and the theme could be burning down the school. And kids bought the record anyway. Kids who were Christians and still became life-long fans of The Grateful Dead! (Oh well, we tried)

But that brings up an interesting point: Is it wrong to have a variety of music interests? Can a church-going Christian love Jesus and still like R and B or Jazz or Western Music? Yes! In fact, I think it’s a good idea to like more than one kind of anything. (Can you imagine having only one kind of food and God chose spinach?)

After all, church people hear a lot of different music all thru the week, whether they want to hear elevator music or ‘50’s music in the grocery store or not!

Sometimes when people get to church it all changes. All of a sudden for a lot of church people there can be only ONE kind of music. Some people like it traditional. That means the kind of music; usually hymns people have loved for 300 years. Some people like it non-traditional. That means the kind of music we know as contemporary praise songs.

Many churches have ‘gone to war’ over ‘right or wrong music’.

When some people hear ‘top 40 music styles’ at church, they freak out! They let you know that they think it’s not showing reverence for God and it’s too worldly to use THAT KIND OF MUSIC in church.

It’s a lot that way with music today. For some people, anything that sounds like ‘top 40’ is a ‘no-no.’ For others, anything that sounds like something from a church service is an ‘oh no!’ Thus, the war over music still rages! And the God who created music for good is saddened. It’s hard to believe but there was a time in churches when the pipe organ was considered ‘something from the devil.’ Later on it was the guitar. Later on it was the drums. But today most churches use all
three of those instruments. Would you believe that there are still churches that use NO instruments?

I think God allowed for all kinds of music in the church when in Ephesians 5: 19, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to The Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything…” (NIV)

Simply, God allowed for different kinds of music for different times and different people. Music is not like socks, ‘one size does not fit all!’ After all, God is a creative God.

One of the reasons for that was that God knew that just like people like different kinds of food or different kinds of T.V. shows they would like different kinds of music. One kind would appeal to one kind of person, another style appeal to another type of individual. So, the older person will like the songs they grew up with, (hymns and classical music.) The younger person, like you, will like the songs they grew up with; anything with drums, amplified guitar, and played L-O-U-D! Remember, even in the Old Testament they used cymbals. And they were L-O-U-D!

By the way, for those who are worried about using ‘music people dance to’, even the prophet Jeremiah says, “I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, AGAIN you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.” Jeremiah 31:4 (NIV) this is a prediction of when the Lord comes back and makes Israel to be at peace. Sounds like there will be a lot of music to dance to at what will be a ‘permanent party!’

No matter what kind of music people like, they can pick what ever kind they like during the week. They can turn their radio to their favorite station. They can play the cd’s they like at home. They can take ‘their sound’ with them on their i-Pod when they walk down the hall at school or run in the mornings using their headsets.

But at church, they don’t really have a choice, that is, of course, the church has more than one service and each service has a different style of music or a ‘blended service’ when several types of music are put together. There are two things to keep mind when it comes to church music.

1. Music is supposed to bring glory to God more than giving entertainment to people! That’s what Ephesians 5 reminds us, “We are to ‘make music in our hearts to the Lord…’ and always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.” Translation: It doesn’t matter where you are or what service you’re in or what kind of music is being played; what matters is that you are there to meet, worship, and praise God. In other words, get your mind off what music it is and think get it on the ONE the music is about, not just what makes YOU happy, but what makes HIM happy!
I’ve often said, that I could worship in a tent sitting on a piece of cardboard with natives chanting and playing bongos in the background, because if I’m there to find God nothing is going to get in my way…not even drums! But not everybody feels that way.

I remember a woman in one of my churches, a very nice lady. Sang in the choir and the Women’s Ensemble and The Holiday Musica, but who refused to sing contemporary choruses in the ‘blended service’. She sang out loud and strong on “Blessed Assurance” (Hymn) but not on “Blessed Be the Name of the Lord” (Praise Song) …and pouting even. That’s right. And this was a woman in her early 30’s! (See what I mean?)

2. Music should be a means to an end, not only to glorify God but also to help bring people to have a relationship with Him! That happens when the music is in a style they can relate to, in both the words of the music and in the way it is played.

Too many times people have wanted their music their way, forgetting that in our current culture, people may not be able to relate to ‘older music.’ Not everyone gets excited about old hymns or new praise choruses. But if everyone insists on having music his or her own way, there will be disagreement. (And sometimes war). And people will most likely forget the two things I have just said we need to keep in mind about church music!

**The Ideal:** Every service could have a ‘little of everything’ when it comes to music. The **Real:**

It’s pretty hard to have a single service where that can happen.

Here’s something to think about: Whatever style of service or music you have at your church, the picture I get from the Old Testament is that when the People of God got together, there was **JOY.** I don’t imagine that they came together and sat in silence with long faces, not smiling, singing funeral music. Nope! I’ll bet they ‘got into it.’ (They even tapped their toes and raised their hands.) They even made parades and sang and danced their way to their nation’s capitol, Jerusalem, for holy-day celebrations! (Check out Nehemiah 8: 10 and Esther 9:20-22, two of my favorite ‘party passages’.) God’s people knew how to ‘party hearty’ and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise!

“So the people went off to feast, eating and drinking and including the poor in the celebration.” (Nehemiah)

“They made their holiday one of laughing and feasting…their day for parties and the exchange of gifts.” (Esther)

Sounds like a combination of Thanksgiving and Christmas to me! Unfortunately, we have made reverence and worship respectful, which it should be, but we have also taken much of the celebration, fun, and **JOY** out of it. And I’ll tell you what: that’s not only bad for the church, it’s
not good for attracting people who need to come to church but see it as boring, out of date, and
certainly not fun! I like to say that we need to get back to the FUN-damentals!

Yet, this problem in the church is part of a much bigger problem in our society. If God created
music to be good, and it went bad, then we have a problem. The problem: What kind of music
should we be listening to?

It goes back to those questions; I used to ask my kids to ask when they picked out their music.
1. What are the words?
2. Who is the artist and what is their background?
3. What is the song/artist trying to say?
This is really the ‘bottom line’ when it comes to music.

It’s really not too hard to figure out. If the words are what we call ‘dirty’, we can find music with
words that aren’t. It the artist is doing things that we don’t feel right about doing (using drugs,
or living with someone instead of being married to them, or devil worship or advocating suicide),
then we probably shouldn’t be helping them to make money by buying their music! If the
themes of the music are negative or insulting or focused on things that are wrong or on death, we
do have other choices available.

But this ‘nifty’ little guide to music isn’t as simple as it sounds. Let me tell you why.
Sometimes a song has a great sound but maybe one word or a few words are wrong. I remember
a song that was a hit in the 70’s. It was recorded by Debbie Boone. You might need to ask your
parents who that is. (She was a little before Brittany Spears.) The song was beautiful and
powerful but in the middle of it, the words suggested that making love to someone you weren’t
married was all right. So, do we throw out the whole song because of a few words?

There may be a Christian artist who does something we don’t feel right about. I remember a
great Christian female vocalist who left her husband for another man who she finally married.
Do we stop buying her records because she did that? Tricky!

Sometimes the theme of a song is not easy to pick up. There was a time in the record industry
when something called ‘Back Masking’ was used to actually hide the real words of a song. That
you could only hear when you put the record on and played it backwards by moving the record in
reverse! So, we buy this record and find out that it was encouraging us to do something that was
wrong…now what? (Usually, though, it is pretty easy to hear the words before you buy the
music from iTunes.)

A lot of parents have ‘gone to war’ over words and song themes in music. Often the record
companies say that it’s a free nation, we can say what we want to, and no one can tell us we
can’t! Yet one would only hope that record companies and artists would have the kind of lyrics
you wouldn’t have to fight about! Parents, though, do need to try to talk about this issue, not just make rules about it. They need to find out why their kid is listening to it, try to learn what the ‘music messages’ are important and what they are saying about life, etc. More often than not, the kid will out-grow the music thing and it’s a good idea to not make too big a deal over it! Grown-ups need to let their kids know how they feel about it though, monitor the things their kids listen to, but ultimately trust that their off-spring will learn to make good decisions about music …and other things!

If you do the ‘Three Question’ test with religious church music, it usually works out pretty well. Words: never dirty. Artist: not (usually) on drugs, trying to live a goodly life. Theme: almost always on praising God. Doing the ‘test’ with non-religious music is not so black and white!

That’s why I don’t get church people making such a BIG DEAL over music styles!
Do the math, and remember God can use lots of different kinds of music to carry out his purposes, for goodness sake.

Just because some music is not so good doesn’t mean its all bad…not by a long shot!
God made it to be good and a lot of it still is. I dare anyone to tell me that what Beethoven composed is bad (because he had a temper) or The Beatles wrote is all junk (even though they were into Eastern religions) or what Amy Grant sings should be thrown out (because she was divorced). Let’s learn that like with a lot of other things such as sex, food, T.V., leisure, music all have a lot of good in them and have brought a lot of good things into the world. Music has caused people to worship God, to be encouraged when they are struggling with problems; stirred them to honor their country, to express their love to someone in their life. But, it has also brought a lot of bad things into the world. Music has caused people to have the wrong kind of sex, to kill people, to commit suicide, to use drugs, to rebel against authority. Although it’s true that people make the choice to do good or bad things, music can make them think about these things and influence their choices. The truth is: music can and does make a difference in the lives of those who listen to it. The children’s song says it best. “Be Careful Little ears what you hear.” What we hear can affect who we are and what we do!

**MODERN REASONING**
Music is for our enjoyment and it doesn’t matter what kind we listen to. No one should tell us what entertainment we should choose.

**RESPONSES**  
1. Music was created more to honor God than to entertain us.  
2. A person is encouraged to consider the artist and the lyrics as well as the sound of the music in deciding what to listen to and to buy.  
3. The kind of music someone listens to can have a positive or negative influence on how they think, which values they choose, what decisions they make.
4. It’s a good idea to enjoy more than one kind of music!

**RESOURCES**
Larson, Bob. Larson’s Book of Rock and Roll.

**FACT**
Rock and Roll Music was ‘invented’ to match the rhythm of the song with the human heartbeat in order to excite the listener!

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* A gift from God which is intended to give Him glory and enjoyment to people.
*Activity:* Take different kinds of music and explain what they focus on and ‘teach’ people.
- Hymns/Praise Songs
- Rap/Hip Hop
- Western
- Hard Rock (Grunge, Metal, Industrial)
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS

This topic is not new to kids and parents today; the Bible has talked about these relationships since Adam and Eve became the world’s first parents!

Let’s take a look at ‘God’s Family Photo Album’ where we see ‘snapshots’ of parents and children in the Bible. Here we will God as a parent, human parents and children, how they are to function and succeed.

SNAPSHOT #1 God as a Father in the Old Testament
In the very first book of the Bible, we get a picture of God, the Father, relating to Christ, His Son in the super parent-child relationship. It models all the others. Here we see them discussing the creation of the world. Throughout the Old Testament, Christ appears on a mission from His Father. For example, He appears To Abraham in Genesis and to the three Hebrew men in the book of Daniel. The Son is commissioned by the Father to care for the needs of human beings.

In the New Testament, Christ becomes a human being and is sent by his Father on a divine mission to earth to ‘re-create the world’ by bringing salvation the world. What is implied is that God and Christ operated in a father-son relationship, one of mutual respect, open communication, and seeking common goals. It is obvious, however, that the Father was the initiating force in the relationship, providing the basis for the Son’s response. We learn a great deal from them as to how parents and children are to function.


John 5:17 “My Father is still working and I am also working.”
(The Father and Son are working along-side each other.)

John 5:19 “The Son does nothing on his own, but only what He sees the Father doing.”
(The Father sets the example for the son, showing him what to do)

John 5:36 “The very works I am doing testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.”
(The son gives evidence of what his father has taught him confirmed in his actions)

John 6:27 “For it is me that God the Father has set his seal on me.”
(The Father approves and is proud of the son)

John 8:26 “I speak these things the Father instructed me.”
(The Father has invested time and energy in teaching his son)

John 8:29 “For I always do what is pleasing to him.”
(The son desires to bring credit and honor to his father)

John 8:38 “I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence.”
(The son has learned from the father’s example.)

John 8:55 “But I know him and I keep his word.”
SNAPSHOT #2 Human parents in the Scriptures.

In the Bible we also see human parents…but not super parents. In the Old Testament Adam and Eve were the parents of children even though they did not have parents themselves! What is significant about their situation is that they needed to listen to God, the Father and Christ, the Son as ‘spiritual children’ in order to know how to be parents. This is the most important principle for all parents.

Yet, Adam and Eve had the same problems and challenges other parents still have today.
Why is that important? It means they were imperfect parents who had imperfect children just like everyone else, conflict between themselves and their children, conflict between the children themselves. One of their children killed his brother! (And you think you and your family have problems!)

There were many parent-child relationships, many of them with problems!
   Abraham had a good relationship with Isaac.
   Isaac had a good relationship with his son, Jacob, but not Esau.
   Jacob’s mother favored him causing him to hate and trick his brother.
   Noah’s son disgraced him.
   Joseph was favored by his father and ‘kidnapped’ by his brothers.
   Moses was in conflict with his brother and sister.
   Samson’s parents were greatly disappointed by what he did with his life.
   David was in conflict with his son, Absalom.
   Eli and Samuel both were lax in disciplining their sons.
   Daniel was taken from his parents and forced into a foreign ‘boarding school.’
   Many of the kings of Israel and Judah had fathers who seemed to be too preoccupied with their work to guide and direct their children and left that up to mothers who were often evil and misguided their sons who often became bad kings.

It’s a relief to know that parents in the Old Testament are not ‘super parents’ with only success stories; it’s nice to know they are human just like us, people who have problems and make mistakes, too!

In the New Testament we see the relationship Jesus had with his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph as well as with his stepbrothers and sisters. These were family relations which were not without tension and struggle. (Mark 3)

We gain insight into Christ’s relationship with his parents. In Luke Christ showed respect for his parents when they found him in the temple. Too, we see his parents supporting him in his career
choice of doing his Heavenly Father’s will instead of insisting he become a carpenter. In John, he showed honor and care for his mother when dying on the cross.

We see several instances of a parent-child relationship in the Gospels, the love of a father for a dying daughter. (Matthew 9) The love of a father for a wayward son who had disobeyed him and spent all his inheritance. (Luke 15) Christ himself models a parental-type love for children in asking that the little ones be allowed to come unto him. (Luke 18)

In Ephesians and Colossians, the apostle Paul discusses the parent-child relationship more generally. He repeats the commandment from Exodus 20 which commands ‘children to obey their parents’ but also adds specific instructions for the parents, especially fathers.

He uses his own relationship with Timothy, his ‘spiritual son’ to instruct parents and children both by what he says and what he does illustrating his admonition to parents ‘Instruct their children in the way of the Lord by precept and example’.

Christ identifies the importance of obedience to His ‘heavenly parent’ in Hebrews 5 where it is recorded that ‘he learned obedience to His Heavenly Father by the things which he suffered.’ He taught the importance of both training and discipline…and he was a perfect child!!

SNAPSHOT #3 How parents and children can work together in their relationship.
In the second book of the Bible, Exodus 20, God gives Ten Commandments. (God’s Top Ten Rules for life.) Number 5: “Honor your father and mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” (NKJV) Obedience and honor are both responses which the child is to extend to their parent. Obedience is as long as the child is at home and/or supported by the parent. Honor is after a child moves on and out yet gives respect to their parents for the rest of their lives.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION
Honor and respect for a parent from a child is something that must be earned not simply expected; it is based on mutual respect for the child and a commitment to modeling right behaviors for the child. The parent needs to make it easy for the child to honor them. This is the basis of obeying one’s parents. The parent needs to make it easier for the child to follow their direction and discipline.

Yet, no matter what kind of parent one may have, the child is commanded to honor the parent. This means appreciating the parent for giving them life and providing for them despite times when there is disagreement and conflict in the relationship. The child needs to make it easier for the parent to appreciate them! The Lord teaches and models the importance of mutual respect, trust, appreciation, cooperation between the parent and child; this is how they work together!
In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, the Lord teaches about the importance of spending time together. Here he integrates inter-personal connections and instruction and discipline making the teaching of spiritual concepts, values and practical principles for effective living as a part of everyday life. This second dimension of the parent-child relationship is one that God and Christ model in their relationship. “These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home (and turn off the T.V), and when you walk along the road (or car pool on the free-way), when you lie down and when you get up.”(Parentheses mine.)

PRACTICAL APPLICATION
Spending time together can be difficult at times when kids are small and have short attention spans or they get older and don’t want to spend time with their parents. It is also easy for parents to try to substitute other things beside time when the ‘gift of presence’ is the most important one any parent can give to their children.

Also in Deuteronomy, God adds specific rules to his ten commandments; he gives a word about the third dimension of this partnership. In Chapter 21:18-21 God explains that if a child is stubborn and rebellious and refusing to obey, this child is to be brought to the city gate and stoned to death!

Is He kidding? They were to actual kill their kids? (And you complained the last time you got grounded for missing curfew.). Aren’t you glad God changed the rules for today? If He hadn’t there would be a lot of teen-agers who would never become ADULTS!

The New Testament states it more positively. In Hebrews 12:5a-11, we read: “My son do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, because the Lord disciplines those he loves. Now no discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

It is important that we differentiate between discipline and punishment. Discipline is done out of love with the best interest of the child in mind. Punishment is done out of anger with the best interest of the parent in mind. A synonym for discipline is ‘correction’.
To put it another way: It means loving someone enough to do what is best for them; it means caring enough to confront.

Paul uses the example of ‘a tomato plant’ to describe discipline. The synonym could be ‘train’. Discipline is a means of training a child about what is right and wrong, how to make good decisions. The difference between being disciplined and not being discipline is like the difference between a weed and a well-kept flower garden. Things that are cultivated and cared for properly become fruitful and beautiful.
Discipline is part of a healthy parent-child relationship, one to which Christ submitted during his time on earth; it allowed him to become all he could be/realize his full potential. It helps us do the same. (Hebrews 5:6-9)

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

We need to view discipline as a means of training. This can be done best by the parent who best knows the child and how to train them according to their unique personality and needs and can prepare them for life. This what it means to ‘train up a child in they should go.’ A child who is trained to be self-disciplined will have a higher degree of success in adult life when they become responsible for their own choices and decisions.

Parents need to be reminded that they are not parenting to win a popularity contest or be a buddy to their kid. More than one kid has made life difficult for a parent who makes a decision/carryes out a discipline they don’t like in later years to thank them for it! (Ask any parent about their own childhood!)

Too, they need to remind their child of two things in disciplining them. One, they haven’t parented, so ask the first born to give them a break. Two, they are responsible to their parent, God himself, for the job they do as a parent! (Let God be the ‘heavy’.)

The Scriptures also teach the importance of parents educating their children. In the Old Testament, Proverbs defines the education between the parent and the child.

In the New Testament, the Gospel of John and Paul’s Epistles give us insight into the education process.

Solomon writes as a father to his own son. In the first thirteen chapters, eight of them include the term, ‘son’. The rest of the thirty chapters list ‘life principles’ which Solomon is giving to his son to be applied in every day life. (I’m sure he shared them with his daughters too!) This compliments the ‘instruction processes of Deuteronomy 6.

Paul refers to Timothy as his ‘spiritual son’ and includes how a father should relate to a child and what things he should teach a child.

One very important part of the education process was the truths of God and rules for life being passed down from one generation to another just as David had passed them to Solomon and he had passed them to his children.

In Psalm 78, we see the importance of this transmission of truth. We could call them ‘spiritual hand-me-downs.’
“Listen dear friends to God’s truth. Bend your ears to what I tell you, stories we heard from our fathers, counsel we learned at our mother’s knee. We’re not keeping it to ourselves, we’re passing it on to the next generation; God’s fame and fortune, marvelous things he has done. He planted a witness in Jacob, set his word firmly in Israel, then commanded our parents to teach it to their children so the next generation would know and all the generations to come.”

In Ephesians 6:4, we see how parents were to treat and train children. It should be noted that both these portions provide a good model of how principles were to be taught to children both by ‘what they said’ (precept) not by ‘how they lived’ (example).

In our public schools we are to teach the history of our country and the values which are basis of our nation. In our Christian institutions and ‘home schools’ we need to teach the history of our religious heritage.

The Jewish model of education is significant. It centered in the role of the father’s giving the basic instruction to the child and the mother being more responsible for helping the child apply it in everyday life. (SEE SCHOOL)

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Education is not simply a point of time, so many years of school; it is part of a life-long process. It is best imparted through others who teach by what they say/do and able to give the tools of being self-taught to a child. It has been said that ‘more is caught than taught’ emphasizing the importance of the adult role model. It has also been said that ‘wisdom is the right application of knowledge, the ability to apply what one learns in real life situations. These things are to be imparted by parents to their children.

These principles are given again in the New Testament.

In Colossians 3:20-22 and Ephesians 6:1-4, God through Christ, by the Apostle gives us additional information on the education of children via the Message.

**CAUSE**

“Take them by the hand and lead them to the Master.”

**EFFECT**

“Children, do what your parents tell you; this delights the Master to no end.”

The end result of godly education through parents who strive to maintain right relationship with their children will *ultimately* results in their living the right kind of lives and making right life choices, something which becomes more complicated as the child goes through adolescence into adulthood. These are times when the impact of the early years is replaced by the influence of the culture and peers. The objective of the formative years is to be restrictive, giving freedom gradually as the child matures and to provide a strong spiritual foundation upon which the child can build their lives and make wise decisions and choices.
As the child will grows older, they become more and more responsible for their choices and the direct involvement and decision-making potential lessens for the parent. Here is where the parent often learns to pray/trust in God more and their own ability to make change less. This is all part of the education process in which both parent and child learn different life lessons.

Thus, the place and function of the parent cannot be over-emphasized. It is in the confines of a child-parent relationship and home life that the most important instruction can take place. It is ‘home schooling’ at its best.

Often, parents today, want someone else to educate their children…the school teacher, the Awana/Scout leader, or grand-parent. These people should be on the ‘back up’ teaching team, not to replace the parents but support the basic teaching of the parent.

Many other parents have chosen home schooling as the way to provide both the spiritual and regular education of their children. Based on both Old and New Testaments, every child should be ‘home schooled’ that is be taught by parents by precept and example.

Here is an over-view of how parents and children are to work together:

**PARENTS (Initiators)**
1. Spend time with their children. (And not just on the way to soccer practice.)
2. Teach their children about God and His principles for life.
   (Not leave it to the school and church or Scout Troop to do and teach by what they do as well as what they say.)
3. Not to favor one child over another. (The tendency to compare and cause competition can insure a child’s security and incentive to achieve for the right reasons.
4. Not to demand too much of their children. (Holding them accountable for rules and responsibilities without having impossible standards and/or creating an environment of criticism and non-affirmation.)
5. Use discipline not punishment. (Knowing the difference between positive and negative reaction to a child’s mistakes and the difference between punishment and discipline, use non-physical means of correction. The parent should also be willing to admit their mistakes and apologize for them.
6. Allow each child to develop and give spiritual instruction according to their own person, temperament, capacity. (Resisting making the child ‘fit the parent’s ideal of what they want them to be or trying the same approach with each child.)
7. Stand with and love with the child no matter how badly they might fail you. (These two are the ultimate constants in the parent processing.)

**CHILDREN (Responders)**
The response of the child will be based in large measure on the response of the parent. The parent takes the initiative which keys the reaction of their child.

The concept of children learning what they lives is captured in the Poem by the same name. Dorothy Law Nolte (1972)

**Children Learn What They Life**

*If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.*
*If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.*
*If children live with pity, they feel sorry for themselves*
*If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy*
*If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy*
*If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty*
*If children live with encouragement, they learn to have confidence*
*If children live with tolerance, they learn patience*
*If children live with praise, they learn appreciation*
*If children live with acceptance, they learn to love*
*If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves*
*If children live with recognition, they learn to have goals*
*If children live with sharing, they learn generosity*
*If children live with honesty, the learn to be truthful*
*If children live with fairness, they learn a sense of justice*
*If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect*
*If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and others around them.*
*If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place to live.*

Providing an environment that is safe and healthy is a strategic part of raising secure and happy children; it is not a small or simply task a parent is called to do; it is surely one of the most challenging, demanding, and yet rewarding jobs in the world. But after all, someone brought them into the world and got them to adulthood although imperfectly!

But, married parents would do well to remember that kids can consume a lot in the way of physical and emotional energies; they are by nature consumers for a long time. One needs to put their marriage relationship first, the parenting relationship second. It is not an act of selfishness, but one of securing the primary relationship from which comes a healthy child-parent relationship.

Parents need to remember the Proverbs axiom which says “Train up a child in the way they should go; when he/she is old they will not depart from it.” AND that it does not say WHEN, it promises that the things taught to the child will eventually come back to them. Simply, to use the gardening metaphor, ‘if you plant roses you won’t get thistles.’ But, when it seems like you get thistles you didn’t plant…don’t let the Devil beat you down with
guilt and ‘what if’. The enemy loves to add the insult of failure to the injury of having your kids mess up. Do the best you can with the Super Parent’s help and leave the rest to Him. He loves and can care for your kids better than you can!

SNAPSHOT #4 how Parents and Children can survive!

God’s model for the parent-child relationship is one that is based on how HE and HIS Son operate and how people are to operate when they follow His example and instruction. It is also based on His knowledge of the people He has created, their needs, and the principles needed for living successfully especially in relationships. Perhaps God says it best in two portions of the New Testament: Timothy, “I write this to you, Timothy, the one I LOVE so much. All the BEST from God be yours.”

Thessalonians “I cared for you the way a MOTHER cares for her children. We loved you dearly. Not content to simply pass on the Message, We wanted to give you our hearts. And we did! With each of you, we were like a FATHER with his child, holding your hand, whispering encouragement, showing you step-by-step how to live before God who has called us into His own kingdom, into this delightful life” (CAPS Mine)

These two portions give us an ideal portrait of what the parent-child relationship.

KEY: The relationship between parents and children has a better chance of succeeding when based on a spiritual relationship which empowers them to build mutual respect, cooperation, trust, willingness to help each other, to forgive each other. This provides the means by which to carry out the objective. The cross symbolizes the connection of the ‘divine and human’ relationships. As parents and children have a strong connection and interaction with God, they have a better chance to have the same with each other.

This looks good on paper and it sounds good when you read the words, but in a real world it doesn’t always work out that way. It’s not the principles aren’t true or the rules don’t work, it’s just that human parents and children aren’t able or willing to make them work right all the time!

There are real situations which make it hard to follow the pattern for parent-child relationships the way God portrayed it to be:

1. Parents get divorced often leaving the child with a single parent. 4 out of 10 kids in America grow up in homes without fathers. (Statistics confirm that 70% of all criminals come from homes without fathers.)

2. Modern life makes it hard to spend quality time together as a family. (The average father spends approximately 6 minutes a day with his child—and eating together in front of the T.V. doesn’t count!)
3. Society is more open to same-sex couples adopting children or having kids through someone else (a surrogate) so there is not the presence of a male and female person in the home to raise them. (God gave each parent a special ability by which to care for the child…the father to provide the instruction, the mother to help the child learn to put it into practice.)

4. Respect for authority is declining. (Kids are taught to insist on their rights and challenge and mistrust anyone who is older.)

Peer Group influence is increasing. (Kids from all kinds of homes are often willing to accept the lead of who they ‘hang with’ rather than adults...(they put the influence of friends above their parents) although 75% of kids recently polled said that they get along very well with their parents and 90% said they had a family member they could confide in.) (SEE PEERS)

1. Kids are made to grow up too fast. (Childhood has been affected by premature pressures on kids who have to think and act like adults much too soon.)

2. Parents want to give gifts rather than themselves. (It’s easy to substitute money for myself and gifts rather than the gift of time and attention.)

3. An increase in pain causes kids to seek help in the wrong way. (Lots of today’s children and youth try to run from reality thru drugs, sex, alcohol, cutting, video games.)

4. Parents have poor models to learn from. (More and more moms and dads come from divorced homes without knowing what a good marriage should be or how parenting should be done.)

5. Kids are being parenting by other people besides parents. (Today more and more Grandparents, foster parents, others are serving as parents to kids.)

Parents like the idea of having kids but don’t like the idea of having to raise them. (Parenting is permanent and parents who want the luxury of children without the sacrifice of raising them will pay a high price.) Some parents hold on to their children too long and never let them grow up. (These children depend too much on their parents and expect their marriage partners to treat them the same way their parents did!)

There are forces which are working against the traditional concept of a family today. (The family is truly under attack in this county. Many believe this includes: making it necessary for both parents to work to survive, opposing traditional marriage between a man and a woman, encouraging women ‘make it on her own without a man’ and having ‘other people’ raise the child instead of the parent.)
There is also less emphasis on spiritual values in our society and less attention given to religious education in the home. (40% of those raised in church do not continue in church as adults; at this rate after 8 generations only 72 in 1,000 Christians will remain!) God’s portrait of the family is blurred. It is not as ‘black and white’ as it used to be or we would like it to be. But the picture is promising! God is still all for strong marriages and healthy families. He has designed them to work well if couples, parents, children, and youth will work at following His design. Parenting and kids gets a ‘bad rap’ these days. Parenting can be considered a limitation to a free life; kids can be viewed as out of control ‘delinquents’.

But in a recent study conducted by the Horatio Alger almost 75% of high school kids said that they get along extremely well with their parents and family members ranked highest as role models, way ahead of athletes and entertainers. Over 90% said they had a family member they could confide in. Life in modern times is especially hectic, so many pressures, so many activities, so many demands. There are good times and bad times but God has a plan for families to follow if they will try. Many families have and continue to succeed in the parent-child relationship.

So, here’s to parents and children working together to understand, get along with, and make life easier for each other. Here’s to a long and happy life that ‘their days may be long upon the earth’ for both of them; just as the Designer promised!

**MODERN REASONING**
Parents are old! They do not know how to relate to kids today and kids are smart enough to figure out their own lives!

**RESPONSES**
1. God requires that parents care for the children and gives them a design by which to do it.
2. God helps parents teach their children what to do and how to do it.
3. God enables parents and children to work together to make life as happy as possible.
4. When children respect and obey their parents, life is better and possibly longer!

**RESOURCES**
Drescher, John. Please Don’t Sit On Your Kids.
Dobson, James. The Strong-willed Child.
Dobson, James. Preparing For Adolescence.
Samenow, Stanton E. Before It’s Too Late: Why Some Kids Get In Trouble and What Parents Can Do About It.
Drescher, John. Seven Things Children Need.
Collins, Gary. Family Shock!
FACT
The average child laughs 200 times a day; the typical adult laughs only 4 times every 24 hours. (Maybe we need to spend more time looking at today’s issues and answers and laughing together!)

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Explain that the family, even with a single parent or other relatives, is the place God knows is the best place for children to grow and become adults.
Activity: Make two lists:

PARENTS NEED TO: (Initiative)
CHILDREN NEED TO: (Response)

Discuss the difference in real life between ‘God’s Design’ and the reality of today’s parent-child relationships. What things need to be done differently to align the two?
PEER PRESSURE

Well we all have peers and we all know about pressure, don’t we? When we think of peer group pressure we usually think of adolescents or teen-agers. But any parents reading this book know about peers and peer pressure, too.

The term, adolescent, was pretty much invented during the first 25 years of the last century, during the Industrial Age, a time when people moved from the farm to the city and went to work in factories. For the first time, the family was not working together. So, the families began to be divided into groups, children, adults, older adults, and youth. The adolescent became the teen-ager because their age ended in a ‘teen’ they were in a class by themselves. By the way, a peer is someone who is your equal, someone just like you, something that makes them easier to relate to than your parents, except that they don’t always know much more than you do. For the first time they became disconnected from the family thus creating a group of peers or peer group.

Thus, the peer group became a family to its self, one that would decide what was right and wrong, etc. The youth peer group would in some ways take place of the person’s family. Youth were now asking people who were their same age and place in life to help them make decisions that before they would have asked their parents to help them with. PEERS began to replace PARENTS.

Peers today also talk about a lot of other things; most of them have to do with decisions they have to make. The decisions have to do with things like taking drugs, drinking alcohol, having sex before marriage, using bad language, cheating on tests, disobeying parents, taking chances when doing things that are dangerous. There is a lot of pressure to make these decisions one way or the other. How kids make them depend on what kind of peer group they are part of.

Well, does the Bible say anything about peer pressure? Oh yes! Let’s start by looking at some real life examples from the pages of the Old and New Testament.

The Old Testament

A Calf
In Exodus 32: 1-6 God’s people got impatient waiting for God to give them the Ten Commandments. So, they thought it would be a good idea to make themselves another god to worship. What started as one person’s idea caught on, and soon a lot of Israelites bought the idea of making a god like the ones they had seen in Egypt. And Aaron, the brother of Moses gave into the pressure from his peers and built the calf. This resulted in unfaithfulness to the True God and God was very angry with His People. Aaron should have known better!
A King
In 1 Samuel: 1-5, in came time for Samuel to die and for Israel to have a new leader. But the problem was that his two sons were not good leaders. But instead of looking to God, God’s People wanted a human king. What they wanted a king like all the other nations had. Simply, they wanted to be like everybody else. The other nations were their peers. Following the crowd was a mistake that led to a bad choice.

Other Nations/Pagan worship
In 1 Kings 14: 22-24 the people of Judah (Southern Israel) made God mad by having the same pagan religious practices that the other nations around them had! This might have been many versions of the golden calf! God had warned them not to do the things the evil nations around them did or they would be punished and lose their land; but they did them anyway! Becoming like everyone else was the beginning of big problems!

Solomon:
Wives: Even though King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, he wasn’t too smart when it came to marriage. Supposedly he had 300 wives and 700 ‘other lovers.’ 1 Kings 11:1-4 tells us that Solomon fell in love with women from the other nations; the pagan nations God had warned Israel about. In fact, God had told them not to marry pagan people for fear that they would follow their religious practices. Well guess what? That’s what Solomon did and led his people to do by his BAD example! Once again, he let his peers influence his poor choices. He did what seemed popular to do at that time but the results of his choices were awful; in fact those choices led to the down-fall of an entire nation…that still hasn’t recovered today. He should choose a different group of peers.

The New Testament

Peter
In Galatians 3:11-15, Peter gets a lecture from Paul because he let peer pressure cause him to make a bad choice. Peter was told to preach the Gospel to both Jews and Greeks. In other words, everyone was supposed to hear the good news about Jesus. And Peter did this for while. But, the Jews in his peer group made him forget about associating with the non-Jews (Gentiles) because they still believed that God’s Gospel was only for them. (Jews). So when Peter got to Antioch, he had lunch (so to speak) with only his old Jewish buddies and had nothing to do with the Gentiles, his new buddies. In so many words, Paul said, “Peter what are you doing not having anything to do with these other Christians?” Peter gave into peer pressure!

That may be why Peter could write about peer pressure as well as he did in 1 Peter 4: 1-5; 11-16. He explains two things here:
1. When we become Christians we are not to do the things we used to do.
2. But the ‘old friends’ we used to run with don’t like the fact that we’ve changed and they want us to do the same things we used to do…things like too much Partying, drinking, and fooling
around with sex.” So, when we don’t do those things, they put pressure on us to do them anyway. I often believe this happens because people who don’t believe in God or let Christ direct their lives and don’t want to be around anyone who does. They don’t like to think that everyone doesn’t do the wrong things they like to do. Isn’t it interesting that people had to put up with peer pressure 2,000 years ago!

2. When Christians don’t do the same things we used to do, we may feel pressured or put down. Peter uses the word persecuted. (A word we don’t use or hear much about these days, at least in America). Peter also reminds us that Christ went through being ‘put down’ so we shouldn’t be surprised if it happened to us! Let’s put it another way: We can get in trouble for doing the wrong thing and we can get in trouble for doing the right things. So peer pressure can cause us problems when we go along with our peers and it gets us into trouble. Peer pressure can cause us problems when we try to do what is right and they make it hard for us because we don’t go along with them.

Peter puts it this way: “Now it’s time to be done with your old life. Of course, your old friends don’t understand why you don’t join with the old gang anymore. But you don’t have to give an account to them. They’re the ones who will be called on the carpet and before God Himself.” (I Peter 4:1-5 The Message)

Notice that Peter uses Christ as an example of someone who didn’t give into Peer pressure. Let’s look at that more closely. There were several places in His life and ministry where He was under pressure from His peers and could have given into it but He didn’t.

**His Family**
In Mark 3:20, 21, 31, 32, they think He has gotten a little carried away with His ministry and that He is not taking care of Himself. So they are trying to convince Him that He should stop ministering. They come to get Him to take Him home. He knows that even though they mean well, they don’t understand what He is doing and He doesn’t go home with them. But they no doubt put the pressure on Him!

**His Disciples**
In Mark 8:31-33, Christ tries to explain again why He has come to earth and what He is to be doing. They, like His human family, do not understand, especially one of them, Peter. Peter is trying to put the pressure on Christ to forget the cross. Again, like Jesus’ family members, Peter was simply trying to protect Jesus from having to suffer. Suffering was something Jesus came to do. But, Peter, a peer of Jesus, was putting the pressure on him to disobey God!

**His Enemies**
In Matthew 27:41-44 the religious leaders who had Jesus killed were standing at the cross making fun of Him and insulting Him. As His peers, they were asking Him to prove that He was The Son of God by coming down off the cross. (Which He could have done, of course.) Imagine,
Christ was hanging there dying knowing that as GOD this is what He had come to do, but as a MAN wanting to haul off and get even with the people that had Him killed and asking God to get Him off the cross. (Which He could have done, too!) But instead, He stayed on the cross, resisted peer pressure, and saved us. Interestingly, in his first letter, Peter tells us that Christ did not make threats or insult these people who had treated Him so badly. (I Peter 2:23) Christ could have given into the pressure and come down from the cross; once again not doing what He came to do! His peers would have influenced Him to do the wrong thing. What if He had given into them and gone against His Father? All of history would have been ruined. You wouldn’t be reading this book about how to apply the Bible and the Christian faith to modern-day problems.

There is something to be learned from the way Christ handled peer pressure. He was trying to do what was right; He was here to fulfill God’s purposes. And what happened? He ‘got it in the teeth.’ Nobody understood Him or what He was trying to do, not His human family, not His disciples, not the religious leaders. Isn’t that the way it is with us? We often try to do what is right and fulfill God’s purposes while other people try to keep us from doing the right things.

What’s really important here is to realize that if Christ had given into peer pressure, you and I would never have had the chance to become Christians by giving our lives to Him?

So how does that apply to us? If and when we give into peer pressure several things may happen.

**We will not become all that we could be.** Why? Because usually peers want to get us to do things that are wrong and/or harmful. Unlike Christ’s family members and disciples who were doing what they thought was right, most of our so-called-friends are not trying to get us to do what is right. Frankly, they just don’t like getting into trouble by themselves; they want company to get into it with them! And by the way, most people (kids and adults) know that what they are doing is wrong but they are willing to take a risk and see what they can get away with. They are thinking or at least hoping that they won’t get caught. Sometimes they think this way: “Oh well, I can drink and drive, I’ll never have an accident” or “I can have sex with anyone I want and I won’t get pregnant.” In other words, I can risk and take a chance and it won’t happen to me. Well, you know what? If you do the wrong things long enough it usually does happen to you! The point: When we make bad choices on our own or through the pressure of others, we as they say, “shoot ourselves in the foot.” We hurt ourselves. Often we set ourselves up for consequences we have to live with for the rest of our lives. These consequences, affect other people. Someone is killed in an accident we caused because we were drunk; or the life of an unborn child is gone because we had an abortion. And why do we do this? Because we want to be cool and accepted; we want to be in with the popular kids; we don’t want anyone to make fun of us or think that we are ‘chicken’. People dare us to do something and we go ahead and do it even when we know that it is wrong and even when we know that it is risky. We actually think that what people think is more important now than what might happen to us and what we might live to regret then.
Think back for a minute: Isn’t this what happened when the Israelites made a calf or demanded a king or when one of their kings decided to marry foreign wives who practiced pagan religion? They thought of only themselves (What they wanted) instead of OTHERS (how their choices would affect a lot of other people!)

We need to be honest though. It’s hard not to give into peer pressure. No one wants to be the only one’ who is not doing something that it seems everyone else is doing, right?
So, when a whole carload of kids wants to skip school and go to the beach, you want to go; you don’t want to be the nerd who stays home and studies or watches the history channel!

One of the biggest problems kids face today with peers is with their parents. Their parent won’t always let them do what everyone else is doing. And the other kid’s parents let them their kids what everyone else is doing. (Or so you tell your parents!) I can remember the times when my kids were growing up would hit me with, “No one else’s parents are making them stay home from the ________. You’re just old-fashioned, you don’t understand kids today, you grew up in the Dark Ages or you don’t trust me; that’s why you won’t say yes when all the other parents are!” Well, sometimes we would call the other parents and find out that they weren’t saying yes and their kid was simply not telling the truth. I actually remember a couple of times when one of my kids would actually thank me for saying no because they wanted to but didn’t have the courage to say it. It’s all so interesting isn’t it? And it wasn’t until they were older that they thanked us for not letting them do anything they wanted. They knew that it was because we cared about them, where they went /what they did; they realized that the kid’s parents who said yes didn’t really care about their kids after all!

**Others will not become what they could be.** That’s right! Not only do the choices we make under peer pressure keep us from becoming the kind of people we could be they keep others from being the kind of people they could be. How do you figure? (You’re probably asking!) Well let’s look again at Christ’s example: Christ could have given into peer pressure; He could have stopped doing the right things, the things He was supposed to be doing. What if HE had only thought about the present instead of the future? Those choices would not only have affected his disciples by a bad example but it would have kept all of us from becoming Christians. We would have not realized God’s best for our lives nor had the potential to become better people.

Think back again: What if Israel hadn’t made a calf or chosen a human king or King Solomon selected the wrong kind of wives? Their land would have not been punished and they would not have suffered. They made bad choices and people were affected in the wrong way. Christ made good choices, different than His peers pressured Him to make, People were affected in the right way, people like you and me! Choices can be good or bad but they are always ripples on the water. Sometimes they create waves.
Let’s say someone you are friends with knows that you are a Christian, you go to church, and you don’t do certain things. They even ask you about why you are different and why it is that you don’t do certain things that everyone else does. Then you go to this party. After all you weren’t going to drink, you were just going to have a Dr. Pepper, right? Well maybe you were going to have a little beer, but not enough to get drunk! But you get to the party and well you know how it goes, one of your friends dares you to just have a beer. And then they dare you to take one shot, then more than one to see how much beer you can drink in a minute. (Binge drinking) By now you are beginning to feel pretty good and so you really get carried away and figure oh well there’s nobody there that knows you that well and this is fun. You know the rest of the story. You get really drunk. But then you passed out so you don’t remember. And what’s worse, the word is out, big time! By the time you make it to your locker on Monday, your close friends who know you are a Christian want to know what happened. You turn red, admit that it is true and say you’re sorry. But sorry isn’t enough…the damage has been done. Your reputation is forever changed and so is your influence. Even though it is the other person’s choice whether to believe in Christ/Christianity or not…your choices may result in them maybe not wanting to be a Christian because of what you did! So, like Israel, you do the wrong thing and others are hurt. But like Christ, you and I can do the right thing so others are helped, right?

What then does the Bible say about resisting and standing up to peer pressure? It gives us examples of what happened when people gave into it and what happened when they didn’t.

In the Old Testament, Solomon said to his son: “My son, don’t be tempted by sinners or listen when they say, ‘Come on! Let’s gang up and kill somebody, just for the fun of it. We’ll take their valuable and fill our homes with stolen good. If you join our gang, you’ll get your share.’ Don’t follow anyone like that or do that they do.” (Proverbs 1: 10-15 (Contemporary English Version).

In the New Testament, Paul said to the members of the Corinthian Church: “do not be misled, bad company corrupts good character: I Corinthians 15:33 (New International Version)

Here’s the point: **You become like the people you hang around with.** Either peers will pressure you to do things that are good or they will pressure you to do the things that aren’t! But a lot of that has to do with the kinds of peers/friends/companions you chose. If the people you chose to hang with are people who share your beliefs and values and try to do the right things and stay out of trouble, it will be a whole lot easier to make the right choices.

**OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEER PRESSURE TODAY**

1. It is a whole lot harder to find the right kind of friends these days. That may be because a lot of people don’t believe in the same things they used to. A lot of kids growing up today feel they have the right to pick whatever friends they want and don’t want their parents telling them who
they can hang with and who they can’t. Many of them don’t have the same values or principles. (Maybe it’s always been that way!)

There are kids out there who are trying play by the rules and do the right things but they are sometimes hard to find. And, too, they may not be the most popular kids at school...but they probably are the safest. Popular kids pay a high price to be popular. Many of them later on ask if the price was really worth it. Usually the price was too high and it wasn’t really worth it if the person didn’t stay true to what they believed and/or gave into pressure and did something they knew was wrong. To put it another way, they got something they wanted right away...and wound up with something they didn’t want for a long time. Peer pressure center on drinking, drugs; sex; cheating, and disobeying parents. The person who starts drinking may wind up being an alcoholic; the person who has sex may wind up being a parent too soon; the person who cheats on their college entrance exam may wind up cheating on their income tax and getting in trouble with .The person who disobeys their parents may have to learn to do the right thing later the hard way! And they may have a problem with respecting and obeying authority. They will find out the tough results of bad choices their parents were trying to protect them from!

2. Finding the right kind of friends at church or a Christian School isn’t always the answer either. I have a brother and sister who both went to a private Christian School for a few years. My parents thought that by going there they would maybe be able to escape some of the problems in the public schools and the wrong kind of friends. They were surprised! Just because someone goes to a Christian School doesn’t mean that they are a Christian. They also think that Christian schools are closed off from the outside and from the trends and things people do out there. Kids who go to Christian schools during the day still watch M.T.V., use the Internet, listen to music on the radio and go to movies at night and on the weekends, you know. So all that stuff out there comes with them when they come to school and influences how they act, what they think, and what they say. So, you still have to be careful about who you hang with. (SEE SCHOOL)

Peer pressure is a really important issue for kids today. It is more important than ever before because there are so many peers out there that put you under the wrong kind of pressure! It’s hard to resist the pressure to do the wrong things and hard to purpose to do the right things in the world of today, believe me! (You know that already!) But the outcome of selecting the right people as peers and the outcome of the choices we make can have impact not only now but throughout our whole lifetime. And each person has a choice.

Final thought: Eric was a neat kid with lots of friends; He was a Christian and thought that he could play loose and not lose. But he took on dare and see how close he could drive by someone standing on the center yellow line without them. Everyone else was doing it; he could do it; he’d be so cool; he would be the man. But he got careless, drove too close, and killed a classmate. He is in jail for 25 years. He can tell you now how stupid it was, how sorry he is, how he wishes he
hadn’t listened to his friends who cheered him on something that changed his life and the life of the one he killed, forever!

How you live your now and how it turns out in the future depends on who you are listening to, who you are trying to be like, and what things you let them talk you into doing. Remember, there is a big difference between a Bible Study and a ‘kegger’.

MODERN REASONING
We live in a culture where parents don’t really understand their kids--- so it is normal for kids to look to their peer group as the basis of their authority and close relationships.

RESPONSES
1. Everyone, adults and kids, deal with peer pressure often in the same ways.
2. Christ gives us a model of how to handle peer pressure through His life on earth.
3. Peer pressure can be good or bad, depending on whom we make friends with and how we respond to what they want us to do.

RESOURCES
Tripp, Paul David. Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hand: People in need of change helping people in need of change.

FACT
In a national survey High School Kids listed peers as the most important influence in their lives after God and parents.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Peer Pressure is something that can help or hinder a person.
Activity: Have a tug-of-war with the person in the middle of ‘the good peers’ and ‘the bad peers.’ Have both sides give the person reasons why he or she should join their side.
POLITICS

One of the questions asked by many church people is: Should a Christian get involved in politics? This usually means one of two things: running for public office or helping someone who does. For many years, Christians have been told to have nothing to do with politics. This is because it was considered ‘dirty’, no place for people to be involved.

Actually one may wonder if the Bible says anything at all about politics and if so what that is. Let’s start by saying that there is no section of the Scriptures or in the index that is marked ‘P’ for politics. (If you have one in your Bible, I would love to see it.) The answers to this issue are not that obvious.

For starters, the Old Testament reveals that the original form of government was called a theocracy, which meant a God-centered government. There were priests, and judges, but there were no kings at first. This meant that every Israelite was automatically a part of the government. And you didn’t run for office; you were appointed. No one could vote someone out of office. And it was probably not necessary to write a letter to the editor complaining about who was running the government since it was supposed to be God!

All that changed once the Old Testament people of God voted God out, so to speak, and voted a King in. The record of this event is in I Samuel 8. Two reasons for this action:
1. The prophet’s sons were unqualified to be president.
2. The Israelites wanted to be like everybody else, the Old Testament version of giving into peer pressure. (SEE PEER PRESSURE) So God gave Israel a king, which by the way, was the beginning of big problems. After all, whenever you put a human being in charge of other human beings, you’ve got big problems, right? By the way, Psalm 75:6 tells us that God is the one who allows leaders to be put in place. “Don’t raise your fist against the Most High God; don’t raise your voice against the Rock of Ages. He’s the one from east to west, from desert to mountains, He’s the one. God rules, He brings this one down to his knees, pulls that one up on her feet.” In other words, God handles all the promotions to people in power. This is hard to understand when you look at certain leaders, right?

And certain leaders were a problem for Israel, even though God put them in place. In I Kings 2 the people got involved in politics. How? Well, since they couldn’t vote the person out of office, they just decided to find someone else to be king. It is recorded in I Kings 2 that Solomon’s son tried to pull off what we today would call a major tax increase and the people revolted; the beginning of the I.R.S.? Maybe this was the Old Testament version of the Boston Tea Party.’ (Some of you may need to ask your parents about that one!) So in a sense they did vote and ran someone else for King, namely Jeroboam. (Where did they come up with these names?)
Something very similar happened earlier in history when God’s people rejected David and wanted to make his son, Absalom, king instead. The point is the people of Israel were involved in the political process.

Another instance of getting involved in government took place in minor prophet book of Daniel. Daniel and his three friends had been taken from their home in Jerusalem and transported to Babylon as captives. During the course of their time there, after being selected to be advisors to King Nebuchadnezzar, they were made to bow down to an image he had made of himself. The consequence of not doing that was death, according to Chapter 3 of Daniel. But the Hebrew boys wouldn’t betray THEIR God by bowing down to another god. They did more than write an editorial to The Babylonian Gazette; they registered their complaint by disobeying the king’s orders. (We will discuss disobeying the king in a minute) Three chapters later, Daniel did the same thing when King Darius made a ruling that required people to pray only to him and considered it breaking the law to pray to any other god. This meant that Daniel could not pray to the True God and he was not about to stop doing that. So, he broke the law by praying to God and (as most of us know) was thrown in the lion’s den where His God protected him from being eaten, **of course**! But the point is that Daniel became involved in the political process.

In the New Testament, at the birth of Christ, there were wise men that came to see Him, according to Matthew 2. The head of government at the time was a wicked man named Herod, who had killed his own children in order to keep anyone else from taking his throne away from him. So he wasn’t too excited about finding out about some King named Jesus Christ who had been born in his kingdom. Herod pretended to be interested in the birth of Christ in order to kill Him. This is why he instructed the wise men to come back after they visited Jesus and his parents and tell him where Jesus was. And what did the wise men do? They wisely went another way home and didn’t return to Herod as he had requested. (Smart move for three wise guys!) The point is these men were involved in the political process.

We need to stop and assess what we mean by being involved in the political process. What we mean is that these people did not automatically do as they had been told to do by their government. They stopped, thought about what their government was doing, decided they did not approve of it, and chose to do something else in stead. True, they weren’t running for office. (Although it might have looked like they were running from those who were in office!) But in a real sense, they were voting and letting their voice be heard by their actions. Today that might look like someone putting up a yard sign for ‘ the other candidate’ or carrying a sign outside an Abortion Clinic letting people know that they do not agree what the people are doing inside the clinic!

**WARNING**: We are not saying that the only way to get involved in politics is to disagree with and disobey the government! God has instructed us to support our leaders as much as possible.
But now it’s time to look at the New Testament to see what the Christian’s role in politics should be. Although there is not a lot said about the Christian’s role in government, but what is said is significant. These portions are found in Matthew 22:21; Romans 13: 1-5; I Timothy 2: 1-6; I Peter 2:13-17.

We can honor God and our government at the same time. (Some believe we can disobey our government under certain situations…more on that in a minute) In a sense we honor God by honoring the government He has given us. This is the teaching of Romans 13 where we are reminded that not only has God put these government leaders in place, but He has allowed them to be there for our good.

“Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. So live responsibly as a citizen. If you’re irresponsible to the state, then you are irresponsible with God.” Let’s put it this way: If we obey them we are safe, if we don’t we aren’t. This is hard to understand and apply because there have been leaders through out history who have been wicked and cruel. Some would ask: Are we supposed to respect and support these kinds of leaders? It’s a good question and a hard one to answer.

Yet, In I Timothy 2, we are instructed to pray for our leaders for two reasons. One, so that we can live protected lives free from fear and harm. Two, they and others will come to know God through a personal relationship with Christ. When our land is safe, then we will be free to share that message!

Again, In I Peter, 2 we are told to submit ourselves to the authority God has put in place. Peter goes on to say that it would be wrong to dishonor or disobey these leaders (Let’s see, Daniel might have had a hard time with that one, right?) In fact, it’s even more important that we do this since we are claiming to be Christians. What sometimes happens is that a person says, “I’m a Christian, I obey God, I don’t have to obey a man or a woman!” We get a good look at this attitude in another portion of the New Testament, Acts 4 where we will also answer the question, is it right to disobey government when it asks a person to do something they believe is wrong or that they disagree with?

Here in the Book of Acts, two of Christ’s disciples are preaching after Christ has risen from the dead. They are brought before the religious leaders and told that they can no longer talk about Jesus. This was their reaction. ‘You can’t tell us not to talk about Jesus and we won’t stop doing it! ’It is important to notice, though, that these were religious leaders not government leaders who told them this. It’s fair to ask, ‘would it have been different if the king had told them not to talk about Jesus?’ Well, remember Daniel who was told by the king not to pray but did it anyway because he figured that the king shouldn’t make laws about how he worshipped God/his religion! Thousands of religious people feel that same way today!
Some would say that we as Christians could disobey the government if they ask to do something we disagree with or do something we think is wrong. For instance, what if the government uses our tax money to carry out abortions? Do we stop paying taxes? Or what if the mayor of our city requires that we only water our lawn every other day because of a draught? Do we go ahead and water our yard anyway. (Because we just put the grass in, not to mention our prize pansies) Gets complicated, doesn’t it?

What about something a lot more serious like, going to war? Many people over the years have become what we call a conscientious objector; they won’t go to war because they believe that killing is wrong and that their government cannot force them to fight!
So they don’t go. In their minds, not going to war is all right because they believe that God commands that we not kill, which is true. He also commands us to obey and support our government. So we have a problem here…or so it seems.

We have to be very careful about how we respond to this situation. On one hand, God has told us that He has put the government in place for our good in order to protect us. For example, the city puts up stoplights to protect people from having accidents and stops people for speeding or driving while drunk to keep people from dying.

In other parts of the world people have been told by their government to do things that go against their belief, things like denying God and saying that they no longer follow Christ. Like Daniel and his three friends, they do not believe government has a right to interfere with what they believe and how they practice it. These folk will go on doing what they believe God has told them to do. Many people around the world have to make the painful choice between following God and following government. Hopefully, we will not have to deal with this problem in our country.

But we need to be careful about how we apply this principle. We need to remember that if we do the things that God commands us to do in response to our government He will honor that response. (Even if it means paying taxes when the money is not used the way we want it to be and we believe war is wrong!)

It is especially important for people who claim to be Christians to honor authority and cooperate with those in government. I would like to suggest four ways in which I believe we can cooperate with the government and be involved in politics.

SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT: We need to remember to vote when we’re old enough. We need to be informed about the issues. We need to let them know when they do things we appreciate. Being a leader is hard work and often a thankless job.
PRAY FOR THE GOVERNMENT: Know who the leaders are, what position they have, to pray for them on a regular basis. This is because our leaders need wisdom to do their jobs and make big decisions.

CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT: This means taking a stand on things we believe in or feel strongly about. This does not mean that we refuse to do something but writing a letter or making a phone call or writing an editorial to express your opinion even if it disagrees with the city, state, or national leadership.

GET INVOLVED WITH THE GOVERNMENT: Join a political party committee, help get petitions signed, speak at a city council meeting, and even run for some office!!!! (You never know!)

In the New Testament, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells Christians to be salt and light, to add flavor light to brighten things up. I believe God’s People, can and should get involved in politics in the right way, to be salt and light. Yes, politics can be dirty, but involved citizens can clean it up.

Hopefully, we can uphold their principles and uphold their government at the same time. We can be informed, supportive of, and involved in the process that God has put in place to help us live happy lives , practice our Christian faith freely and make our land continue to be free, all things that government should help not hinder us to do.

MODERN REASONINGS
Government is man-made so we can disagree with it, disrespect it, and disobey it.

RESPONSES
1. God gave us government, which is not like him because they are imperfect and they make mistakes.
2. God expects people to support their government in every way possible but hold it responsible for what it does.
3. God expects us to respect and uphold those who govern us we actually improve our lives.

RESOURCES
Wallis, Jim. God’s Politics.

FACT
A greater number of youth each year become less involved in the election process. The two reasons:
1. They see the issues as unrelated to their daily lives.
2. They cannot identify with a candidate that truly excites them.

**LIFE LAB**

*Teaching Aim:* To educate that ‘Politics’ is a system that has to do with governing people and/or getting people involved in actions of government.

*Activity:* Invite a local leader or political figure to speak about:
1. The responsibilities they have.
2. The challenges they face.
3. What governments in other nations are like as contrasted to ours?
4. How people can get involved in their government.
To understand the world of ‘pornography’ in the Bible, we need to look at the word, evil.

The Old Testament:
The word for evil is ‘ra’ which means, that which is evil and harmful. Clue: Evil is something that harms you.

The New Testament:
The first is ‘kakos’ which means something basically bad, or worthless. Clue: Evil is something that is worth nothing; you get nothing good out of it.

The second is: ‘pornaros’. (Look at the first four letters…look familiar?) It means something basically wicked, which is diseased. Clue: Evil is something that makes you sick.

Now let’s look at these ‘evil’ words in real life settings:

Old Testament ‘ra’

Genesis 2:9 “The tree of life was in the middle of the garden. Also the tree of knowledge and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

Genesis 6:5 “God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil Imagined evil, evil, evil, and evil from morning till night.”

Deuteronomy 17:7 “You have to purge the evil from your community.”

Judges 2: 11 “The People of Israel did evil in God’s sight.”

Psalm 34:14 “Depart from evil and do well.” (NKJV)

Jeremiah 2:13 “My people have committed two evils” (NRV)

Micah 2:1 “Doom to those who plot evil, who go to be dreaming up crimes”

New Testament ‘kakas’

Matthew 6:13 “And lead us not into temptation but delivers us from evil.” (KJV)

Mark 7:21, 22 “For it is from within from the human heart that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery…wickedness, deceit, (misuse of sex). All these evil things come from within and defile a person” (NRV)

Romans 12: 21 “Don’t let evil get the best of you: get the best of evil by doing good.”

I Peter 3:11, 12 “Snub evil and cultivate good, He turns his back on those who do evil things.”

– ‘pornaros’

John 3:19 “Every one who makes a practice of doing evil addicted to denial and illusion, hates God/light and won’t come near it.”

Romans 12: 9 “Hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good.” (RSV)

II Timothy 3:13 “But Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse.” (NKJV)
PORNORAPHY PRINCIPLE # 1: *It starts on the inside (Thinking) and shows itself on the outside. (Doing)*

The writer of Proverbs put it this way: “For as he (she) thinks in his (her) heart, so is he/she.” (NKJV) How does this relate to the problem of pornography?

People are basically evil. People naturally do evil things. We became evil through sin which affects the things we think about and the things we do. Pornography is the result of people naturally wanting to do bad things. One of those is seeing and hearing wrong things about sex by looking at magazines, videos, movies, T.V. and the Internet. Currently, there are more than 73,000 ‘pornography for-pay sites with more than 2,500 new sites come online every week. Most of it originates offshore and is not covered by U.S. Law. Over 29 million Americans visit cybersex sites on a weekly basis. In other words, what people want to find…and are looking for, they will find! The writer of Proverbs 11: 27 reads: “A student of evil becomes evil; Trouble comes to him who seek EVIL.” People today are seeking evil on everything, especially the Internet.

Heard the latest thing in cell phones and porn? Now users can access pornographic videos thru mobile phones. (Minute-long movie clips that come with the speed, that rivals DSL!)

Sadly, many people, especially children, view things never wanted to see. 1 in 5 children between the ages of 10-17 receive unwanted sexual advances on-line. Nine out of 10 children between the ages of 8-16 viewed pornography on the Internet for the first time, unintentionally! But, if you’re trying to find not-to-nice things to look at, you will find them and fill your life with those things. In other words, you become what you see... If we have evil desires ‘inside’ we will look for ways to fulfill them ‘outside’.

PORNORAPHY PRINCIPLE #2 *It is Evil which comes through the eyes.*

The New Testament puts it this way: “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, the whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”(NIV)Matthew 6: 22, 23

One of the worst things about pornography is that the pictures/images a person sees usually stay with them for along time and often permanently. Those ‘mind photos’ cannot be quickly forgotten or easily erased. They are imprinted on our minds and in our memories. Pornography is different today than it was when people lived in different time, like Romans times. After all, the Romans didn’t have cameras, so people couldn’t take dirty pictures. They didn’t make movies, so people didn’t have sex on the screen to watch. They weren’t able to have Internet access, so they weren’t able to download pictures from Playboy. In other words, they couldn’t see as much evil as we can today and they didn’t see them in private!
It used to be that the only way people could see the wrong kind of sexual activity was to go to a particular place...usually at night, and enter by the back door, hoping that no one would see them. Now people can see things like that in the privacy of their own home where no one will see them...they can see ‘evil on-line.’ In a given year, Porn Web Sites earned 1 billion in this country. Each day at least 50,000 people chat on 700 sex-talk lines.

**PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE # 3 The more you get, the more you want.**
Pornography is like any other addiction. You need more and more of it to feel satisfied. I call it *emotional cocaine*; once you look, you’re hooked! Like the misuse of food, sex, or drugs, people who look at porn need more of it because what they started with, no longer gives them the thrill they got the first time. When what we want and are looking for is wrong, enough is never enough. At least 76% of American men confess to having viewed pornography.

**PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE 4# It Misuses and abuses sex.**
Pornography has to do with sex. It gets people to satisfy the natural God-given desires in an unnatural way which God doesn’t’ approve of. It gets people to take something God made to be good and make it bad. *(SEE PRE-MARITAL SEX)*

Let me tell you, pornography is never good, no matter what anybody tells you. Comments like “this is just expressing and fulfilling your natural urges and desires”, or “there’s nothing wrong with that. It won’t hurt you.” The devil takes something that is the best and tries to substitute it with someone much less than best. He takes something beautiful and makes it bad. Pornography takes sex outside of the relationship of marriage and causes men and women to ‘have sex’ with someone else, in a magazine, on-line, through a video. They chose to use it to misuse and abuse sex.

98.9% of the consumers of online porn are men! And men are the ones who are buying the wrong magazines, going to the wrong places, and taking the wrong kind of pictures of other people. They often make children their victims, as well. These men are called pedophiles, men and women who ‘love’ children in the wrong way.

**PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE #5 It Makes/Costs Money**
Pornography is a $209 000,000,000.00 (That’s billion) industry in The U.S. (Do you have any idea how much money that is? 1 million/209 times!) One of the saddest things about this is that it steals something very special from people in order for other people to make money.

1. It causes husbands to hurt their wives by wanting them to have sex like they see in the videos.
2. It causes children to have pictures taken of them doing naughty things before they really understand what they are really doing.
3. It causes parents to sometimes make movies of themselves and their children and sell them to people who put them on-line.
4. It causes our country to make movies and videos to send out around the world that cause other people to do wrong things. (Thinking its okay if Americans do it!)

Porn web sites earned a billion dollars in a given year; a billion and a half the next year. Pornography is a big, evil business which makes money off of other people’s lust and loss of control. One of the reasons porn makes money is because people buy it. The reason why porn thrives in our country is that people make it possible. Often pornography is a bigger problem for men than for women. In the churches where I have been a pastor, I have found men of all ages who are porn addicts… looking at sex in the wrong way and wanting to do what they see. Playboy’s electronic headquarters received 4.7 million hits in a recent 7-day period.

I remember sitting down with a group of high school boys in one of my churches that had confessed their porn problem at camp one year. One of the boys had been involved with on line porn for 7 years, which meant that he started looking at it when he was 11. All of the boys told how they had been using the Internet for the right reasons when porn spam flashed on the screen. All of a sudden sex was in their face. Naturally curious about sex at their age, they followed the instructions and found stuff they never dreamed of seeing. And the more they saw, the more they wanted to see, even though they felt dirty and guilty, they couldn’t stop. One young man told me that he was afraid that he would always look at all women the way he had seen them on the screen, naked and wanting to have sex with him. The images in his mind were awful but still attracted him.

I also remember sitting across from a woman in one of our congregations whose husband had been involved in pornography since they were first married. She had discovered magazines hidden away, phone bills that he lied about to 1-800 numbers, Sex Lines, credit card bills from times when he had gone to have sex with a woman who gave sex for money. (We call them prostitutes). He denied everything. But once when he did admit to doing these things, he promised never to do it again. But because he was a sex addict, and never really got to the bottom of his problem, he did go back to his habit. Meanwhile, he became more and more distant from her, helped less around the house, and even wanted to be away from home more and more. She was desperate; she knew that she would lose her husband and her marriage if she didn’t get him to stop playing with porn. To this day, he has not changed, but his life and marriage have…for the worse! People pay a high price for porn; they use it at high cost to themselves and those they love.

Porn is a not only a problem for non-church/non-Christians. In a poll taken by the Focus on the Family Organization, which asked the question, “Has pornography ever been a problem in your home, of nearly 10, 000 responses, 47% said ‘yes’; 53% said ‘no.’ The church today also pays high price for the use of pornography by its members.
PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE #6 It takes control of the person who uses it.
Anything that we can’t control, takes control of us. Oh sure, lots of people who play with porn will tell you that it doesn’t control them and they can quit it any time. But it’s not that simple. From the first time they see it; they want to see more of it. From boys who put Playboy inside their Algebra book to men who watch videos in the basement after their kids go to bed, to women who go to Male Strip Shows, porn prevails in the lives of those who want to see it. You let ‘evil’ it in the front door; it takes over the whole house.

The reality is that people know that they are looking for and seeing something they shouldn’t be. For instance, 70% of the porn traffic goes on between the hours of 9-5. Why? So no body at home knows whose looking at it at work! Viewing it in private is not enough. The sex addict has a huge craving for seeing evil. Deep down inside, they know that what they are doing is wrong but like any other addiction, they’ve got 25 reasons (at least)…like why it’s okay to do it…they are just fulfilling their God-given needs…it’s not hurting them or anyone else… everybody has a hobby! (Their hobby is just looking at people with no clothes on!)

PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE #7 It will always bring hurt to you and others.
Again, we remember that when Satan tempted the first couple to sin, he told them how exciting it was to disobey God and do what He told them not to do but didn’t tell them what would happen if they did. He told them they wouldn’t die which they didn’t on the spot but eventually they did die.

When people use pornography, nothing may happen to them right away. They think they can get away with doing it and no one will know; they will not be hurt by their activity. But in time there will be results for their activity which will affect them and others in their life. Pornography causes spiritual faith and personal relationships to die little by little, a slow death.

People who use pornography and get other people to use it, try to sell us on idea that see the wrong kind of sex doesn’t hurt us. What they forget to tell us is that it’s not will it hurt us but when it will hurt us. We don’t think it hurts us NOW; we need to remember that it hasn’t hurt us yet!

All kinds of individuals today are into porn, from movie stars to pastors, even! They have had to believe a lie to convince themselves that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing; they have had to ignore God’s warnings, and they ignore the harm they are doing to themselves and others.

Pornography is using sex in a selfish way, thinking more of one’s own pleasure and at the expense of someone else’s. Using sex in the way God intended is unselfish, thinking of the impact of what one does on the other person and bringing them fulfillment as well as one’s own. Several things happen to hurt other people when someone uses pornography.
When someone ‘has sex’ with someone in a magazine or in a video, they do not have a personal relationship with those people. They lose their desire for/satisfaction with a close personal relationship with a spouse or a child. When this happens in a marriage, the person’s partner feels unloved; they feel they must become like the person in the magazine. They cannot have a relationship with someone unless they are doing something sexual with them. People who look at pornography over and over become different. Their minds are consumed with seeing more and more sex and possibly acting out what they see. They become defined by their desires.

As sad as these things seem to be, all of them are ways in which pornography hurts us and others. Pornography is like ‘playing with fire’…when you do you get burned. The burns can be hard to recover from and they can leave life-long scars. A small match starts a forest fire.

**PORNOGRAPHY PRINCIPLE #8 It is something God tries to warn us about.**

God tries to warn us about this. He has made people with a conscience, something inside our minds that helps us know right from wrong. I like to compare the conscience to a door bell or an alarm clock. Both the bell and the alarm sound off to let you know if someone is at the door or when it is time to wake up. Through our conscience, God is trying to let us know when something evil is trying to get into our lives or when we should be alert to something that is trying to hurt us that we are not paying attention to.

When we miss God’s attempts to alert us to potential danger, we may very well allow evil to harm us and others. So, make no mistake: If you miss the warnings and think you can play loose with porn, you will lose…your good conscience, your wife or husband, your freedom! What you thought you could control can take you captive! One of the boys I talked with said he saw the porn images every time he looked at a girl and he admitted he did not want to look at his future wife *that* way! God allows our conscience to tell us that what are doing is wrong and dangerous. Today, he is successfully married. He overcame his addiction.

Pornography is a real problem! People today tell us that it isn’t. They tell us that we don’t have to follow the same old rules because God just wants to spoil our fun. Sex is something to enjoy, especially kids who can’t be married yet but want to fun with sex. So, everybody seems to be doing it. Rock stars and movie idols are looking at porn, making money on it, or filming other people to make it. Kids are trading videos at school, often ones they have ‘starred in themselves.’ So, we assume that it must be okay; it doesn’t seem to be hurting anyone.

Isn’t it funny? The people who say that we don’t have to follow the SAME OLD RULES are the same people telling us the SAME OLD REASONS why seeing and doing the wrong kind of sex is OKAY? God’s rules and reasons never change; they remain that way because he wants us to have the sex that He intended for us to have, not a cheap substitute. Porn may find you a little pleasure but never find you life-time fulfillment.
Satan lies and has a lot of people who continue to tell it for him!

If we plant the seeds of pornography NOW, they will produce a bumper crop of sadness, sorrow, and even sickness LATER. Compare it to having a dandelion in your front lawn. You can’t see the seeds blowing from the dandelion but before the summer is over your lawn had gone from green to yellow. Something that was meant to be beautiful and bring satisfaction becomes unbeautiful and brings sorrow and sadness.

To use the picture of a roadway; porn sex is a dead end; proper sex is a freeway. Warning: Don’t take the side roads of sex; don’t walk the path to pornography!!

**MODERN REASONING**
What a person sees in private that brings them pleasure is their own business if it doesn’t hurt anyone else.

**RESPONSES**
1. Pornography links a desire for something evil with doing something evil, looking at wrong things.
2. Pornography takes something beautiful and useful and makes it bad and ugly.
3. Pornography never satisfies—the more a person sees the more they want.
4. Pornography hurts those who use it and those who know them.

**RESOURCES**
Hall, Laurie. *An Affair of the Mind.* (More geared to adults)
York, Frank, LaRue, Jan. *Protecting Your Child from an X-Rated world.* (Child and Up)
Means, Marsha. *Living With Your Husband’s Secret Wars.* (More geared to adults)
Whiteman, Tom. *Your Marriage and the Internet.* (Youth and up)

**FACT**
Pornography users spend 10 billion dollars a year, more than on the NFL, NBA and National Baseball League Activities COMBINED! (Now, that’s a lot of $)

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Activity*: Have a leader from your church/youth group interview someone not from your church/youth group who has struggle with pornography and overcame the addiction. Have a discussion following the interview.
SEX IS GOOD!
After all, that’s what God said about everything He made at the beginning of creation. Sex was created for two basic reasons:
1. Pleasure - RECREATION
2. Producing Children - PROCREATION

When He created men and women, God created the opportunity for sexual relations between humans. In fact, in Genesis 4, God refers to sex with the phrase, ‘Adam knew Eve’, meaning he had sex with her. In *The Message*, a modern version of the Bible, it says it this way, “Adam slept with his wife, Eve”. It means that the man and the woman knew each other in the most intimate and closest way possible. Today we would say that people sleep together. This means that two people have what we know as sexual intercourse; they have sex with each other.

God created sex for two reasons: Pleasure (RECREATION) and producing children. (PRO-CREATION) Both of these reasons are why God called sex good.

SEX IS BAD?
In the beginning, God intended for sex to be good. But sin changed all that. Sin happened because the first man and woman believed Satan’s lie that they could disobey God and get away with it. Everything in God’s creation was affected including sex.

People’s use of sex changed. Instead of sex taking place only between a man and a woman as God intended, it started to take place between other people. There are many examples of the wrong use of sex in the Bible.
1. Jacob having sex with his own daughter-in-law; Lot’s daughters wanting to have sex with their father. (Incest)
2. David having sex with another man’s wife (Adultery)
3. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanting to have sex with other men. (*SEE HOMOSEXUALITY*).

Obviously, the thing God had once said was good had become bad. The beautiful design God had made for sexual relationships between a man and a woman who were married became less than beautiful. What God had made to give fulfillment now made many people frustrated. When sex is used in the right way brings fulfillment; sex used in the wrong way brings frustration.

THE LOG IN THE FIREPLACE
The ‘log in the fireplace’ to describe the difference between what God intended for sex to be and what people have made sex to be.
When you have a log in your fireplace, it is in the right place, the place where logs are supposed to be when they are burning. There it fulfills its purpose of giving light and warmth; it fulfills its purpose. But take the log out of the fireplace and what happens? No light, no warmth, and it burns a hole in the rug; it does not fulfill its intended purpose. The fire is out of control. (Think for a minute of a forest fire!) What was meant to do something good, like roast your hotdogs and S’mores on the campfire is now doing something bad, it destroys trees and animals and sometimes people!

Sex is made to be the log in the fireplace. It is meant to be beautiful when it was used in the right way. But when sex is not used in the way it was intended to be used, people suffer the consequences. (Which are a lot more serious than burning a hole in your rug or even destroying a forest!) Oh sure, even the wrong use of sex can be fun, for a little while, but later can bring sadness and even sickness, getting pregnant, or S-sexually T-rans-mitted D-iseases.

The Bible talks about two types of sex that is wrong. In Hebrews 13:4, 5 God says, “Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband, God draws a firm line against casual and elicit sex.” (Casual and elicit sex means in a way other than what God intended.)

**Inside Marriage:** This is when people have sex with someone other than the person they are married to. This is ADULTERY. God even uses this term many times to describe his relationship between Him and His People who have committed ‘spiritual adultery’ by falling in love and get involved with other gods other than Himself.

**Outside Marriage:** This is when people have sex with someone other than a marriage partner. This is FORNICATION. It means any kind of sex that God considers ‘illegal’ or ‘out of bounds’. This second type of sexual sin includes having sex with someone before you marry him or her. People who commit fornication before marriage are much more likely to commit adultery after marriage because it has become okay for them to have sex with a variety of people.

**NO TRESPASSING!**
God explains what happens when a person has sex with someone they are not married to (in I Thessalonians 4:3-6a), He compares this person to someone who trespasses on someone else’s property (**Trespasser**) like a burglar who breaks in to your house and steals something that doesn’t belong to them. (**Robber**) Ever see a ‘No Trespassing Sign’ on someone’s land? It means, this land belongs to me and you cannot walk on it…you can’t have it. So how does this apply to sex?

God is saying that when you have sex with someone else who you shouldn’t have sex with is like they are ‘going where you shouldn’t be going’ (**Trespassing**) and ‘taking something that doesn’t
belong to you’. *(Robbery)* When it comes to having sex with the wrong person, God says “don’t go where you are supposed to go and don’t take what doesn’t belong to you.”

Many people today would say that this way of thinking and teaching is out of date because we live in a much freer society now and things are different. The fact is that God has never changed His mind about sex and how it is to be used. He made it to be something beautiful when used in the right way. And the rules God made about sex haven’t changed either. He intended that we keep the rules about how to use it. God did not make His rules to make our lives miserable; He made them to make our lives meaningful. His rules have reasons and breaking them has results!

The free love revolution began in the 1960’s in The United States in a time where people were questioning authority and old ways of thinking. This anti-authority attitude was reflected in the song ‘Love the One you’re with’ which went like this:

“And there’s a rose in the fisted glove.
And the eagle flies with the dove.
And if you can’t be with the one you love…
Love the one you’re with.”

In other words, the attitude was practice ‘free love’… do what you want to do with whoever you want to do it with.

What the promoters forgot to tell their listener/lovers was that FREE LOVE ISN’T FREE, it costs a lot. When you break the rules, there is a high price to pay…in lots of ways. God knew then and He knows now that when we use sex in the right way we would really enjoy it. If we use it in the wrong way, even though we might enjoy it NOW we won’t enjoy the things it brings then. To put it simply, *(to play now is to pay later.)*

**THE GUARD RAILS**

Let’s use another word picture. Compare sex to driving your car on a mountain road with a sheer drop-off on either side. Someone has put guardrails up to protect people from going over the edge, right? Now let’s suppose that someone says, “Let’s take the guardrails off.” (After all, they suggest, God made driving to be fun and doesn’t want people’s fun to be restricted. Let people drive over the edge!) How stupid is that? About as stupid as people today telling us that people should have sex however and whenever they want to…with no restrictions which would spoil their fun.

It is not driving with the guardrails that causes to girls get pregnant, drop out of school, often abort their babies *(SEE ABORTION)* and become single parents. God knew what He was doing when He made fireplaces for logs and guardrails for cars. HIS RULES HAVE REASONS - TO MAKE OUR LIFE BETTER NOT WORSE! The reason is not to spoil our fun and our enjoyment of sex; it was to make certain that our experience with it was to be beautiful and fulfilling without pain, sorrow, and sickness. He designed sex to bring happiness not harm to
people. It is unfortunate that a lot of kids growing up today think that having sex any way they want is okay that is because a lot of their parents are doing the same thing. Adults often live by a double standard, saying one thing but doing another.

SAFE SEX RATHER THAN NO SEX?
This emphasis on having sex before marriage is based on encouraging kids and adults to have safe sex rather than to have no sex. No sex before marriage is really the safest sex. (That’s right!) Safe sex before marriage is not nearly as safe. Guys who use a condom instead of control take a risk. It is a known fact, for example, that 1 out of 10 condoms fail. Guys are sure, of course, that the condom they use won’t be the one…but if it is, the risk of getting pregnant or getting disease is still there! Women using birth control plans are not always fool-proof either, especially if a person is not married or not wanting or ready to have a baby.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon was telling his son that sex anyway you want it isn’t okay! Here he says to be careful about getting involved with women who want to have the wrong kind of sex with men. (Of course, Solomon wasn’t a very good model of the message, but he had a good message!)

It’s recorded in Proverbs 23:26-28. “A whore is a bottomless pit; a loose woman can get you in trouble fast. She’ll take you for all you’ve got. She’s worse than a pack of thieves.” This does not mean that the woman is the only one responsible for the decision to have sex; obviously the man agrees to have it too! He says that the wrong kind of sex can rob you of a good life and lead to disease.

Remember that the Devil lies to us in order to harm us or even kill us. He often does this in the area of sex. He tells us that sex is good, it’s fun; if it feels good, we should do it. It’s our body and our business.

We can do what we want. But here are the things He doesn’t tell us:
When we do something that we shouldn’t do it may seem like there’s nothing that happens to us…until later. In the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 1-7) Satan told Eve that if she ate of the tree God told her not to, she would not die. She didn’t die at that moment, but she did die later on. Please know that everyone who misuses sex does not die at that moment, but something does dies…the mother carries the pain of aborting her baby; a marriage partner regrets cheating on their mate; a child has huge problems if abused by an adult; a man or woman who has sex with the opposite or the same sex can catch a disease that may kill them …later!

When we break the rules, there are consequences. God says that when we sin with sex used in the wrong way, we actually sin against ourselves, our own bodies. When we drive our cars too fast and go over the speed limit, we may get stopped by a policeman who gives us a ticket that costs us money. There is a consequence for breaking human law. Why should we expect that
there will not be a consequence for breaking God’s laws? We still break the laws even when we
know better though, don’t we? God does forgive our mistakes but he knows life and sex will be
better when we obey the rules.

When we do something that is fun for us, it may be tragic for someone else. For instance, we get
drunk at a party but we drive home anyway and hit another car; we use dope, even just once and
then we find we need more and more of it to feel as good as we did the first time. We take
something from a store, get away with it; when we try it again, we get jail time. If we go too far
and have sex with someone we shouldn’t, we may get a disease or bring a baby into being that
can change a person’s life in many ways, not all of them positive!

**DATING AND SEX  (SEE DATING)**

1. When couples date they need to have limits. If two people don’t have limits, they
exceed the limit. Imagine having roadways with no speed signs! (It actually used to be that way
in Montana!) This means that they know what they should do and what they shouldn’t do ahead
of time. Example: A boy and a girl should not keep on kissing if they feel that it makes them
want to do more than that! Both boys and girls need to know what their limits are before they
start dating and kissing! Speed limits are like guard rails.

2. When couples date they need to avoid having sex before marriage. One
of the reasons for not having it is that once you’ve had that experience, that’s all you want to do.
Everything else…holding hands, even making out seems boring. Sex is like a magnet and pins.
The pins are always drawn to the magnet. When the couple gives into sex too early it also keeps
them from getting to know each other in even more important ways, like learning to talk and
sharing things other than their bodies. Not having ‘sex with someone before marriage’ is called
abstinence. It means to abstain from sex. It has been proven that abstaining from sex outside of
marriage, although something unpopular with a lot of people is still the safest way to deal with
sex.

In Uganda, for example, where the government pushed abstinence (before marriage) and
faithfulness to one’s partner (after marriage) HIV has declined 75% in the 15-19 age group, 60%
in the 20-24 age group and 54% overall. To put it another way, God’s rules do have reasons.
They also have results…good results.

But in a lot of cultures today a lot of teen-agers are getting into sex too early. They are being
taught in lots of different ways that breaking the rules is okay, partly because they are told that
everybody wants to do it and most are doing it. (And that makes doing it okay?)

3. When couples date they need to remember that the person they
might decide to have sex with may not be the person they are going to marry.
This means that they will do something that they will ‘love the one they’re with’ rather than the one they should marry and do it with! God did not intend for us to have sex with a lot of different people. Two of the biggest reasons relate to sickness and dis-satisfaction. But another reason is that God did not want us to compare partners, the one we were with and the one we were supposed to be with!

4. When dating, couples need to remember that they do not need to prove their love by having sex with each other. Girls are most often asked to prove their love by having sex with a guy, but it can be the other way around. Actually, if you really love someone you don’t have to prove it by having sex with them. The reason you don’t have sex with them is because you care about them and don’t want to take something special from them that should belong to the person they marry. The real proof of loving someone is, not giving in but in holding out. Not doing something hurtful to someone you may love and care about.

A woman in my first church, who was in an unhappy marriage, shared this reading with me.

I met him, and then I liked him,
I liked him, and then I loved him
I loved him, and then I let him,
When I let him, then I lost him.

She and her husband had sex before they were marriage. They had to get married because she was pregnant. The relationship was never strong because it was built on wrong sex and trying to cover up a mistake. (Even though marrying was better than the woman aborting the baby or the father walking out on the two of them!) They felt resentful toward each other. Their love died. They eventually divorced. She did lose him. Her counsel to young women: “Don’t let him push you into proving your love by having sex with him. It’s the wrong way to start a relationship and a marriage”

In many countries of the world, parents still choose partners for their son or daughter. How would like for that to happen in the United States? (Yes, I know some of you think that’s what your parents are trying to do anyway!) But the truth is that you can pick the person we want to date and to marry. It might be easier if you didn’t have to because then we wouldn’t have to date so many different people to find the right one! But that’s also why it is so important that we not have sex with someone until it is the right one and you are married!

We also need to talk about what happens once you’re planning to be married the right person! This is when dating and courtship leads to engagement and marriage. A lot of couples I counsel today, in preparation for marriage, consider it OKAY to have sex before marriage when they know that they will spend their life with THIS person. It is very common today for people who have never had sex with anyone else before marriage to have it with the person they wind up engaged to. I hear: “since I know this is the person I’m going to spend the rest of my life with,
it’s OKAY for me to have sex with them.” Problem: something can always happen to change the relationship.

Recently I watched an interview with a well-known rock star who confessed that she had not had sex with anyone until she met _____. The reason she had sex with him was because she honestly believed that this guy was THE ONE. But, he wasn’t. But then it was too late; she had already had sex with him and was no longer a virgin, something she believed was very important in ‘saving herself for her husband.’

Here’s what I try to explain to them. The rule about not having sex with someone before marriage is still there; God hasn’t changed his mind about it. He believes it’s a law for life. It keeps us from something that might hurt us and to give us the best thing possible. This applies to sex, too, of course! There are no reasons good enough to change that rule no matter what people try to tell us or how many people are having sex before marriage!

Also, the choices still bring consequences. One result may be the girl getting pregnant. In twenty-four hour period, for example, 2,739 American teen-age girls will find themselves pregnant. And it’s different today than it was some 60 years ago. In 1940 the birth rate for unmarried teen-age girls was 14%. In 2000 that number rose to 79%! We not should be surprised that this is happening when we think about the ways sex is sold in our society. (And sex is used to sell a lot of things!)

It is also important we remember that the God who made rules and consequences also offers forgiveness and ‘second chances’ for those who disregard them. Just because a person has sex in the wrong way cannot learn from their mistakes and be able to enjoy sex as God intended for them to enjoy it. It is the Evil One, Satan himself who gets us to give into wrong sex and then makes us feel so guilty about it that we think we’ve ruined our chances for having the right relationship with someone when we are married. Don’t buy into that lie!

Just remember: When God created sex, it was good and he wants us to enjoy what is best and most satisfying. The log in the fireplace and the guardrails on the road make certain that we have the safest and most satisfying sex; it is where we avoid accidents that hurt ourselves and others. Remember, God didn’t say don’t have sex; He said have it with the right person at the right time, and that means after marriage, not before. This really does make sense doesn’t it?

If it seems hard to think and act this way just remind yourself that it is a lot harder to think and act the other way. To think sex with anyone any time is OKAY will make life a lot harder than it has to be. To think that sex needs to be with the right person at the right time makes a life a lot easier. It takes knowing what you believe, standing by it, and sticking to makes having the right kind of sex thing work! People with a strong faith in God will find His help in waiting for what is best.
My wife Joyce and I have been married for almost 44 years. We were engaged for a year and a half, probably longer than I advise. But, as hard as it was to wait, we did not give into our natural feelings and urges and have sex until our wedding night. Was it hard? You bet! We have said many times that what we did was not only right but it was worth it. We have had a strong marriage and you know what else? We have been able to tell our children to wait for sex and know that we are not asking them to do something we didn’t do. Remember, someday you may have children who you want to wait for sex. It is hard to do that if you tell them you didn’t! It is best if you can say you did wait and they can see the benefit of that decision in YOUR marriage. God’s rules have reasons. He wants the best for us, especially in the area of sex: Trust me! Trust him! He’s right and it works!

MODERN REASONING
Any couple should have sex when they date. It’s fun, everyone is doing it, and it’s only a problem if they make a baby, but it actually helps two people get to know each other!

RESOURCES
Talley, Jim. Too Close Too Soon.
Tenzel, Pam. Sex Has a Price Tag
Gardner, Tim Alan. Sacred Sex
Arterburn, Stephen, Stoeker, Fred, Yorkey, Mike. Every Young Man’s Battle.
Arterburn, Stephen, Ethridge, Shannon. Every Young Women’s Battle.

RESPONSES
1. God made sex to be beautiful if it used according to His rules.
2. Misusing sex is a selfish act which steals something from someone else and hurts the one who steals it.
3. Satan lies to us sex by telling us about the fun of it but not telling us about the dangers of misusing it.

FACT
1.5 million new Sexually Transmitted Disease patients are recorded annually; 2/3 of them are under the age of 25.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Pre-Marital Sex is doing something that should only happen when two people are married.
Teaching Activity: Have two couples take two different positions on Pre-Marital Sex.
1. Obtain a log. Talk about the benefits of having the log in the fireplace. Talk about the dangers of having it outside the fireplace, OR sex before marriage
2. Have two couples debate the difference between sex before marriage. (WE SHOULDN’T WAIT) And sex after marriage. (WE SHOULD WAIT)
RACISM

There are not very many topics that are more difficult to deal with than this one. Unfortunately, it is one that has been around since the early days of our country.

The problem of racism simply stated centers in how people of different races, backgrounds and nationalities treat each other. A simple definition of racism is: Believing that your race is superior over another and treating people of other races as inferior!

Please note that in the Garden of Eden before sin, everyone got along. Of course, there were only two people and they were of the same race whatever that was! But after sin, two of the children of the first parents, Adam and Eve, were in conflict with each other and they were of the same race! Cain, in fact, killed his brother Abel. So it is no surprise that people of a different race would be in conflict with each other, is it?

Let’s look at two things that have affected how people treat each other from the beginning of time. These things are recorded in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, in chapters 6-11.

This is where racism, conflict between people of different races and nationalities began. And the word ‘nationality’ is a clue. These problems began when there began to be different nations. In chapter 6, God sent a flood to clean up a world that had become very wicked. Noah and his three sons and their wives survived the ark and re-populated the world. In Genesis 10, we read the record of these sons and their families who formed the first nations of the world. In Chapter 11, after all these groups of people united together to build a man-made religious system to get to God on their own, they were all divided by language and made to scatter to different parts of the world of that time. Almost over-night language was not the only thing that changed, so did the attitudes of one group of people towards another. Another significant thing contributed to the problem of racism. This involved Noah in Genesis 9 (SEE ALCOHOL). Noah got drunk and his son, Ham, apparently did something that did not show respect for his father in this condition. So in Genesis 9:25, the Lord said, “Cursed be Canaan, the lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.” Many people believe that because Ham was the father of a people who came from an area that eventually became Africa, which the people of black descent were meant to be slaves. They use this incident of Ham and his father and the curse to say that discriminating against certain kinds of people is okay. As we will see, it is never okay; it is never what God intended. People have misused this event to support racism, their feeling of superiority over all people.

After sin, we notice that people became enemies of each other. They remained in their own little group and tend to treat those outside of it unkindly. Again, this fits our definition of racism, to think one’s group to be superior to every other group and treat others as inferior.
All through the Old Testament, we see different races, nations, and groups of people in conflict. After sin, it was the sense of insecurity and pride that kept and still kept certain people from wanting anything to do with those who are different than they were. This not only has to do with people’s language and color, but also often simply has to do with the fact that they are different in any way at all. (The way you dress, the things you like, the food you eat, where you live, etc.) Simply, I don’t like you because you aren’t like me.” Pretty sad, isn’t it? But we treat each other that way all the time even people who are of the same race, ours! (Just like Adam and Eve’s kids!)

One of the clear evidences of this conflict in the Old Testament is recorded in the books of Exodus and Joshua. In Exodus, we see the Children of Israel battling with the Egyptians and in Joshua, the children of Israel in conflict with the pagan nations of Canaan, the land they were told by God to conquer. Later in the books of Kings and Chronicles, God’s People had to fight against not only their own relatives but also foreign nations who opposed them. One of the hardest questions to answer in the Bible is this: How can God tell us not to be racist, to have an attitude of thinking we are better than someone else, when God also tells His People to kill people who are different than they are? Good question! Answer: God does not think one nation is more important than another, but He does believe that a nation which does not believe in Him deserves to be punished. (This eventually included His own people, Israel.)

As we will see in the New Testament, God considers all people as equal in His sight. But being a God who must be consistent, He must deal with disobedience. Let’s look at it this way. If God did not hold everyone accountable to the same standard then He would be racist. He would prefer one group of people to another. This is based on the basic fact that God considers all people equal. After all, they were all created the same way. God breathed their very life into them. (Genesis 2) “God formed man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man came alive - a living soul.”

We all only live for a limited period of time ((Psalm 90:10.)”We live for seventy years or so with luck we might make it to eighty.” We all eventually die.” We struggle for survival for these few years God gives us on earth” (Ecclesiastes 8:20; 12: 7) we must all give an account to Him of how they live their lives. (Ecclesiastes 12: 13, 14) There is no inequality in the Old Testament.

But we must look to the New Testament to really get a good answer to the problem of racism /the attitude of one group of people thinking they better than another group. Two things need to be noted in the New Testament. First, when Christ was sent into the world, God made several clear statements about how He felt toward different groups of people.

• He is impartial. (Acts 10: 34)
• He loves everyone equally and desires that everyone come to a relationship with Him. (John 3:16; I Timothy 2:3-6, II Peter 3:8,9)
This same principle is evident in the Old Testament when God expresses His desire to proclaim is message of salvation to the whole world. (Psalm 96: 1-3; Psalm 98: 1-9; Psalm 99: 1-5)

- Everyone He brings into His ‘spiritual family’ is considered equal. (I Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 4:3,4) And remember, God considers everyone as equal.

- He desires that everyone who claims to belong to Him treat each other with the same respect and kindness, even their enemies, which is different than it was in the Old Testament (Colossians 3:13, 14)

**Racism and the Gospels**

Some people would suggest that Christ contradicted Himself in His teachings in the New Testament. This is because He first came to give the Gospel of Good News to only the Jews. But, remember, that all changed when the Jews, God’s Old Testament Chosen People, rejected Jesus, A fellow Jew. He allowed His message to go to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. This is clear in John 1:1-14 when it clearly tells us that Christ came to His own group and they rejected Him. “He came to his own people but they didn’t want him. But, of course, He knew that ahead of time and had planned all along to allow anyone (Jew or Gentile) to believe in Him and become part of God’s Family.” But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said. He made them their true selves, their child-of-God selves.” This was His intent in making His promise to Abraham in the Old Testament. (Genesis 15: 1-6; 17: 1-7)

This was His purpose in coming into the word as expressed by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17 with these words, “God did this; created every human and gave them an exact place and time in which to live. He makes the creatures, the creatures didn’t make Him. Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God and not just grope around in the dark but also actually Find Him. He’s not remote, he’s is near to every one of us.”

We can say with certainty that Christ did not contradict Himself. In fact, several times in His ministry on earth, He brought salvation and healing to people who were of a different group than His own group, the Jews.

Three examples:

*The Roman military commander in Luke 7 when Christ healed his servant;
*A Syro-Phoenician woman who He gave the privilege of hearing the Gospel and believing. (Mark 7)
*A Samaritan woman who He shared of truth of who He was and how to find the Living Water He provided. (John 4).

Christ clearly demonstrated his love for and acceptance of other people of other races, nationalities, and backgrounds. He truly demonstrated His love for all people of the world!” This
is how much God loved THE WORLD (caps mine). He gave His Son, His one and only son. II Peter 3: 9.10

Racism and the Book of Acts
One of the best portions of the Bible telling us how God feels about people of other races is found in Acts 10. Here is the account of Peter and a man named Cornelius. God uses a vision to teach Peter that as he can eat many kinds of food, he can also associate with many kinds of people. Cornelius was an Italian and a member of the military. (Who knows, maybe an early version of the ‘Mafia’!) The story goes that Cornelius was praying for someone to come to him and his family and share how they could know the gospel and come to Jesus. And at the same time, Peter was talking to God about what God wanted him to do. And guess what? God told Peter what he was to honor someone who he would consider not only a non-Jew and outsider, but also a pagan person. Luke’s factual account has a wonderful ending. This man and his family all come to Jesus, who considered everyone equal, loved and gave Himself for everyone.

Racism and the Epistles
The writers of the Epistles carry on this theme as they instructed early church members about how they were to treat others. This theme was already highlighted in Acts 2:17-18 when Peter confirmed the Old Testament Prophet Joel who said that God would pour out His spirit on ALL people, sons, daughters, young men, old men, servants, both men and women.” In the last days, I will pour out my spirit on EVERY KIND OF PEOPLE.” (caps mine).”

In the Books of Corinthians and Colossians, the writers say that all persons are equal as members of Christ’s Body. They certainly don’t say anything about the race, nation, or background of a person who is accepted by Christ. Actually these people become part of a different nation and a new race. Let’s look at what Peter has to say in I Peter 2:1-10.

“Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you will serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives to God. But you are the ones chosen by God chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chose to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for Him.”

Racism and the Book of Revelation
In this book concerning the future, the writer John gives us a view about how God feels towards other races and nations in Revelation 7:9-17. Here John describes the throne-room of heaven where Christ is re-united with all those who have believed in Him. Note the words: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from EVERY NATION TRIBE, PEOPLE, and LANGUAGE standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” Again in Revelation 21, John records that when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth and makes heaven and earth into one, “ALL (caps mine) nations will walk by His light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it”. (NIV)
What is clear here is God is not partial toward any group of people. He made, loves, cares for, and desires that all people come into a relationship with Him. People’s rejection of Him does not change the fact that all the things that He says about how He feels about them are true. Only their rejection of Him causes Him to reject them. His reaction is based on their action.

Racism is the feeling of superiority over others, causing us to view people as inferior to ourselves goes against God’s MESSAGE and MODEL. Certainly He could consider Himself to be superior over us and make us feel inferior. We are all part of a race of sinful people and belong to a nation of rebellious people. And yet, God became one of us to make us feel accepted and loved. He did this by sending Christ who allows us to be equal with Him as His sisters and brothers in the Family of God, which includes everyone who believes in/commits their life to Him. (John 1:11-14)

The sad reality is that many of us have an attitude of ‘racism’ taught to us by our parents and modeled by other important people in our lives who have not treated other people the way God has instructed us and shown us to do. He expects that we will have the same attitudes toward others as He has toward us.

MODERN REASONING
Anyone who is different than we are is inferior to us and does not need to be respected or treated the same way we expect to be treated.

RESPONSES
1. God is not a racist, He considers all people equal.
2. Considering ourselves or our race to be superior to others may actually reveal our sense of inferiority to them.
3. Christianity actually teaches us to treat others as he has treated us.
4. God makes His Gospel available to everyone.

RESOURCES
Jelloun, Ben. Racism Explained To My Daughter.
Dyson, Mike Eric. Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line.

FACT
The second highest number of Jewish people in the world live in NYC and the highest population of Latinos outside of Spain live in Los Angeles. 31.1 million Foreign-born people live in the U.S. a 57% increase over 1990.
Teaching Aim: Help students realize that racism is an attitude/actions based on one individual/group of people thinking they are better than another individual/group of people. This thinking is unbiblical, not pleasing to God, and hurtful to others.

Activity: Single out the people in your group who have blue eyes. Give them a special button/or blue dot on their forehead and special privileges that all the other different eye color groups don’t have. Put a black dot on all other foreheads. Maybe serve ‘the group’ a nice meal and all the other group’s crackers and water. Discuss how all the non-blue-eyed people felt about the ‘elite group’. Compare this to how groups in society treat one another.
SABBATH/SUNDAY

Most people today wouldn’t even know what the first word means or even care about the second word. After all, Sunday to them is just another day of the week! So what’s the BIG DEAL? Well for God this day is a big deal. We will see why it is!

In the Hebrew language, the word Sabbath is taken from the word ‘Shabbat’. It means cease, stop activity, rest. In our words, we would say, don’t keep doing on this day the things you do all the other days. Things like shopping, housework…. ah, but I didn’t say homework!

God commanded His People to take this day off! Sabbath or Sabbaths is mentioned some 170 times in the Old and New Testament. It was something He included in the 10 commandments. (Exodus 20:8-11 and in Exodus 31:14-16) “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, you God. Don’t do any work.”

Actually it is the only one of two commandments to take up four verses; the second commandment has to do with not making an idol of something other than God. (Exodus 20:4-6). I think there is a connection here between these two longer commandments, the other one deals with keeping the Sabbath. It is the many things that we do on our spiritual day off that keep us from doing the most important thing - focusing on God by focusing on other gods. And by the way, in Exodus 31, God also told Moses to tell the people that anyone who did not keep the Sabbath was to be put to death. (Can you imagine being struck by lightening if you washed your car after church?)

Fortunately, God has changed the ‘punishment’ but not the principle of the Sabbath. And as we will see, we ‘die’ in other ways, when we forget to honor His Day!

You will note in reading Exodus 20:8-11 that God uses Himself as an example of ‘honoring the Sabbath’. He took the Seventh Day off after He had spent six days creating the world. (I know it seems hard to think of God needing a nap!) But the point God was making wasn’t that He actually needed to rest but that He too needed a ‘day off’ from working, doing the same things He did the other six days, get it?

God also taught the Sabbath principle when He gave the Children of Israel manna, ‘heavenly angel food’ to eat. In Exodus 16, God gave specific instructions about how the manna was to be gathered. (Exodus 16:14-26) It was to be gathered every morning except on the Sabbath. God said through Moses, “Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.” The people were not supposed to do on God’s day off what they did the other days! They were to cease, stop activity, and rest.
It’s important to remember as well that when His People forgot to take off on the Sabbath, they got into trouble. This was because when they did, they forgot to focus on God. They failed to take time from their busy lives the other six days to truly worship and think about Him and all that He had done for them! This is why this day is often called ‘A holy Sabbath to the Lord.’ It was to be a day set apart from all the others and dedicated to Him. After all, He gave all the days for people to enjoy; the least they could do was to give Him one! But God also ask His people to celebrate what we might call Super Sabbath every 49th/50th year which God called the Year of Jubilee.

God talks about that with His people in Leviticus 25: 1-13. It was literally 7 times 7. And there were certain things the people were to do during that year, like not harvesting all the fields (even the land was to rest) so there would be food left over for poor people release slaves, and return all land to its original owner! So, I’d say it was a big deal!

Yet, God’s People forgot his commandment to honor the Sabbath and the Super Sabbath, the very things God had commanded them not to remember. So what happened? There were serious consequences for forgetting these two Sabbaths.

Reason? God also told them that the Sabbath was sign between Himself and His People. In other words, it was to be a trademark of God’s People. This was because no other nations were commanded to make the Sabbath Holy. Only God’s People were asked to do this. So when they forgot the day and forgot God, they looked and acted like people of every other nation! There was not anything different about them. (Ezekiel 20:20) Oh, by the way, God’s chosen people were also made to move to other neighboring nations because they had forgotten God and His day, and they stayed there for the number of years they had forgotten to keep the Sabbath, even! (Ezekiel 20:21-24)

God also mentioned the Sabbath situation in the New Testament in Hebrews 3:7-11 and Hebrews 4: 1-11. Again God says that He set the example of taking a day off by resting on the seventh day, after working on the creation for six days. He also uses the term’ entering into His rest’ to describe the Sabbath. He compares not going into the Promised Land as failing to enter into His rest. In other words, they missed out on the very best He had for them when they didn’t enter into the Sabbath rest. We’d say they worked too hard and didn’t rest enough. They forgot to take a day off. Simply, when they didn’t rest they didn’t get the best!

THE NEW SABBATH
For years, people have argued about what day is the true Sabbath Day. Is it Saturday or Sunday? In the Old Testament, the Jewish people considered Saturday their Sabbath. This is why Jews and some Christians worship on Saturday instead of Sunday.
The reason Sunday has become the day of worship for so many other religious people is due to two things:
1. If you start the week with Monday as the first day, Sunday becomes the seventh day.
2. Sunday is the day on which Christ rose from the dead and is considered the first day of the week. (Matthew 28:1) They believe that Christ’s resurrection marks not only a new day but also a new Sabbath. This is why it’s called the Lord’s Day. This is why many Christians work on Saturday (The Old Sabbath) and go to church/worship on Sunday (The New Sabbath).

Actually what day of the week people make their Sabbath doesn’t matter, according to the apostle Paul when he wrote his letter to the Romans in chapter 14? “Or say one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of their conscience.” Let’s put it this way: “It doesn’t matter WHAT DAY of the week you worship on. What matters is that you take A DAY to worship!” So set a day aside, worship on a Tuesday.

What’s the big deal? The big deal is that we obey God’s command to stop doing on that day what we do all the others days; that we WORSHIP and REST.

Another thing: We really need a little Sabbath every day. This is why we try to take time either at the beginning of the day or at the end of the day or both to be quiet and listen to God, possibly to read the Bible, perhaps to pray. The Sabbath is not just all on one day. God encourages us to’ have a little ‘Sabbaths’ throughout the week’

In fact, in John 4, when Christ met the woman at the well and they got into a discussion about worship, Christ didn’t say WHERE she should worship or WHEN she should worship; what He did say was WHO and HOW she should worship. “True worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23, 24)(KJV) If I were John, I’d say, ‘it’s not where you are…the right kind of building or church service…but who you are, a believer whose life Christ controls, that makes the difference in true worship. “It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God.” Yet the main thing is that people honor the Sabbath on whatever day and in whatever way they chose. (It can even happen on vacation!). I call it ‘spiritual R and R.’

Sometimes I don’t think I’m the right person to be writing about taking Sundays off. That’s because I am a pastor and I work on Sundays! (And for more than an hour, too) I try to find another day of rest. For the single Mom who has to work on Sundays that might work too! Remember it’s not the day but a day that matters. I am not suggesting, though, that we stop going to church on Sundays if we can. Having a Sabbath on a Friday doesn’t mean skipping service if you could be there!

It is important to honor the Sabbath/the Lord’s Day for two reasons:
1. It allowed His people to honor/worship Him. (What He gets out of it)
2. It allowed His People to stop working/start resting. (What we get out of it) He did it not only for Himself because He is God but He did it for us and for our good!

**OUR PROBLEM WITH THE SABBATH TODAY**

There was a time in our country when everything was closed on Sunday, stores, gas stations, and even restaurants. This was because people either believed that this day should honor God or that this day needed to be a day off. In order to make it possible for people not to work on that day, they closed the places they worked! But it also made it easier for people to stay home and/or go to church on that day. Our government, for example, is telling us now that closing on Sundays could violate the constitution. (Would some explain that one? It restricts business?)

American colonies based Sunday laws on English statutes some colonial ‘blue laws’ declared failure to attend church a federal offense! Most often, the state laws prohibited business of any kind on Sunday, but some also banned dancing, playing cards, or having fun then! (Makes you glad you don’t live in colonial days, right?)

Was there a point to all this ‘don’t work on the Sabbath rule’? Yes, there was a manna principle here. People were to collect manna - work at their job for six days so they would have enough manna left over for Sunday. It meant that they would buy their groceries, gas their car, have enough food to eat home instead of eating out, so they ‘wouldn’t have to work’ on Sunday. Yes, we do remember that there are people who have to work seven days or who can’t take Sunday as the day for other reasons; God understands and makes exceptions! That is also why taking little Sabbaths is important.

But in a culture where God and His laws have been ignored, people today, like God’s people years ago, have forgotten what He has commanded them to do. They no longer take a spiritual day off. Oh no! They keep going at the crazy pace they have been going at the other six days! Everything is open…stores, gas stations, restaurants. So people have to work on Sunday to serve the people who come to those places. In addition to that, people can travel more, have more leisure time, and have more money to spend these days, so when it comes to the week-end, they take off! Do they? Ask any pastor where a lot of his sheep are on Sunday! Get the picture: The seventh day has become just like the other six days. There is no difference. But, I think it has made a big difference in our country. The lack of Sabbath has caused people to work or play themselves to death! Maybe we’re paying a price for disobeying God even though we don’t see it.

People don’t cease doing, going, traveling, eating out, etc. They don’t stop their activity, they do not rest. In fact, one of my favorite phrases is that everyone needs ‘R and R’. They need Rest and Recreation. Only I like to look at the word recreation another way, RE-CREATION. I believe people today, just as in days long ago, need to ‘rest in the Lord’
so they can be ‘re-created’. By focusing on and worshipping The Lord they can really rest. We also give a day back to Him. And don’t you think He deserves it; after all He gave us all the other ones?

One of our big problems today is that our life is too fast moving. We have too many things going, we keep speeding things up, the have more and more to do, more places to go. But not only do we seem not to have enough time, but we seem to always be frustrated and tired. What’s wrong with this picture? So many times, I have heard people complain how tired they are from going on vacation and how they need to rest up from resting! What’s wrong with that picture?

What’s wrong is that we have forgotten the Fourth Commandment; we have forgotten not only to take the Sabbath Day off; we have forgotten to take ‘little Sabbaths’ in between. We have forgotten that God gave this commandment not only because it was good for Him, but also it was good for us. When God’s People, Israel, forgot to keep the commandment…that they missed out on the very best He had for them. When we forget to keep it, we miss out on the very best God has for us! We forget him by spending too much time thinking about ourselves and going, coming, rushing, spending, having fun to try to fill the hole in our hearts that is there because we have left God out of our busy, noisy lives. At this rate, we will self-destruct, not only in spiritual ways but in other ways, too!

**HOW TO SPEND THE SABBATH**

My dad grew up in a family of twelve children (He and his twin sister were the last two). His father was a pastor. So Sundays were ‘very serious and not-much-fun days.’

No one was allowed to read the paper and certainly not the funnies. (That’s what they called their cartoons in those days) or play football, or go anywhere but church! They went at least two times on Sunday! Is it any surprise that my Dad’s feelings about the Sabbath /Sundays weren’t very positive? And it took him and his brothers and sisters a long time to actually enjoy Sundays. Of course, some of them (not my Dad. of course) did not honor the Lord’s Day in their lives for years.

In those days, people went too far one way: Sundays were TOO serious. Even though God’s Day off may not be for mowing the grass or going grocery shopping, it sure can be a good day for a nap, or going swimming or a picnic or eating out, for goodness sake. (I really doubt that God would be really hung up over you going water-skiing. but you might want to watch for any storms!). But I do believe that God believes in having FUN; life is too serious not to enjoy yourself, especially on God’s Day off.

These days, we’ve gone too far the other way. Sundays aren’t serious enough! We skip church whenever we feel like it, or at least when it doesn’t rain. We clean the house, and we wash the tractor or whatever. If we do go to church, we want to get it over with as soon as we can so we can do all the other things we have planned. Taking
The Lord’s Day to focus on Him has been replaced by our focusing on ourselves.

So what we need is balance. Let’s put it this way: the Sabbath/Sunday needs to be sacred, taken seriously, but not too seriously!

Here’s a sample day: You and your family get up and go to church and Sunday school, if your church offers that, then you have a meal together, spend some quality time together without necessarily doing the things you do the rest of the week, like going to the Mall! Maybe take some time to reflect on how the Lord has blessed you and what you need his help to do in the week ahead, and have a short time to pray. Then maybe take in a movie or go bike riding or a drive in the country…watch a little T.V., play a game, and have a late night desert. Simple Sabbath rule: Focus on God/Have Fun. And remember to thank God you didn’t live 100 years ago, when people spent the whole day in church

One of the famous creeds of the church says that ‘we were created by God to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever! If you aren’t sure about that, try reading about the parties God’s People had when the walls and the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt (Nehemiah 8:9-12) or when they defeated their enemies in Persia (Esther 8:11-16; Esther 9:18-23) These people worshipped and praised God but they enjoyed Him, too!

God isn’t against partying, as long as we do it for the right reason and in the right way. And you know what? Most people who don’t take Sundays off or who don’t go to church don’t because they think that it’s all about a bunch of rules and a bunch of people sitting around with sad looks on their faces doing nothin’ that’s fun. And, yes, there are a lot of church people who do look and act that way. That’s what I think of when I think of my Dad and all his brothers and sisters sitting around in their stiff church clothes all day reading their Bibles. But, I don’t think that’s what God had in mind when He thought up the idea of the Sabbath.

WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT THE LORD’S DAY FROM THE LORD
1. Taking a spiritual day off not only allows us to focus on Him but to be refreshed ourselves; it provides ‘R and R’ - Rest and re-creation.)

2. The Sabbath should be different than all the other days of the week. We are to cease/stop doing the things we usually do on the other days. This day is meant to be different. It is to be a ‘trademark’ showing that God’s people live their lives differently.

3. Our Sabbath should be sacred but not too serious. Although we do different things on that day from the other days, we should enjoy this day, as God would want us to. We can focus on the object of our faith and still have FUN!!
God took a day off for a good reason. It’s a reason we should remember today in a world that has too little time for God and too little time to really rest and have a really good time! People would be so surprised if they really understood what the Sabbath means and could change their lives! Christians should be the ones to show others how to use the Sabbath in the way God intended!

**MODERN REASONING**
Sunday is like any other day except it’s on a weekend, which means that, it should be for time-off and for fun, which usually means without attending church!

**RESPONSES**
1. God had a Sabbath day off in order to set a good example for us to follow.
2. We need to make little Sabbath’ a part of every day.
3. If we honor the Sabbath Day, the rest of our week will go better.

**RESOURCES**
Dawn, Marva. Making the Sabbath Special.
Mains, Karen. Making Sunday Special.

**FACT**
Blue Laws: The idea of a ‘Blue Law’ goes back to Rome in the 4th century when Constantine I, the first Christian emperor, commanded all citizens, except farmers, to rest on Sunday and was first used in the United States to close all businesses on the Sabbath in 1781.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* To teach that God commands, models, and points out the benefits of having a ‘time-out’ from our everyday routine regularly each week for taking time to focus on God and to take a rest ourselves.

*Activity:* Create a large calendar putting a green ‘X’ on Sundays then talk about how we can make our ‘Sabbath day’ different from all the other days and why it would help us if we do. Make an action plan to how you change your ‘Sabbath habits.’
I know…just to have someone say that word brings up a whole bunch of thoughts and not all of them GOOD. Well, maybe we can change all that! When it comes to education, the Bible actually says very little about school. But, it does have some pretty significant things to say about ‘schooling.’

**SCHOOLING**

The heart of education in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is what parents teach their children. This is part of what Moses had to say to The Children of Israel when he ‘stated the law again’ in the Book of Deuteronomy. (Chapter 6: 1-9) This portion is actually an ‘echo’ of Deuteronomy 4:9. It goes with the instruction of Moses to his class of 6 million people (Try grading papers for that group!) in Deuteronomy 11: 18-21 and Deuteronomy 32:46, 47. We might again call this Biblical concept, ‘Holy Home Schooling’. True education according to the Scriptures, is to begin and continue at home through the parents teaching their children.

This ‘home schooling concept’ is reflected in other parts of the Old Testament by the writer of Psalms (Psalm 119: 11) (Psalm 78: 1-7) and the writer of Proverbs (Proverbs 22:6); it would seem rather obvious that both these writers had been ‘home schooled.’

It is also recorded in the New Testament in two of the most familiar portions, Ephesians 6: 1-4 and Colossians 3: 20, 21.

Although it doesn’t exactly say that parents at home should teach children, it does suggest that parents (particularly fathers) are to TRAIN and INSTRUCT their children. It is an echo of the Old Testament. If the parent is to instruct their child, he and she will do that when they are around the children. So, this most usually would be at home or doing things families do, things like going to school, buying groceries, having a dental appointment, going to Little League practice, taking the dog to the vet, or sharing a vacation together. It doesn’t say so much about going TO a school away from home as being IN a school, at home. The thought of sending a child TO school was not familiar to Jewish parents.

Before we look at the issue of school more closely, we need to look more closely at what the ‘home school education’ was all about. The 3 K’s! (Before the 3 R’s)

1. Knowing about God, what He was doing in their lives, and loving Him. (Deuteronomy 4:9; Psalm 78: 1-4)

2. Knowing about God’s laws for life. (Psalm 119: 11)

3. Knowing about how to relate one’s faith in God to every day life. (Ephesians 6:3, 4)
This portion actually connects with Exodus 20:12; the commandment about the relation of children to their parents and the promise of long life if they respond in the right way!

Again we see that the parents are to TRAIN and INSTRUCT the children. What do these words mean? The word train means to guide someone in the right way. The word ‘instruct’ means to show them how to get to where the right way takes them. Certain translations of the Bible explain this home schooling is one that comes from precept and example. Another way to explain this is: the parent is responsible for the TELLING (precept) the child what to do and SHOWING (example) them how to do it. Maybe this is where Show and Tell’ come from! To train is to tell somebody WHAT he or she should do; to instruct is to show somebody HOW to do it.

The word picture in the Scriptures is that of getting a plant to grow in the right direction. A tomato plant, for instance. To get this to happen, you put a metal frame around the plant and with the right amount of sunlight and rain, the plant takes the shape of the metal frame around it. So it goes with parents who train and instruct their children. It is important that this continues to happen throughout the growing up years of the child, whether they are home- schooled or go to a public school. In other words, the parent of the child has a responsibility to educate their child no matter whom else is doing it. This is because often a child who is not home-schooled or does not attend a religious school does not have the benefit of religious education, which the parent can and should give to them. This means, of course, that the parent has a religious faith/belief system that they can use as a basis for training (what) and instruction (how).

In the book Indivisible, the writers, James Robison and Jay Richards comment: “If you send your children to a public school, you have to supplement their education if you want them to see how God and their faith are relevant to all those subjects studied in school."

Before we talk about ways to get an education, I’d like to talk about the basics of schooling in today’s society. We have reviewed the education process in Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Proverbs, Colossians and Ephesians. It is one that centers in the interaction between the parent and the child.

But that is a challenge in America today. The statistics about how much time parents, especially fathers, spend with their children aren’t especially encouraging. One of the other challenges is kids having too many things to do and too many places to go.

I was recently reading an editorial about homework written by a father of two children, a daughter, 8 and a son, 5. He comments about how last semester she had squeezed homework into a crowded routine that included after school Spanish lesson, karate, and drama and that this semester she was only taking gymnastics. (Whew)
Without intending to, a lot of parents have gotten their kids into all kinds of activity because they may feel guilty for not spending time with them. They so they fill up the time with other things, think that the busier the children the less chance they will have to get in trouble, and perhaps letting other adults take on the role of being with/educating their child while they use their time for other interests.

We probably would do our kids a big favor if we cut back on the activity and the T.V. for that matter. This way we could have more time, even time to do home work. (Yah, I know, you’d rather be roller-blading).

But I also believe that we could use the times together going all those places as teaching moments. There are still plenty of opportunities for parents to teach their children through the natural events of everyday life.

I can remember one of our greatest teaching moments as a family was when one of our pets was rushed to the ‘vet’, we talked about things like’ why would God let this happen to an innocent animal’ and would there be pets in heaven? Many planned times of Family Devotions would end in disaster; when our unplanned times of ‘Crisis Education’ would work out really well. Maybe that was because God had our attention and we had to talk about how our faith related to everyday life!

The fathers and mothers in the Bible probably had a lot more time since they didn’t have to fight freeway traffic to get home. They had a lot more time to spend with their kids since so much of their life was spent working together, in the fields, etc. Education for them was not so much an EVENT as much as a PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE. I think we need to re-capture that today.

And the activity trend may be starting to change. According to a recent poll in leading parent magazine, 86% of parents polled believed that their children were over-scheduled. Maybe parents are beginning to realize that just because a kid knows how to win at soccer may not mean they can win at life!

But it’s time to get back to school. There are two concerns: The first issue has to do with schools for different grade levels; the second has to do with the type of schools we can choose from.

GRADE LEVELS/TYPES OF SCHOOLS

Grade School/High School If a child is not home schooled, and then their parent may want them to go to a public or a religious school. Some religious schools are private. These are usually run by a church or religious organization. Unlike students who attend public schools, these kids have to pay a special tuition/special fees and possibly wear uniforms, all this to get a special education of which religious training is a part. Some students only attend a Christian school thru
their elementary years, possibly grades 1-6 or 1-8; other kids attend ‘parochial’/private school’ thru graduation from high school.

After our children attended public school up thru seventh grade, we asked them if they wanted to attend a Christian Junior High or high School. They said ‘no’ and decided to continue in public school. They were involved in the choice.

**College** Often a Christian young person who has attended a Christian Grade School or High School wants to continue their education in a Christian College. Some who have gone to public school all their life will want a Christian College experience. Too, kids who have been in Christian School all their life want the experience of a public institution when they hit college. It is important, though, to prepare the ‘Home Schooled kid’ and the Christian Schooled kid for public school. It can be a jolt!

I have one brother and one sister. My brother attended a public grade school and a private Christian High School. My sister attended a Christian Grade School, a Christian High School, and a Christian College. I attended a public grade school, a public high school, and a Christian College. Different people choose different things. We had different needs.

I have discovered, however, that one kind of school is not for everyone. Some students who have attended Christian schools feel they need to be exposed to the setting of a public school. Others who have attended public schools feel that they need to be in a setting that is different than the public school. Both sets of students have good reasons for their choices. In all three of our situations, the education from our parents was still the most important part of their education and made the greatest impact in our lives! (Still today as adults)

In either case the education may be similar but the environment is very different. Generally, kids who are home-schooled have a better education than those in public school and seem to do okay socially, even though they have not been in the classroom with a lot of other kids their own age. *(SEE PEERS)*.

We find an early version of home schooling in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Here Daniel and his three Babylonian buddies were far from home. They were considered exiles (a word related to exit); they had been forced to leave their country. They wound up being chosen as part of the Babylonian wise guys who helped the Babylonian people learn about the Jewish people who were exiles, too. They were at the top of the class, way smarter than the other guys. This was because they had had good training at home in Judah. History indicates that they were probably relatives of the king and came from good homes. But also, in the court of a foreign king they were not sent to a university, they trained at home in the king’s court. And the results were impressive.
Home schools, by the way, have come a long way in being recognized as good schools. In a Home School Legal Defense Association survey of 5,000 adults home-schooled seven or more years, the following was identified:

1. Home School Students made better citizens. They voted in more elections. (76% compared to public school graduates of just 29%)
2. Home School Students were more likely to work for/contribute financially to a political campaign.
3. Home Schools had a higher enjoyment of life quotient. (59% compared to the public.28%)
4. Home School students were more like to be involved in regular community service. (71% to 37%)

And would Home School Students home school their own children? 82% said they would and 75% were already doing it!

**PERSPECTIVES ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

1. A private school education is never a substitute for one’s education at home.
   A child or young person’s education must always start and continue at home. This is not necessarily home school; it is the school of life that becomes by being a part of by being part of a family. This education of children is the primary task of the parent/parental unit. This education involves all parts of life. This, of course, includes the spiritual area, which is the most important. It also includes relationships with others, how to manage money, time, and resources, how to cooperate with people authority (parents) and how to get along with people (brothers and sisters), how to deal with sex, help in making life choices and important decisions, how to prepare for a life’s work. These things can best be taught by a parent through training, what to do, and instruction, how to do it. No institution can ever take the place and do the job of the parent better than the parent can!

   Organizations like schools, churches, scout troops, Sunday Schools; youth organizations can only strengthen what the child is learning at home they can never be a substitute for the parent. Too often a parent who is either too busy or feels too inadequate to teach their child, simply expects public or private school to do their basic job.

2. A private school education is never security from the dangers of the real world.
   Too many parents and kids today believe that if you go to a Christian school then you’ve got it made. Parents not only assume that they don’t have responsibility for the education of their kids; but also assume that their kids won’t lose their faith or have to deal with ‘the big bad world out there. Why? They are in safe school. I can assure you this is not always the case. I have known too many kids who have messed up and too many parents who realized too late that a Christian School is not the answer to every need. It is when parents substitute another school for the school at home that their kids too often let go of their faith and more often than not get carried away by
the influence of the world. Why? Because they have not understood their faith well enough to be able to hold onto it in a world that wants to blow it away. Too many parents don’t have the answers to their kids questions about faith so let the experts at the private school or Sunday School take care of that! Other parents who don’t care about religious education simply want public school, or anyone else for that matter to make sure their kids turn out right!

3. A private school education is never permanent solution to the issues of personal and spiritual life. Let me illustrate this thought with a simple example. Which of us have a car that we’ve only have to ‘gas up’ once? So why is it we think then, that once we come to Christ, at a point of making a commitment of our life to Him, that’s all we need to do? Jesus is not looking for just converts but lifelong followers! Most of us realize that we need to fuel our spiritual engine often. Believing in/receiving Christ as Savior is only the beginning of a lifelong walk with Him. Author, Eugene Peterson, describes that walk in his book entitled, Discipleship: A Long Obedience in the Same Direction. In other words, the road to heaven to be with God is one that involves a lot of stops along the way for questions about faith, dealing with temptations, figuring out how to relate the Bible to everyday life. That’s one of the reasons for this book! We all need help learning to make right decisions, and finding out what you believe and how to defend your faith.

If this is so, then why do we think that if we enroll a child in a religious institution in grade school, high school, or college, this is all we need to do? There they will get all the answers, deal with all the problems, overcome all the challenges! Going to the ‘right school’ is no guarantee that one has the answers. Finding the answers to the issues of life requires entering into the school of lifelong learning. And by the way, no one ever graduates from this school, sometimes referred to as the ‘School of Hard Knocks’ unfortunately! Your diploma is surviving! In reality, finishing at any school, including home school is only the beginning of one’s real life education which continues throughout their life.

4. Private School Education is never a guarantee of success. More than one person has completed their Christian education but still been uneducated in terms of how to live life successfully. What comes to mind is the situation where, for example, a girl starts to date a Christian guy. At least he says he is and after all she met him at a Christian College so he must be alright, right? They fall in love, and then comes the wedding, a Christian wedding in a church, of course! But in a matter of a few years, the wife learns that her husband either isn’t really a Christian after all; he said he was but does not act like or treats her in a way that a Christian husband should. Hey, anyone can put anything on their job application and they can lie about if they have ever been in jail or taken drugs, too. So what difference does it make if someone tells you that they are a Christian because they go to church or because they went to a religious school IF they don’t choose to live according to the things they learned in school? What if how they behave doesn’t match with how they say they believe?
This fourth perspective relates to the first three. Back to the groom for a minute; the guy told his bride to be that he was a Christian. Let’s say his parents sent him off to a Christian school. They figured that even if they didn’t believe in any religion, and certainly not Christianity, that their son would get the religious education he needed to make up for the one they didn’t give him. Or they were Christians, sent him off to their favorite private school but did not really give him a good model of how a Christian would act at home. So even though he went to this school that was supposed to make him okay, he never really believed it. Or he did believe it but never really learned how to live it out in the real world!

Let’s put it this way: success does not depend on what degree you get from what school—it depends on to what degree you live out and practice what you’ve learned in every day life! The wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, defined wisdom this way: ‘being skillful in the art of living.’ A person with real knowledge knows how to use it. Being able to live skillfully is the most important basis of success. Solomon, by the way, was also the guy who wrote about and talked about wisdom but later in his life failed to put it into practice. He made serious choices that not affected his marriage but his family and a whole nation of people and he was Home Schooled! King Solomon is a classic example of having the right education with the wrong kind of life. I make my point!

Let’s go back, for a minute to where we started: The basis of real education is to take place in the home. This is holy home schooling. Remember? It can be compared to the foundation of a house. First comes the foundation, and then comes the house. And the house is only as strong as the foundation. This education foundation is laid during the years the child is at home. The house is built during the rest of the child’s life. The foundation is built with training and instruction. The builders are the parents. The house is built by the understanding and application of the training and instruction.

The church, the type of organizations a child/youth belong to, the kind of schools they attend can help strengthen the foundation but they cannot replace it. These things can help a child or youth build on the foundation but the foundation of personal faith and real life education comes from the child’s parents.

And remember, no parent or school, public or private can be totally responsible for the way the house is built. Hey kids, remember too, that your parents can start you out, but you are responsible for how you finish. Success in life is not only up to your parents; it’s also up to you. Everyone is responsible for what they do with the basic education they got at home and at school; they have to build their own house. Well, news flash, parents are human, they try hard, and they make mistakes. I say, “Give them a break.” Yes, there are bad parents in the world, but a lot of kids with those kinds of parents decided to turn out okay. Some kids need to stop holding everyone else responsible for how their building did or didn’t turn out and then accept responsibility themselves.
In the words of the Scripture in I Corinthians 3:10-17, “You are God’s house. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls. Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation. Remember, too, that there is only one Foundation, the one already laid, Jesus Christ. Take particular care in picking out your building material. Eventually there is going to be an inspection. If you use cheap or inferior materials, you’ll be found out. If your work passes inspection, fine; if it doesn’t your part of the building will be torn out and started over. But you won’t be torn out, you’ll survive, but just barely.” (The Message)

God does not want us only to graduate with a ‘D’ average or worse yet flunk out. He wants us to graduate with honors and excel in what we LEARN so we can excel in how we LIVE! No matter what school we attend, we will never graduate from ‘The School of Life’, the one that matters most. But what we learn ‘at school’ will make the difference as to whether we are an honor student in ‘The School of Life’ or not!

MODERN REASONING
Public School is the only way to go, because we pay taxes to run it. Any other kind of school is not quite as good.

RESOURCES
Sheble, Jan. School Choices: What’s best for your child?
McEwan, Elaine. When Kids Say ‘No’ To School: Helping children at risk of failure, refusal, or dropping out.

RESPONSES
1. True education continues to be at home and through what we are taught by our parents.
2. The basis of true education is helping a child learn what they need to know and how to use it in everyday life.
3. The quality of one’s education depends more on the kind of person one is than the kind of school they go to.

FACT
The parent is still the child’s primary teacher. 70% of the child’s words are learned by age 3; 80% of their knowledge by age 5; and 90% of their personality is shaped by age 7.
(Before second grade - even!)

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: School is a system/activity by which a person becomes educated with life skills.
Activity: Have each person in the group set up an interview with someone who works with schools. (Teacher, Principal, Coach, etc.)

Interview topic:
1. How do schools today compare with schools when you were a kid?
2. What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of today’s school system?
3. What change would this person make in today’s schools?

Report back to the group at the next meeting.
SMOKING

Well, Mr. ‘Issues’, this should be worth reading. Like there’s anything in the Bible about smoking! I’ll have to admit; about the closest you get to smoking in that book is what happens while you’re preparing the burnt offerings for God!

So, don’t expect to turn to your Index or Bible Concordance under ‘S’ for smoking or ‘T’ for tobacco. But where do we turn in finding information on this issue?

*First, we look to a non-Biblical source. We look at a history book.*
History records that smoking didn’t become a part of everyday life until people started growing tobacco in the southern United States. And you’re asking…that was because? It made money, of course! (Forget how much money it would cost to treat all the sickness that came from smoking!)

Now people have smoked all kinds of things for years. Roots, pipes, about anything they could light and inhale. Yet it was tobacco that put smoking within reach of many more people. Hey, that’s why tobacco growers bought slaves to work the field and paid for them with tobacco profits!

Oh, and another thing that our country introduced to the world is marketing. This is the way advertisers sell things like tobacco. They make it the acceptable and expected thing to do and people buy into the line and buy their product. So, tobacco and smoking have become a big part of American life. Americans have become addicted to them.

It is estimated that 34% of the 50 million smokers in America try to kick the habit. 80-85% will go back. That is certainly proof of addiction to smoking and that it’s a good idea never to start! And there is another reason. The connection between smoking and smoking-related death is clear. This is especially true as it relates to certain types of cancer and other illnesses that affect the heart and lungs.

*We also need to look at THE Book, the Bible*
In the Bible, the basis of this issue is built on three principles:

1. Smoking is not a natural activity. This is confirmed by the fact that a person often reacts to smoking with physical discomfort like nausea or severe coughing. (Hello!—is your body trying to tell you something?)

2. Smoking is not something God intended for a person to engage in. That was because it wasn’t good. Of course, if smoking didn’t happen until much later in the history of humans, long after the Bible was written, then it makes sense that it wouldn’t refer to it. But it still doesn’t
make sense to smoke! God obviously talked about engaging in other things that were around in Bible times that were not good for people, try eating too much. (The Bible calls it gluttony)

3. Smoking is harmful to a person’s body and health. (No matter how healthy the people look who advertise it!) There is a link between these three. 1 + 2 = 3. If smoking is not natural, and it is not something God intended for a person to do, it makes sense that doing it is harmful, not healthy for a person to smoke.

This is different than the subject of drinking alcohol. Booze is something that showed up in the very first book of the Bible! The Scriptures do discuss alcohol/getting drunk and why that’s bad, but we don’t have any such stories about smoking. But remember, grapes were around and people learned how to make them ferment so they could make wine.

4. Smoking is harmful to an individual’s spiritual health. The Bible doesn’t make a direct correlation between a physical habit and one’s spiritual life but there is a connection.

Let me explain: In I Corinthians 6 it says that “God gave us our bodies and we should use them to do things that please Him.” As we have seen before in studying other issues, it means what it says. Here’s a ‘no-brainer’: something a person does that causes him or her to be sick or become diseased is HARMFUL AND SHOULD NOT BE DONE! It may be easy to figure the physical harm, but how can smoking be harmful spiritually?

First, it is harmful because a person is doing something that they know directly goes against God’s rules, one of which is in I Corinthians 6. “Take good care of the body God gave you since it actually belongs to Him. (Paraphrase) The rule is also stated another way in Romans 12 when the writer says, “so here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday ordinary life; your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life and place it before God as an offering.” Question: Can a person who smokes and hurts their body give that body to God, as a sacrifice that is good and acceptable. (Romans 12: 1)

Secondly, the person who is hurting their body may actually be shortening their life. That’s right. If they shorten it, they will not live as long as God intends for them to live or do the things He has planned for them to do. Pretty hard to do them when a person is dead, right? Three thousand teens a day, in fact, take up smoking! (That is a real problem…more addicts, more shorted lives!)

I’ve heard all the arguments:
Smoking is the way I can feel accepted by other kids.
Smoking relieves pressure.
Smoking helps me lose weight and stay thin.
Smoking helps calm my nerves so I can work better. And besides, I can give up cigarettes anytime, if I want to! (Yes, we’ve noticed)
Funny, you don’t hear people say smoking has given me disease or is causing me to die. It’s interesting, isn’t it? And a lot of tobacco companies have been sued for saying what’s good about smoking but forgetting to tell us what’s bad about it. That ‘oops’ has cost a lot of money and a lot of people losing their lives!

I’ve often wondered…if smoking is so great, then why do so many people want to stop? (34% of 50 million!) Those activities don’t cause them to be addicted (although there are people who might be addicted to Sit-coms!) And these activities don’t usually kill them. These activities are pretty natural. God intended for people to do things that bring them pleasure IF doing those things don’t harm them. Smoking, on the other hand does not make the natural list. It may bring pleasure but it can also bring pain.

Perhaps one of the most significant factors relating to smoking does not come from the Bible at all. It comes from the culture and a lot of people who probably don’t even believe in the Bible. Today more and more people are concerned about the effect of smoking. Outlawing smoking has become a campaign, right along with save the whales. (I’m all for whales, but I’m much more interested in saving people!) Smoking is not allowed in many places where it used to be allowed in places like airplanes and restaurants, for example. The main reason for this campaign against smoking is that people are realizing that smoking is a bad thing for a person to do.

For years tobacco companies have tried to sell us (the American public) on how safe smoking is. They have tried to tell us that cigarettes are safer because they are filtered. They have lied to us, but we have found out the truth. This is why on cigarette packs or cartons and on billboards, is told that cigarette smoking can be dangerous to their health. (A government regulation!) It causes harm to unborn children when their mothers are expecting them, causes cancer of several different kinds and other diseases.

And the smoker is not the only one affected! So are the people who are around the smoker via second-hand smoke! One of the great hidden dangers with smoking is the impact of second hand smoke on innocent non-smokers. The damage to them is nearly as great as to the smokers themselves!

And by tobacco, we also mean cigars and chewing tobacco, the kind of tobacco that people spit out! (The kind those baseball pitchers used to roll around in their mouth before they throw out that big curve ball…after they SPIT on IT!) Thankfully, sunflower seeds are now more popular than tobacco.

Keep in mind something else about smoking tobacco. It can lead to smoking other things, things like grass and harder drugs. Let’s put it this way: once you’ve smoked a cigarette it’s a whole lot easier to smoke something else. A lot of people who start with a simple cigarette are like people
who have their first drink, or watch their first porn on the Internet or put their first nickel in a slot machine. They can get hooked right away.

It is true that every person who starts to smoke doesn’t get sick. It is also true that every person who smokes does not get cancer. But one thing is almost always true. A person who starts smoking can easily become controlled by it. That’s how it is with nicotine. (Some people say that’s how it is with caffeine, too, but coffee is not probably going to kill you!) Smokers start with wanting to and soon come to a place where they have to. They have lost control over the white master which has taken control of them. Smoking is their master and they are its slave. Their life is controlled by four inches of tobacco.

One of the encouraging things today though is how many people want to quit smoking. So there are a lot more programs and plans that help people do that. Yet, thousands of kids start the habit every day. Why? Perhaps, like tattoos, they ignore all the things they may know to be true. What they want to do becomes more important than what they should do. And, they don’t see the long-term effects of their choice. Like the lady who explains to her grandkids her odd tattoo, the granddad has to someday explain to kids why he now has emphysema or lung cancer. Seems like T.V. magazines, and other kids are telling them to start; but no one from the tobacco company or their groups of friends is around to help them stop!

As kids, boys don’t see themselves as old men with throat cancer possibly unable to speak or swallow with pain. As kids, girls don’t see themselves as old women with hardened skin that takes away their beauty and makes them age faster than they would have. As a teenager, a person doesn’t think about the smell of smoke on everything in their home, clothes, and hair or the smoke that other people will have to inhale. Sadly, it’s a lie that a lot of kids believe. They pay a high price for not listening to the truth, which they often don’t or won’t hear UNTIL they realize they are addicted or diseased!

At a Middle School in our area, the police department is trying a new, Anti-Smoking Approach. It pictures of long-time smokers, and tobacco-chewers and how they look after years of using. And police presenter says: “If you ever want to chew this stuff, just think about the people in these pictures” (With cancer of the mouth and the throat!) And the program is working!

My mother used to comment about the kind of clothes kids wore. “If you told them they had to dress that way, they would do just the opposite.” (In other words, look neat and clean). If you apply that rule to smoking, it would go something like this: “If you told kids they had to smoke, they would just the opposite. In other words, they wouldn’t. But because you tell them not to, that’s exactly what they’ll do.
Maybe some of you have seen the commercial about Tobacco High School where everyone attends there has to smoke, including the faculty. The smoke and the disease are disgusting, but smart kids don’t enroll. Do I make my point?

It would be safe to say then that kids may smoke because it’s cool but they also may do it because they know it will make their parents upset! Or they consider it cool to do an adult thing because their parents do it. After all, does a parent really expect a kid NOT to consider smoking when they have grown up in smoke all their life? There are so many times when I have seen a young mother of father smoking in front of/getting ashes all over their kids/making their children breathe smoke-filled air and say, “Do you have any idea what you are doing to your kids? You are setting them up to be addicts and/or to be ill!” (But I lose my nerve)

Whatever the reason, no reason is good enough to start smoking. Simply, it costs a lot in more ways than one! It’s dirty; from ashes on your clothes, to stained teeth, to smoke smell on your clothes, to cigarette butts in your car or on the street; and as we have seen it’s not healthy.

I close with something a wise person once said about smoking: “Kids start smoking to prove their grown up and 30 years later try to stop for the same reason.” Think about that the first time you think about lighting up!

**MODERN REASONING**
Smoking is not a big deal...a lot of people do it...you can stop when you want to—not everybody who smokes dies from smoking anyway!

**RESPONSES**
1. Smoking is not a natural thing to do.
2. Smoking is a harmful thing to do for yourself and for others in your life.
3. Smoking is something that can make it easier for you to do other things that are harmful to you.

**RESOURCES**
Esopenko, Gerald. *Stop Smoking, Made E-Z.*
Rustin, Terry. *Quit and Stay Quit.*

**FACT**
In 1972 a patent was granted for a cigarette package that ‘coughed’ when the lid was opened!

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* Being involved with something like smoking that brings pleasure to them is also harmful to them.
Activity: Use an actual cigarette (unlighted) to illustrate two things:
Talk about reasons why it’s cool to start. Talk about reasons why it’s cool to stop. (Based on people you know)
Group one- Cool to start
Group two- Cool to stop
SPORTS

Well, now the guys are happy! We have finally scored with a topic that they really like. But we can’t limit sports to guys. These days girls are involved in all the major sports, right? I know of a situation when a Rose Festival Queen in Portland, Oregon was actually a member of the Senior Varsity Football Team. Okay, she was a kicker but she was on the team. Won more than one game, I understand! Not only that, but we have all kinds of women’s sports events in the Olympics including Baseball, Basketball, and Volleyball, of course! And they are just as good if not better than the guys as a matter of fact.

So, why are sports an issue?

Answer: It’s not are they okay? Its how important are they?

We can’t exactly find sports all over the pages of the Bible. Some people think they are in there though. Perhaps you’ve heard the old lines about “Where is baseball first mentioned in the Bible?” In Genesis 1:1 where it ways that ‘in the big-inning’ God created the heaven and the earth. Or ‘where is tennis referred to?’ In Genesis 41 when it tells us ‘that Joseph served in Pharaoh’s courts’! (And about now you’re doing what we call a ‘groaner’…not laughing but groaning!) Seriously, it does indicate that Jacob did have a REAL wrestling match with angels in the Old Testament. “But Jacob stayed behind by himself, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.” (Genesis 32)

We do see sports referred to in the New Testament, however, where Paul uses athletic terms several times:

Track and Field

“This is the only race worth running. I’ve run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. (II Timothy 4:7)

“Start running and never quit. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished the race we’re in.” (Hebrews 12:1)

“I don’t know about you but I’m running hard for the finish line. I’m giving it everything I’ve got.” (I Corinthians 9:24)

Wrestling

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness.” (Ephesians 6:12 - NKJV)
Boxing
“I do not run aimlessly nor do I box as though beating the air” (I Corinthians 9:26 - RSV) “I have fought a good fight” (II Timothy 4:7 - RSV)

Sports in General
I Timothy 2:5 “Any athlete who refuses to play by the rules will never get anywhere.”

“The fact that God uses sports terms to convey His truths would suggest that they were a part of everyday life then and so they are now. And they are not bad! Maybe we don’t learn a lot ABOUT sports in the Scriptures but we can learn some very important things FROM sports. We learn that life is like a game. In this game there are rules, requirements, and rewards.

Rule: Example: “If you don’t wear your seat belt you could get thrown out of your car.”

Requirement: Example: “If you don’t eat regularly, you’ll starve to death.” Or “if you don’t eat right, you’ll become overweight or get sick

Rewards: Example: “If you get a high school education, you’ll have a better chance at getting a job!”

We learn that you have to play by the rules and meet the requirements in order to get rewarded. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “Any athlete who refuses to play by the rules will never get anywhere.” In other simpler words, if you don’t play by the rules, you don’t win the game. (II Timothy 2:4)

We learn that life is a fight, too. It’s great to be alive but life is especially hard in the world we live in today. It is hard because kids have to deal with not giving into bad temptations and trying to make right choices.

We learn that we are responsible for how we live our lives, run our race, and fight our fight. God gives us the gift of life and He expects a ‘return on His investment’. IT DOES MATTER HOW WE PLAY THE GAME OF LIFE! Winning at spiritual sports is even more important! This is exactly what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he used ‘sports terms’ to describe life and how to live it.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians in the book by the same name, he was picturing the Olympic Games, called the Isthmus Games then. He puts it this way: “Do you not know that in a race all runners compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it!” (RSV) “We must all stand before God Christ someday, at the Judge’s station and receive the
reward for what we have done or lose the reward for what we haven’t done.” (II Corinthians 5:10) He pictured the ‘Olympic Judge’ placing a medal around our neck for first, second, third winner. “So do you suppose that there will be more than one winner in the race? But even in the Olympics they don’t give an award for LAST place!” (The Message)

And here’s the kicker (in the interest of sports…soccer to be specific). Paul puts it this way: “All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You’re after the one that’s gold eternally.” (I Corinthians 9:25) In reality, the ‘gold medal’ of that day was a little crown of leaves, laurel leaves to be exact. Athletes would train for months and months, often in bad weather with only light clothing on so they could ‘win in their event’ and all for a little wreath that would wilt by the evening. But God says that in our game/race, we work hard so that we will get a reward/medal, which will last longer than one day. It will last all the days of eternity!

Our answer to the first issue is clear: Sports are okay; they have always been a part of life. God uses ‘sports terms’ to teach us about the game of life.

The second issue isn’t as clear. That has to do with how important are sports. Are they important? The answer would be yes. I mean do you expect me to say no in an age of where people worship at the shrines of the NFL and NBA…where everybody’s kid is on a team, driven to practice by a ‘soccer moms’…and where ABC Sports gives night and day coverage to the Winter and Summer Olympics, the PGA National championship and the finals at Wimbledon? (Hey, I would strike out if I said ‘nay’ not ‘yeah’ to sports!!)

But here’s the problem: Sports can become too important! Let’s see why. Here are some examples of how sports have become too important.

~ Some men know more Monday Night football games than the Sunday school lesson. (They know more sports teams than authors of the Bible)
~ Some kids know more baseball statistics than Bible verses (And not too many kids are trading Bible Verse Cards are they?)
~ Some families are too busy with going to, attending, and coming home from sports activities, that they don’t have time to do other things’ like eat together or have time just to talk, unless you call giving directions to the next swimming meet as conversation!
~ Many sports programs demand that there be practices or attendance at games during times when kids would maybe like to be at church, or with their youth group. This happens on Wednesday nights (Youth group), Sunday morning (Church and Sunday school), and Saturdays (Confirmation Class). You miss the sports thing; you’re off the team! (And ruin your career when you’re still in 3rd grade!)
~ More people these days talk about and get excited about the game more than the Gospel, the great news about God giving us His Son to be our Savior; to help us play and win in the game of life. (It’s okay to be a fan just not a faith fan-atic!)
Please don’t assume that I’m anti-sports. I don’t happen to be an athlete I (except maybe for playing tennis and water-skiing; not exactly contact sports!) But, I have lots of friends who are and have known many people over the years who love them.

The Bible also talks about ‘little gods’ distract us or keep us from ‘The Big God’, so to speak. For instance, in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), God reminds His People to have no other gods before Him. Later on He calls these gods idols. “Don’t take up with non-god idols. Don’t make god of cast metal. I am God, your God.” (Leviticus 19: 4)

Is it possible that sports have become gods or idols to us? Someone has said that each week thousands of people ‘bow at the Pigskin Shrine in their T.V. temple.’ Thousands of people who don’t sit in recliners at home sit in bleachers and in stadiums to worship their favorite team…at the altar of the pigskin! Their team has become their ‘little god’. They worship an idol. Why? Because it has replaced God as the object of their love, time, and attention, that’s why! And note, they are often much more excited and express more emotion than they would ever think of doing in a church service.

The story is told of a wife who came into the family room running the vacuum. The husband shouted: “What are you doing, the game is still on?” She hollered back, “I’m cleaning the stadium!” How many sports guys can relate to that!?

When God says that He doesn’t want any other gods before Him, that’s what He means! And then there’s the half-time commercials telling us about/selling us on all the things we must have. And don’t think that advertisers don’t know how many people are watching.

Football, for instance, has been described at 90,000 people desperately in need of exercise watching 22 people desperately in need of rest! Did you know by the way that the average life time of an N.F.L. Football player is 59 years!

So, too much time with sports, watching or participating, and we can become obsessed with athletics and often ignore other things that are as important or more important. (Like how many kids have tried to get their dad to play ball in the yard because their dad is watching other people play ball in the family room?) Sports have a place if they are kept in the proper place! After all, physical exercise and healthy competition…what’s wrong with those?

God says it this way in I Timothy 4:8, “Exercise daily in God, no spiritual flabbiness please! Workouts in the gym are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.” (The Message) And that brings us to another word from our ‘coach’: Even though life is compared to a sports event more than once in the Bible, it makes a point. Winning in the game of life is more important than winning any game.
If we are too involved in anything that keeps us from winning THAT game then that activity can be too important and needs to be evaluated. More than one athlete has had an injury or gotten too old to play or found out that all the money and the autographs didn’t make them feel satisfied. Their ‘sports god’ let them down and left them empty!

Play, watch, enjoy sports but don’t let sports keep you from winning the game of life. There are much more important things to win beside the Little League Championship or the State Football Division play-offs…a LOT more important!

**MODERN REASONING**
Sports are like a religion; if you believe in something you should go all out for it even if it means having to sacrifice other things that might be more important.

**RESPONSES**
1. God wants us to enjoy the things in life as long as they don’t become more important than He is to us.
2. Sports can become an idol in our lives if we give too much time, money, and energy to it that could be used for more important things.
3. Winning the ‘game of life’ can be more important than winning any other game.

**RESOURCES**
Price, Joseph. From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion.
Kauchak, Therese. Good Sports: Winning, Losing, and everything in between.
Blaylock, Mike. Right Way to Win.

**FACT**
40% of all households watched Super Bowl XXXVI.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* To show that sports are an activity this promotes fun, entertainment, and competition.
*Activity:* While tossing a wiffle ball around the room, talk about how athletic activity can be good or bad. You must have the ball in your possession when you comment.
SUICIDE

In the Ten Commandments, the sixth commandment is: “Thou shall not kill.” Translation: ‘you are not to commit pre-meditated murder.’

When a person commits suicide, they commit ‘self murder’ and it is usually pre-meditated. When a person intentionally kills themselves, they break God’s sixth commandment.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF SUICIDE
The Bible informs us that people have killed themselves for a variety of reasons throughout history.
- Abimelech (Judges 9:53, 54)
- Samson (Judges 16: 28-31)
- Saul (I Samuel 31:1-6)
- Ahithopel (II Samuel 17:23)
- Zimri (I Kings 16:18,19)
- Judas (Matthew 27:3-10)

Perhaps the two most prominent people to commit suicide were Saul in the Old Testament and Judas in the New Testament.

Saul was a king and Judas was a follower of Jesus. What they have in common, however, is that they both struggled with depression. (SEE DEPRESSION) Depression and suicide/self-destructive behaviors are often related.

God realizes that people can become depressed for a variety of reasons. He knows that they can become self-destructive and even want to kill themselves. He wanted them to live, but obviously allowed them the right to choose, to choose to end their life.

The Bible does not avoid showing us real people with real problems who made bad choices. In a weird way, that lets us know that we are allowed to have problems and make our own bad choices! But ending our life is not our choice to make.

What’s important is that we know God both understand and helps people who are depressed or become self-destructive and even want to take their own life. There are other options to solving problems beside suicide.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF SUICIDE
Current data in the ‘Laymen’s Guide to Suicide’ indicates that approximately 30,000 or more people commit suicide a year in the United States. The suicide rate for young people between the
ages of 15-24 has tripled in the last thirty years and a third of all teenagers at least think about it. 7% of those under age 25 have attempted it once. Suicide has also increased greatly among older people. More men actually carry it out, as do those who are older, single, divorced, or widowed. What is really frightening is that eight times the number of people contemplates suicide compared to those who actually commit it. Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in this country; the third highest cause amongst teen-agers. Suicide rates for teenage males increased 557% from 1946-1988. The rate among college-age men has tripled in the last thirty years. The toll for adults ages 19-24 is expected to reach 1,000 deaths. There is little doubt that there is a connection between the facing the stresses of modern day living and those not able to face them.

One of the common things about these statistics is that people who consider or commit suicide do so because they are depressed, confused, or deeply upset about something. Student suicide goes up, for example, in the fall when they deal with rejection, disappointment or academic failure. It is through understanding these things that can hopefully help us to help others who consider and try to commit suicide.

THE CULTURES REACTION TO SUICIDE
Most people, even those who are not religious, would tell you that suicide is wrong. Because suicide has become much more common (and at all ages) and the cases become more publicized; we have come to be more accepting of it. Just because it’s more accepted still doesn’t make it acceptable.

People in our world today do worry about the rise of suicide and some of the reasons why people take their own life. They want to understand the ‘whys’ of suicide and try to prevent it.

THE CHURCH’S REACTION TO SUICIDE
For most of history, church people have considered suicide as an ‘unacceptable way of dying.’ This is because people believe that suicide both breaks God’s law and goes against His original purpose for human beings. Many churches and Christians believe that if a person takes their own life, they are no longer Christians. In losing their life, they have lost their salvation; they are no longer ‘saved.’ There are two things wrong with assuming that a person who commits suicide is no longer a Christian.

The Biblical View
If we can do something to lose our relationship with God, then we are depending on what we do/not do to earn that. The Bible, in Ephesians 2:8, 9 and Titus 3:5 clarifies. “All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish. We don’t play a major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’ve done the whole thing. No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and the saving.” (The Message) It seems logical to assume, then, that if we can’t do anything to earn our salvation then we can’t do anything to lose
it. Some people argue that if a Christian commits the ‘unpardonable sin’ then they lose their salvation. They may consider suicide to be one of those sins that is unpardonable.

But what is the ‘unpardonable sin’? According to Mark 3:28, 29, it means that we are not sinners and don’t need Christ to save us. The Bible refers to this as ‘the blasphemy of the Spirit.’ And why is it called the unpardonable sin? Without believing in Christ to save us from sin, we have no way to solve our sin problem/no way to be pardoned. We are ‘unpardonable.’ What this means is that no sin we can commit, not even killing ourselves, is unpardonable. If we don’t deny Christ, we can be forgiven. So, the person who kills him or herself is still a Christian; they still go to heaven.

We get a preview of this truth in the Old Testament (Written before Christ came to provide salvation, of course.) In I Samuel 31, as already cited, Saul committed self-murder, he took his own life by suicide.

This story helps us understand that a person who commits suicide can go to heaven. In I Samuel 28, Saul comes to Samuel the day before he and his sons dies. Samuel tells him two things:
1. God is going to give His People, Israel, over to their enemies, the Philistines (The Goliath group)
2. Twenty-four hours from then, Saul and his sons would be with Samuel! (This is too weird!).

What the Bible tells us that not only did God know ahead of time that that Saul would commit suicide BUT also predicted that his sons would be with Samuel in a safe place!! In spite of suicide, which God did not approve of, He already planned to allow Saul to be with Himself!

But we do need to say a word about the Bible’s position on why we should not commit suicide.

1. We are made in God’s image. We ‘tell’ God that we don’t like how He made us when we harm that image.
2. We are valuable to God. We ‘tell’ God that we don’t have value when we destroy ourselves.
3. We can find help from God. We ‘tell’ God that His help is not enough when We decide to solve our problem by ending our life instead of asking His help to get through life.
4. We believe that He has a special plan for our life. We ‘tell’ God that we can control our own life and have a better plan in taking our life than continuing to live it.

Image, value, help, plan…. these are all reasons why God wants us to live. Although He may allow people to take their own life, He desires that they live life and live it to the full!

**The Practical View**

Unfortunately, the Church has sometimes not been very helpful to people who are dealing with the suicide. This is because they have very little sympathy for anyone who takes their own life.
One of the other common mistakes in relating to someone who considers or commits suicide is:
1. They shouldn’t have these problems OR
2. They should be able to fix these problems.

I have heard people say to someone who is struggling with depression, or anger, or a bad situation, or who are self-destructive, “you should have gone to church more, or read your Bible every day, or prayed harder.” It sounds a lot like ‘good Christians aren’t supposed to think, and feel, and act this way…there must be something you’ve done or not done that has made God punish you by giving you these problems.’

How helpful is that? (Especially with a person who already feels like a failure?)
They feel that they have let themselves and everyone else down. Now you tell them that they have let God down. Hey, if they were thinking about suicide before they just might go through with it! Religious people can make depressed people feel worse!

The Church again has often not been helpful because it has made suicide a worse sin than others. Clue: the Bible says that all sins are equal before God. This means that if I swear and someone else takes their life, these are both sins. One might be more destructive than the other, but in the eyes of God they area both sins. And if the sin of suicide takes away a person’s relationship with God, why doesn’t the sin of swearing or over-eating or divorce take away your relationship with Christ? God does not have a ‘top ten’ when it comes to sin. (Divorce and depression are not #1 and #2 and gossip and gluttony # 45 and #98!)

**TYPES OF SUICIDE**

We usually think of suicide as something a person does in a short amount of time and something they do quickly…like hanging or shooting themselves or locking themselves in a garage with the car running. Yet, there are a lot of other ways that people’ commit suicide’; those means0 just take longer. We call these activities ‘self-destructive behaviors’. These include: eating disorders, substance abuse, and addictions of other kinds. All kinds of people today are using all kinds of activities to ‘kill themselves slowly’. Because these ‘other ways’ are not as obvious to people, they tend not to worry about them as much. These same people are often more shocked when this person does die though because they didn’t see death coming.

In any kind of self-destructive behavior, from over-eating to mutilation cutting yourself to actual suicide, there are certain things most usually present.

1. People are often not in a right state of mind. They are upset by something that has happened to them or a crisis they cannot control. They lose perspective.
2. People are too tired to try; they are worn out from struggling. They think that dying would be better; this is often true of older people who are tired of being sick and in pain. *(SEE EUTHANASIA)*
3. People think suicide is a simple solution. They don’t have to work through the problem; they can just run from it.
4. People believe that they are a burden to others and that life would be easier for everyone if they weren’t around overlooking the grief they will bring to these people.
5. People are convinced that they can give a message to those who are left behind or they can get the attention they wanted when they were alive.
6. They believe that everyone goes to heaven so dying it just an easier quicker way to get there. They are sure they will find a better life.
7. They are convinced that there is no other source of help available and the only solution is suicide.

Mrs. K. was a sad example of what I am talking about. She had been from a family where her father abused her. She had been married but was divorced and was a single mother trying to raise two children, which she was doing really quite well. Then she had problems keeping a job and she started having real money problems. Meanwhile her ex-husband had found a new woman in his life that Mrs. K’s children loved and got along with. So, she figured that since she had failed everyone and knew that her children would most likely have a new mother who would love and care for them, it would be better if she were gone. She was a Christian and had no fear of losing her salvation is she took her life. She committed suicide by sitting in a garage with her car motor running. Her notes told her loved ones all the things I have just told you. She was right; her ex-husband did find a new wife who loved her children. In fact this ‘new family’ became part of the church I was pastoring. But no matter how ‘well things turned out’, Mrs. K didn’t have to take her life. She had a lot of problems, which caused her to be depressed and think she was useless, but she could have found help to deal with the problem if she had wanted to.
Maybe she was too depressed to think and reason clearly.

At her funeral service, I shared about the wonderful person she was and about the things that caused her to commit suicide. I tried to point out how anyone who is faced with the pressures of life has better ways to handle them than to take their own life. I was also very careful to confirm the fact that Mrs. K was a Christian who had ‘gone home’ to be with Jesus, even though it was earlier than anyone of us wanted. And three months later, I did marry her ex-husband and his new wife as a new family began, still filled with grief but also with hope.

**MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE**
When it comes to helping people who are thinking about suicide, we need to understand that all the following are false:
*Suicide and attempted suicide are not in the same class of behavior. (That’s like the guy who thinks about proposing to his girlfriend and never does but assumes that ‘she just knows’ he wants her to marry him!)*
*Suicide is a problem with only a specific class of people. (That’s like saying that only people in the suburbs have children!)
*People who talk about suicide don’t commit suicide. (That’s like saying people talk about going on vacation never really go!)
*Once a person thinks about suicide, they are always going to be suicidal. (We know that people can and do work thru the problems that cause them to consider suicide and get past it!)
*Suicide/self-destructive behavior is inherited/ runs in families. (It may or it may not! Sometimes the person is the first one in their family to ‘take their life.’ Other behaviors that lead to suicide may, in fact, be part of their family history.)
*If a person is a Christian, they should not commit suicide. (Anyone can let their problems ‘get the best of them’ and commit suicide whether they are Christians or not. (Sometimes a religious person feels even worse about himself or herself because they have failed God as well as others!)
*Suicide and Depression are the same. (Obviously a lot of people who are depressed both for a short and a long time haven’t committed suicide. (Depression may lead to self-destruction, but it doesn’t always.)
*A person’s improvement after suicide means that the risk of their taking their own life is over. (Not necessarily! The situations that have caused them to consider it may come again especially if the person doesn’t get help with them!)
*Suicide usually happens without warnings. (Not really. Nearly always there are ‘signs’/’red flags’ that tell you that something is wrong with someone and that they are crying for help and actually hoping that someone will ‘rescue them’!)
*People who want to commit suicide can’t be talked out of it. (Oh yes they can! Many people have been talked out of doing it by someone who cares and is able to ask the right questions and make the right statements.)
*Anyone who commits suicide is mentally ill. (Not necessarily, people who are depressed or having a hard time dealing with problems are not necessarily mentally ill; often they are normal people like us who are really struggling at some point and needing special help).

*Only certain types of people are suicidal. (Again, we see that suicide happens in every group of people, older, younger, male, female, married, single, unemployed, those with jobs, those who are ill, those who are well, those who are depressed, and those who seem to be fine.)
*Women only threaten suicide, but men carry it out. (Although more men than women commit it, there are many women in the 30,000 victims a year who do carry it out.
Women are usually more aware of the impact their action will have on other people which may keep them from doing it.)
*Talking about suicide only causes it by planting the thought in people’s minds. (Actually talking about, bringing it out in the open causes gives people permission to struggle and talk about it, which may eventually help them turn to someone for help.)
HELPING SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE

First, we need to help people realize that suicide death is final. It is not something ‘magical’ on T.V. where a person dies one week and comes back on the show (or another network) next week. Many people today, especially young people have an unreal perspective on death.

Secondly, we need to help people understand that their suicide achieves nothing; it really doesn’t. People commit suicide thinking it will solve all their problems. The truth is: suicide creates more problems. And besides, if suicide did solve all the problems the person had they wouldn’t be around to enjoy the outcome!
The price of being alive is having problems. If you’re dead, you won’t have problems. But you won’t be alive!

Too often, the people who are ‘left behind’ are the ones who are left with the problems. This is partly because the person they need to get things right with is gone. This is especially true when there is no note or anything else explaining why the person took their life. (It’s hard enough when there is a note.) It is partly because they have to work thru the pain of having that person gone from their lives. Suicide often causes a” wound that never heals”, something a person needs to consider before they end their life and inflict that ‘wound ‘on those they love.

I often refer to suicide as a ‘wasted activity’. It doesn’t accomplish the things the suicide victim hopes it would. They can’t enjoy the attention they got from dying because they are not there!!

Thirdly, we need to take people who talk about suicide seriously. The problems the person is dealing with may seem dumb to us, BUT are very real to them!!! We must always take their threat to take their life seriously, even if the person doesn’t seem to be really serious about it. We need to ‘listen between the lines’. We need to consider how real the possibility of their doing something like this is. And most often, the person who is really serious about it has a plan for doing it.

So, we ask them to talk to us about the plan by asking:
(a) What has been happening in your life that has gotten you to think about taking your life?
(b) How long have you been thinking about doing this?)
(c) How do you plan to do this; when, where, with what?

Fourthly, we need to offer to help solve their problems in another way beside suicide/self-destructive behavior. It is often good to talk about an ‘anti-suicide success story’ or perhaps one about the impact of a suicide on those left behind. Today there are a lot of resources to help people deal with the problems that lead to suicide and taking their own life as well. There is no really good excuse for killing yourself. There is help IF a person wants it.
Fifth, we can try to get those help from some source—a pastor, a counselor, or someone who has either considered or tried suicide. Often it is important to stay on the phone or stay with the person long enough to get them to promise to make out an action plan and promised to follow through on it! Obviously we pray with them because doing that puts us in touch with the most important source of help in life, the God who created and cares for our life.

Remember, though, that sometimes our best efforts to help someone not commit suicide may not keep him or her from doing it. We can help them make a different decision but we can’t make the decision for them! We must guard against feeling that we’ve failed if we have done all we can to help them and they still do it!

God believes that every life is precious He wants a person to live that life, not end it. Even though He allows a person to choose, He desires that they find other ways of dealing with their problems. The greatest way to deal with ones’ problems is by coming to Him thru faith in Christ although solving them is not always quick or easy. If they are Christians, however, He takes them to be with Himself and helps those left behind to live thru this terrible death!

MODERN REASONING
Taking your own life is your choice; it’s your life. You can escape and there are no negative effects of your suicide. (People die on T.V all the time!)

RESPONSES
1. Suicide is ‘self-murder. It violates God’s commandment not to kill.
2. Thinking about/attempting suicide is usually a response to unresolved problems in a person’s life that needs attention. There are signals which should be observed and acted on.
3. Suicide fails to solve the problems the person who self-destructs is trying to Solve and actually makes them worse
4 If a person who commits suicide is a Christian, they still have salvation and will spend eternity in heaven.

RESOURCES
Johnston, Jerry. Why Suicide?
Demy, Timothy. Suicide: A Christian Response; Crucial Considerations For Choosing Life.
Oates, Wayne E. After Suicide.
Cerza Kolf, June. Standing In the Shadow: Help and encouragement for Suicide Survivors.
FACT
Suicide is the third highest killer of teen-agers in the U.S. behind unintentional injury and homicide. In 1999, more teen-agers and young adults died from suicide than cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, and chronic lung disease combined.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Suicide is any self-destructive action by which a person takes their own life progressively or at specific point of time.
Teaching Activity:
Discuss: What are REASONS why people commit suicide:
Discuss: What are the WAYS people commit suicide:

Prepare an ACTION PLAN for helping someone who is thinking about suicide not following through on their ACTION PLAN.
SWEARING

Who hasn’t had the urge to *#$!@!! Anyway, no one thinks much about it, especially when the vast majority of television shows and movies use these words more and more often, words called ‘expletives!’ An expletive, by the way, is a word that we ‘block out with a bleep’.

So what exactly is a swear word? Words we consider ‘swear words’ fall into two categories: Profanities and Obscenities.

**PROFANE WORDS** (profanities) usually have to do with taking a holy phrase, like ‘O God’ and using it in an unholy way, like ‘My G____ that was a great movie. This is using God’s name ‘in vain’; using it for another reason than bringing glory to Him. God gets no credit from the fact that you liked the movie. When we misuse His name we don’t honor Him, we dishonor Him!

Profanity was what God forbid his people to use when He gave the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:7 God says, “No using the name of God, your God in curses or silly chatter. God won’t put up with the irreverent use of his Name.” {The Message} In other words, He is serious about what He says about what you and I say.

The name of God, for example, was so sacred to His own people that they wouldn’t actually say ‘Yahweh’, His given name. So they changed The Hebrew language around a little and came up with the term, ‘Jehovah’. The point is: they wouldn’t even consider saying His name, much less misusing it.

There is another way to ‘profane/misuse’ God’s name. The second is to curse the name of God. Someone can do this by saying something about God in relation to someone else…like “$%&! you for breaking up with me.” The Bible also calls this kind of misuse of God’s name as blasphemy, which means to say something that is not reverent about God. It is equal to saying that God does not even exist! The reason is because it dishonors His name and misuses His power. And besides, God does not desire to ‘damn people’.

Fortunately the punishment for cursing has been changed from what it was in the Old Testament. In Leviticus 24:14 the law reads: “Take outside of the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him.” Whoa! Of course, we could explain it away by saying that this was the penalty for ‘blasphemy’, which meant to curse God, denying who He is. But how is that too much different than people who curse God by using His name in the wrong way? Don’t they deny who He is but treating His name carelessly? (Good thing God isn’t having people stoned for cursing today—we’d have a lot of dead T.V. Stars!)
Now it’s obvious that people can use God’s name or Christ’s name in the right way by using it reverently. This is what we do, for example, when we worship. No one would suggest that saying’ praise God’ or ‘O God’ or ‘Jesus Christ, my Lord, how I love you’ would be misusing God’s name, right? This is because we are using those names to bring glory to God. We are not bringing glory to God when we hear someone on a prime time sit-com say “J____C____. Mike, I told you not to drive my car without permission!”

A third way is when we use God’s name carelessly, usually in order to be more powerful, like when people are asked to put their hand on a Bible and promise to tell the truth and the whole truth, so help them God! And then they proceed to not tell the truth, but want everyone to think that they did just because they said, ‘so help me God’. (Don’t try that with you parents the next time you break curfew; it won’t work either!) Now let’s remember though that a person can ‘swear by God’ in the right way. In taking an oath of office a person can say, “I will do my best to fulfill the responsibilities of this office, so help me God!”

I have noticed a couple of things when it comes to people using God’s name. One is that we have invented the word ‘darn’ in place of ‘damn’ and ‘gosh’ in place of God and ‘gee’ in place of Jesus. (And who knows what ‘dog-gone ‘might stand for?) This is saying something with force that is not dishonoring to God. Apparently people need to have some kind of words to express strong emotion! So if you can’t use the bad ones, you make up ‘good ones.’ (‘Oh fudge’, anyone?)

But, have you ever noticed that when people swear, they always seem use the name of God or Christ? They never say “O Buddha or O Mohammed”; they say “O God”. It seems to me it’s because the true names and the significant names for God are the ones people know carry the most weight, so to speak.

One of the problems in modern day society is how casual we have become about using God and Christ’s name in the wrong way. Have you noticed how many people say “Oh my God” a lot? I was watching a new T.V. recently…a prime time comedy that I usually don’t watch. Terrific acting, great script, really funny, but I lost count of how many times the family used the ‘G’ word. It was like part of regular conversation and I assure you it was not a show about a church service!!

**OBSCENE WORDS** usually have to do with terms that don’t have to do with deity (God, Christ, etc.); they have to do with what bodily activities such as sex and going to the bathroom. It doesn’t take much imagination to figure out those words, especially since we hear them so much more often than our parents did, which, by the way, doesn’t make them any nicer or more appropriate!
While the Old Testament speaks more about profanity, the misuse of God’s name, the New Testament speaks more about obscenity. Take for example, Ephesians 4:29 when the writer warns “Watch the way you talk, let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word is a gift” or in Ephesians 5:4 “Don’t talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn’t fit our style.” Or in Colossians 4:6,”Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.” (KJV) Salt, by the way, was a symbol of that which makes other people’s lives better, cleaner, and healthier. Salt also is used to preserve something. Speech for the Christian was not to be like everyone else’s. What Christians say should be better, cleaner, and healthier than what everyone else is saying!

It is obvious that the Devil has taken beautiful and sacred things and made them ugly and unholy. For example, sex was meant to be a beautiful expression of love between a man and a woman. It was not mean to be ‘dirty’ and degraded. That’s true for natural bodily functions, too. Although not always pleasant to experience, they are a natural part of life and still to be treated with respect and not discussed in a careless way.

And speaking of the law, in Portland, Oregon (My home town) the police chief has told 950 officers not to swear so much. Those guilty of unnecessary swearing would face counseling or official reprimand. Portland is one of only a few major cities that allow its officers to use curse words as a law enforcement tool. But apparently the situation has gotten out of hand.

It appears to me that the swearing situation has gotten out of hand in all of our land. It says a lot about where our country is in terms of decency and respect for others.

Swearing also indicates several things about the person doing it.
1. It tells you that they don’t know how to deal with their anger in the right way. They lose control in different ways; one of those ways is with their mouth! It also tells you that they don’t have a good vocabulary; they basically use the same bad language to describe everything they are upset about.
2. It also tells us that this person has little respect for themselves and for others. When people use profane and obscene language, they can’t feel happy; they are often angry, hurt, and rejected. They don’t care how they talk about and to people. But unfortunately they think that when they swear they can make themselves a look important.
3. They are ‘cool’
4. They make other people ‘respect them.’ Unfortunately in today’s world, they might succeed in pulling those things off.

Have you ever noticed people can stop swearing if they want to? When I was in High School, I professed to be a Christian. I joined a boys’ club (A high school version of a fraternity.) And did I get ridiculed and made fun of or what? When I came to the lunch table where my ‘brothers’ were eating, they used to say, “Cool the language, the reverend is here” and they would; this only
proved to me that they could stop talking disrespectfully and dirty all the time if they wanted to! They knew what they were doing and they liked doing it. It gave them a false sense of power and importance; it made them feel like part of the ‘in group’; they thought it made them look like real men.

And speaking of ‘boy’s clubs’, did you know that over an 100 years ago, at Harvard University, there was actually a club called the ‘Filthy Speech Fraternity’? These were people who talked profanely and obscenely. (And we thought people only started talking that way on One and an Half Men. Guess again!)

We’re not talking about a point in time; once in a while; we’re talking about a pattern of speaking. (All the time.) Some people can’t get thru a sentence without using a swear word. Obviously, we have all had times when we made a mistake or did something we weren’t supposed to do, or became upset or frustrated. (Like run a red light at the corner where a policeman was staked out!) Sometimes it seems like there is no other way to express our anger but with a swear word; it just sort of comes out.

In the New Testament in Mark 14: 71, for example, Peter (The disciple of Jesus who wrote a book in the New Testament swore!!) It’s happened to me; I’ve used profane and obscene words but infrequently.

But some people use crude speech all the time. It indicates several things:
1. They think this an acceptable way to speak because they hear it all the time.
2. They think that this is the only way people express themselves. We have lost our respect for God and the self-discipline that comes from people who honor Him and His laws. So, we use His name and other words when we don’t need because we really don’t have respect for Him, ourselves, or for others. Swearing is more than an issue of using bad words; it has to do with the people who use them!

There is one possible exception. I know a place in Michigan called the ‘Dam Store’. Actually we had one close to Loveland Colorado where we used to live. But in the Michigan store everything sold in the store has the word ‘dam’ in front of it. So you’re buying ‘dam’ candy or a ‘dam sandwich’ or a ‘dam newspaper. The kids in the family love the store because they can ‘swear’ legally!

Consider this: Do we really feel good about ourselves when we use terms that are degrading? I don’t think so! It causes us to feel degraded ourselves. Back to the Boys Club at my high school or at the lunch table they gave me a hard time for being what they called ‘a prude’, ‘a religious weirdo’ today. But in private some of these same guys told me that they actually admired my beliefs and convictions and wished they had them. They admitted that they knew using bad language was wrong but were afraid of not being accepted if they didn’t use it. What does that
say about people? It says that they will say anything to be accepted and approved by their peers even if it goes against what they think is right.

**First of all, when we use bad language, we are not learning how to control ourselves.**

Swearing is a symptom of something else. We just ’do what we feel like’; including saying what we want to say. After, all we live in a free country and we have the right to free speech, right? (Frankly, I think our first leaders in this country believed that people should have some self-control over how they talked so that rotten speech would not wind up having to be protected!)

**Secondly, when we use profane and obscene words we actually violate other people’s rights.**

We do that by saying things that offend other people. We do! Like the guys at my lunch table, a lot of people know that using certain words is wrong and that they shouldn’t but they do it anyway, usually because everyone else seems to be doing it. But a lot of people don’t like to hear this language.

**Thirdly, when we use this language all the time, we become ‘de-sensitized’ to it;** in other words we hear it so often that it doesn’t bother us. One of the scary things about hearing grade-school kids talk these days is to hear the words they use—probably words they have heard at home or on T.V.! So, how we speak does affect the quality of our life. Bad language has an impact on the people and us in our circle of friends, family, and even our country!

Ah, but there’s hope for people who have a problem in this area. There is a new ‘Foul Language Filter.’ ([www.tvguardian.com](http://www.tvguardian.com)) it actually has a pair of hands over the ears, with a filter that plugs right into your T.V. also connects with your DVD and VCR. It electronically intercepts 150 acceptable words and phrases for unacceptable ones! The unit then mutes the volume and substitutes a G-rated replacement in the closed caption section. There you go!

That still does not solve the problem of people controlling what they say even though a filter can control what they hear!

Let’s face it, in the world of today, we need something to help us control both what we hear and what we say when it comes to bad words. I swear, (the right way) we need help!

One of the things we forget and don’t hear much about any more is that each of us who claims to be a Christian will someday have to ‘give a report’ of every word we have said. Eventually God will bring everything that we out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it’s good or evil. So as the children’s song says, “Be careful little mouth what you say.” That is something that applies to big kids, too! (Maybe our grandmother had a good idea after all, washing her kids’ mouths out with soap)

I conclude with a story from the British Isles, Wales, to be exact. In the mid-1800’s, a lot
of people became Christians. Some of these people were coal-miners. The coal-miners used donkeys to bring coal out of the mines. The coal-miners would often swear at the donkeys to get them to do what they wanted them to do. After these men became Christians, they changed the way they talked. They didn’t use swear words anymore. And you know what? The donkeys didn’t know what to do; they were confused because they didn’t understand the words. The miners had to train the donkeys all over again!

There are two things we can learn from this history lesson. First, when we become Christians we are to talk differently than other people. Our words are to be the right words. Secondly, when we use the right kind of words, we can have a positive influence on other people, even animals.

**MODERN REASONING**

It’s a free country; we have the right to free speech so people should be able to talk any way they want to, even if it bothers other people.

**RESPONSES**

1. The two types of bad language are: Profanity, which dishonors God and obscenity that dishonors what He has made.
2. Despite what we are told and hear everywhere, bad language makes use look crude—not cool.
3. Bad language not only affects us but other people in our life negatively.

**FACT**

Before 1936, the word ‘filthy’ could not be used in movies.

**LIFE LAB**

*Teaching Aim:* Swearing/Cursing is the use of words which are offensive to God and often to others.

Discuss:

1. Explain why people swear?
2. Write down ‘substitute words’ they could use.
3. Discuss why people seem to swear more today than they used to.
4. What does constant swearing tell you about a person?
TATTOOS /BODY PIERCING

What book on today’s issues would be complete without a section on tattoos?
But where should we look? Let’s start in the Old Testament. One of the things God told His People NOT to do was to be like all the other people around the, like those who lived in Canaan, the Promised Land he gave them.

These people were pagan. This meant that they did not believe in the True God and did not keep His commandments, the ‘Big Ten’ for example! (It was these laws that made the People of Israel different from all other nations.)

Israel, however, disobeyed these very laws. Interestingly enough, they became just like their nasty neighbors. One of the ways they did this was to follow their rituals or practices. One such practice was the way they honored those who had died.

And how did they do that? They cut themselves and/or shaved their heads. (Weird, but maybe we wouldn’t think shaving your head was all that weird today!) Apparently they did this to ‘show their gods’ how upset they were, or how seriously they felt about those who had died. Another example of this was found in I Kings 18 when the 450 prophets of Baal (a false god) cut themselves so they could ‘get their god’s attention.’ (Aren’t we glad we have already have God’s attention: we don’t have to cut ourselves to get it?)

God has something to say about ‘tattoos’ in Leviticus 19: 28 when He says, “You shall not make any cutting in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo, or any marks on you: I am the Lord.” (NKJV)

There is something significant here that may not be obvious at first. The reason God ends this commandment/law with the phrase ‘I am the Lord’ is to make sure His people didn’t forget their identity, and who they belonged to. They belonged to the Lord. That was their ‘mark’ of distinction, not cutting their bodies!!

God also has something to say about this practice of ‘body piercing’ in Deuteronomy 14: 1, 2 when He gives this reminder: “You are children of God, your God. So, don’t mutilate your bodies or shave your heads. You only are a people holy to God. God chose you out of all the people on earth as his cherished personal treasure. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.”

Again, God reminds them of their identity and the fact that it is to be different from everyone else’s. The word ‘holy’, in fact, the Hebrews word, ‘kadosh’, means to be set apart, and distinctly different! In other words, as God’s People, they were to be different and distinguished from
everybody else. They were to follow His laws /life principles. When everybody else was doing it, they weren’t supposed to be!

In Leviticus 22, God also has something to say about the kinds of sacrifices He will accept. In this case, instead of discussing people, He is discussing animals. They are not to be ‘bruised’, ‘crushed’, ‘torn’, or ‘cut’. (Leviticus 22:24) Don’t worry about the fact that these words relate to animals; they relate even more to what kind of sacrifice God accepts. Point: He accepts a sacrifice that is not pierced or broken. In other words, these sacrifices were to be as perfect as possible. So, I believe that what applies to animal sacrifices might also apply to anyone of us who is asked to offer up ourselves as a sacrifice to God. We, too, are to be ‘unbroken’, so to speak.

The Old Testament is pretty specific about what you should and what you should not do with your body. Let’s summarize:

1. We are not to treat our bodies the same way everyone else treats theirs.
2. We are to present our bodies as ‘unbroken sacrifices’ to the Lord.

The New Testament talks more about general principles than specific practices relating to our bodies. For instance, in I Corinthians 6:19, 20, Christians are reminded “Don’t you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering you see that you can what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.” In Romans 12: 1, 2 “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life; your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. May God Himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together; spirit, soul, and body, and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ.” I Thessalonians 5:23.

Let’s summarize:

1. We belong to God and we cannot do just anything we want to with our bodies.
2. We are to give our bodies as acceptable sacrifices to God.
3. We are to get ready for Christ to come back by being the best people can be which includes our bodies.

Someone might say that these portions of the Bible and it’s ‘stretching them’ to apply them to the issue of tattoos and body piercing which is a form of ‘cutting’.

We need to look more closely. God is saying that you cannot treat your body in just any way you want to. It actually does not belong to you, even though it is your body. In reality, it’s God’s
body. He has ‘loaned it to you’ to use! He expects that you and I will be careful about how we use it because it’s of great value to Him. He thought so much of it that He allowed His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die to save it. He allowed Him to have His Body pierced and broken for us!

But, God did not go back on His commandment concerning the condition of our bodies when He allowed Christ to have His Body mutilated. This is because Christ had His Body bruised, crushed, torn, and cut for the right reason. He was ‘tattooed’ in order to save us from our sins so that we could have our relationship with God restored. The writer of Isaiah puts it this way: “But the fact is it was our pains that he carried, our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. It was our sins that did that to Him. He took the punishment and that made us whole. Through his bruises, we get healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-6) He did this for us!

This is different than why we do it, isn’t it? We get tattoos, body piercing, and mutilate/cut ourselves. Oh sure, we might put an earring in our tongue because all our friends are doing it or to impress our boyfriend. (Reminds me of the commercial where the guy wants to have ‘I love Donna’ tattooed on his arm; it cost $50.00 but he only has $42.00 so all he can afford is ‘I love Don’ and his girlfriend gets really mad!) So, we do it for them, but let’s get real. We do these things for reasons that are mostly selfish. We do it because it’s a fad or because it’s a fashion statement, or because it’s fun or maybe to see the reactions we get when we come to work with the tattoo of a King Cobra on our forehead or an earring in each nostril.

But, for a minute, we need to consider a different viewpoint, the viewpoint of lots of kids in our culture who are getting tattoos. What do they say? They say that getting a tattoo is ‘body art’. It is simply a form of expressing yourself. It’s innocent, harmless, and (it doesn’t even hurt to do it…well not much!) Of course, most kids don’t think of where they put their tattoos (the more obvious, the better—since they are making a statement!). And they don’t think about how they will look with a tattoo on their right shoulder when they want to wear that exotic dress to the prom…or how they will feel when they’re 40 and have ‘Love Goddess’ on one of their breasts! No, they usually think of THEN only of what they want NOW!! Maybe they figure that it was just something they did on a dare or just for kicks and they will outgrow the urge (even though they won’t outgrow the tattoo, of course!). I don’t think they have come up with a really effective of removing them yet – (unless they possibly remove your arm!)

But there’s another viewpoint: Some people consider tattooing and body piercing as a form of self-mutilation. They view the ‘art form’ as a form of doing damage to yourself, something that may indicate either an accelerated need for recognition and/or a desire to be self-destructive. In fact, 17% of Americans regret their decision to get ‘inked’ and removal is not an easy process, though it is possible.

Back to the Biblical viewpoint: It’s really pretty safe to conclude that God does not really encourage or approve of doing something to our bodies that alters them, if it’s not necessary. If a
person has to have surgery to have a body part removed…that’s one thing. That’s usually to save their life. But to have your body ‘altered’ for most other reasons is not for saving your life. Surgery for the right reason is understandable. Changing your body for any other reason (with the possible exception of a face lift) is really not understandable. So, this might include things like liposuction or cosmetic surgery, which is really not necessary, except to those who feel they won’t be beautiful without it!

Having said all that, I read an article in my local paper the other day entitled, “Art in the name of God” in which religious/Christian people have tattoos as a way of remembering important things about their faith or finding them a way to witness to others of their faith. One man, ‘Hector, had a tattoo to remember his father who had recently died. Another man who was tattooed with Jesus and the Virgin Mary said, “I’m very proud of the tattoos, I feel that in the darkest part of my life, there’s always someone there for you.” There you go…holy tattoos! Does God approve? I’m not sure!

So, there may well be some of you who are reading this section who will really disagree with me on my thoughts about this issue and that’s your privilege. You might say, “Hey what’s the big deal with a little tattoo, especially if it’s some where nobody sees it. And as for the ten earrings in your left ear, well, they can all come out!

Maybe some people convince themselves that they need to ‘take out their frustration on themselves.’ I’d say that some people need to get help in finding out why you have that frustration and how you can deal with it without being destructive to themselves.

After everything is said and considered, there are still two issues: the first is ‘doing what everybody else is doing’ and the second is what kind of sacrifice we give to God.

Just as in the days of the Old Testament, God wants His people to be different, not like everyone else! Even though it’s hard to do, a Christian young person or adult should be the least likely person to do something because’ everyone else is doing it’. That’s right.

After all, if we were exactly like everyone else, why would anyone want to be like us and have the life in Christ that makes us different? I know it’s hard to be different, especially these days. We want to conform, to be liked, to be in, to be accepted, to have lots of friends. And of course, who doesn’t? But sometimes the cost of being cool is pretty high when it means getting infected by having a tattoo or body piercing. Infection is not as easy to get rid of as taking an earring out of your chin!

I believe God expects us to give Him the right kind of sacrifice. This sacrifice is to be as clean and as complete as possible. God doesn’t take well to half-hearted sacrifice. (Lord I’ll give you all of my 50%!!) He wants us to give him the best and that includes giving Him the best of our minds, our abilities, and our bodies!
If you feel that you can go ahead with your tattoo or earring or body piercing anyway; be my guest. But think it over carefully before you do and maybe ask yourself the following questions:

1. Why am I doing this?
2. Is it something I may regret after I do it or years from now?
3. Is there a danger involved in what I am about to do?
4. Is this something God would really want me to do? If not, why not?
5. Is this something I would want my children to do someday? If not, why not?

And don’t think your parents aren’t thinking about it, even if you’re in grade school. Saw a cartoon recently with the mom and dad outside the door ready to put the kids down for bed. Mother to Father: “You read the bed-time story, I check for the tattoos.”

Speaking of kids; let me close by sharing something from a Dear Abby column. Julie had decided to get tattoo before returning to college. Her mother tried to talk her out of it. No luck! So a few weeks later when the family gathered together to celebrate her mother’s 50th birthday, her grandparents did something quite unexpected. The grand-parents dressed up in clothes from the era when they were young (complete with fake tattoos applied to their arms and shoulders. Julie was stunned. After her grandparents changed back into their regular clothes, they explained that the tattoos were fake and washed them off. The point: you can change your hair and your clothes but if you get a real tattoo, you can’t change that!

MODERN REASONING
It’s your body and already different than everyone else’s so a tattoo makes it even more that way. Besides, it’s your body you can do what you want with it.

RESPONSES
1. God made us as special and He does not want us to hurt or harm our bodies.
2. God made us to be distinctive and so does not want us to act and look like everyone else.
3. We have other ways to deal with our problems than to hurt ourselves.
4. A person needs to think about the future when they do something permanent to themselves in the present.

FACT
Did you know that the word ‘cockamamie’ means a false tattoo?

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: To alter your body through ‘markings’ is something people to that affects their body permanently.
Activity: Obtain and put on some fake tattoos, then discuss the following questions:
1. Why would you want to have a tattoo?
2. Are there ways that having a tattoo could harm you?
3. Why would God prefer you not have one?
4. How would you get rid of it if you didn’t want to have a tattoo?
**WAR**

Why is war something parents and their children have to talk about? It is because war is a reality of our world. There are actually four kinds of war: Conflict between God and us, between individuals, between groups of people (like nations, tribes, etc.), between the Devil and ourselves.

**God vs. Ourselves**

All war/conflict began with our change of relationship with God. After the Devil rebelled against God in heaven he came down to earth and tried to tempt us to turn against God. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, did that. The moment they disobeyed God is called ‘The Fall’. We have been fighting God and what He wants us to do ever since. We have also been at war with each other ever since! And although God knew war would happen, it was not what He wanted, not then, not now.

**Us vs. Us**

It is most interesting that this event happened in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 3, And in the very next chapter, one of the first brothers, Cain, killed his brother, Abel. Murder had entered the world. First people were in conflict with God—then they were in conflict with each other. But this is not the way God wanted people to treat each other. He knew ahead of time, of course, that they would. He also knew that He would provide a way for people to live at peace and in unity with one another through sending Christ into the world. But even after that, people would continue to hurt rather than to help each other.

This is why, in Exodus 20, God gave the TEN COMMANDMENTS. The first four commandments explain that we are to be in RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. Don’t replace him with other gods, don’t use his name in the wrong way, honor his day. The last six tell us that we are TO BE IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER. They explain how to treat each other: Honor your parents; don’t kill each other; don’t have the wrong kind of sex with each other; don’t steal from each other; don’t lie to one another; don’t want what your neighbor has.

The New Testament, in the Epistles, gives us the same commandment. In Romans 12, “Discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody.” In Ephesians 4, “Pour yourselves out for each other in acts of love alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.” Christ said it this way, in John 13, “Love one another. In the same way I loved you, love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples when they see the love you have for each other.” Romans 12 tell us how to love each other. Have affection for each one; honor the other person; contribute to the needs of others; open your home and have people over; be happy or sad when
people need you to be there for them; live in harmony with people; don’t ‘pay people back’ if they offend you.” These suggestions not only relate to people you know (friends) but people you don’t (strangers)! But the reality is that we aren’t in right relationship with one another. We don’t love each other.

The New Testament is full of stories about church people not getting along with each other. In Acts 6 two different groups of widows were arguing over who got their “Meals on Wheels.” In Romans 16, when Paul gives the movie credit list of those people who had helped him, he mentions to watch out for those who would stir up trouble between church members. In I Corinthians, he warns believers about acting like children by forming groups that would fight each other. He actually calls them babies. He tells them not to take each other to court (Chapter 6). He warns them about having cliques when they came to Communion (Chapter 11).

If those who call themselves Christians can’t love others and get along, then there isn’t much hope for everybody else, is there? And here’s a sad statistic: Every year the murder rate goes way up over the holidays?

Want to know why? Because families get together, aren’t used to be with each other for two or three days in a row, argue/fight, and kill each other! Can you believe that?

Groups vs. Groups
People who are part of groups are also part of countries and nations, and they fight each other, too. They go to war. Conflict, not cooperation seems to be the normal thing, doesn’t it?

In the Old Testament book of Habakkuk (‘Hab’ who?), the writer talks about this problem when he says, “Why do you force me to look at evil every day? Anarchy (rebellion-breaking the law) and violence break out, quarrels and fights all over the place. Law and order fall to pieces. Justice is a joke.”

In the New Testament, in the Book of James, the author talks about people having conflicts and disputes. The world has never changed. People were violent way back in Adam’s Day. (Look and see in Genesis 6). And people are violent and make war with each other today.

Recently, I read where a major U.S. city has now created penalties for people who threaten and assault sports officials! (Seen any of those people who do that at a Little League or a N.F.L. Game recently?)

In the New Testament, when His disciples asked about when the end of the world would come, Christ said (In Matthew 24) “When reports come in of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history; Nation will fight against nation, ruler fight right over and over.” And the war goes on. War is the rule; peace is the exception.
We have to consider another question. Shouldn’t people, especially Christians, make peace instead of war? Now that’s a good question; it’s one a lot of people would like God to answer. In fact, more than one person in the past has rejected Christianity because it is based on the Bible and a God who went to war. Many non-religious and religious people believe that the God of the Old Testament said, “make war” but the Christ of the New Testament said “make peace” (After all, isn’t part of the Christmas story, you know, peace on earth good will to men?)

But, remember what Christ also said, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword.” Matthew 10:34 (KJV); what does that mean?

I believe it means that peace/ freedom cost something. There is a price in order for people to be free. God went to war to get rid of pagan people who were a threat to Israel’s freedom. The United States went to war to free the slaves. The world went to war to protect its freedom from enemies like evil rulers, governments who mistreated their people, terrorists who take innocent lives.

We have holidays in our country that remembers those who died to provide our freedom. We appreciate what they have done. Even though war can be wrong and fought for selfish reasons, we believe that war can be right, fought for unselfish reasons. An example of a wrong war is when a country just wants to have more land for itself and have power over more people (The Roman Empire). An example of a right war is when a country wants to protect people from countries which just want more land and more power over more people! (World War Two)

It is easy and popular to organize a protest against war, or carry a poster that says “Bread not bombs”, BUT we need to be reminded that freedom isn’t free; it often costs human life sacrificed in battle to overcome those things which would rob us of our peace and freedom! Too, all countries have a right to self-defense. If they are attacked, they the right to go to war against their attacker! No one would question the fact that the countries of the world had the right motive for going into the Second World War to stop Adolph Hitler, or from trying to take over Europe or the United States from fighting back against the Japanese after they bombed Pearl Harbor would they?

However, some would because they believe war is never right no matter what the conditions. This is due in part to the fact that human motives are not always right.

Making and keeping peace often means standing up to those who would take it away from you. This is often why God allows nations to go to war even though He is against killing and taking life. (SEE AUTHORITY)
Even Christ did come to bring peace on earth; He knew that sometimes a sword would be needed to gain and keep the peace! So, it is safe to say that God makes war and makes peace. He uses war to bring about peace, sad as that seems to us.

Us vs. Satan
One thing is very obvious about war in the Bible: we are in one all the time! The Bible calls it ‘spiritual warfare’. It’s not a physical war that we can see; it’s an invisible war that we can’t. It is an on-going war between God and the Devil and we’re caught in the middle of it. It’s like a bog tug-of-war with God on one end and Satan on the other. We feel pulled in two directions, don’t we? In a practical way it helps us understand that war is a way of life for humans.

What is ‘spiritual warfare’ anyway? It all started long ago in heaven when Satan decided to try to take over heaven. To help himself out, he talked about one-third of the angels to go along with the campaign against God. But even though God allowed Satan to have a free will and to make a bad choice, He would not allow him to take over heaven and take His place. So, Satan lost that war. But after God threw him and his angels out, he came to earth to start a war here. Only this time he tried to fight the war against God by getting the first two human beings to rebel against Him. War on earth began.

This is the tug-of-war between God and Satan with humans in the middle. This war involves everyone whether they are Christians or not. Satan is either trying to keep people from KNOWING GOD or GROWING IN GOD. If we are not Christians, we do not KNOW God. If we are Christians, we many times struggle to GROW in our relationship with Him. Satan wants to keep both these things from happening.

How do we fight this war? The Bible tells us several things.
• The Devil is sneaky in trying to trick us.
  II Corinthians 11: 13-15 tells us that he looks like a nice guy on the outside but underneath he is not a nice guy at all. Satan dresses up as a beautiful angel of light.” The Bible describes him a little like someone at Halloween playing trick or treat. He looks like he is going to give you a treat but it’s really a trick. But he is disguised so you won’t recognize him!
  • The Devil is always trying to destroy us.
  I Peter 5:8 tell us that he is like a roaring lion walking around trying to take them out.
  “The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping.” (The Message) Actually the word that is used here means to prevent someone from being able to do what God wants them to do. That is exactly what Satan wants to keep Christians from doing.
• The Devil uses temptations to get us to do wrong things.
  II Corinthians 2:11/ Ephesians 6:10, 16 tell us that he uses what I like to call ‘tailor-made temptations’ to trip us up. These are the ones that hit us where
we are the weakest and most likely to sin. For instance, I have a temper that I keep under control most of the time, except when my little dog Buster does things he shouldn’t, like not come when I call him or give me little surprises I don’t want. And boy can I get mad, really mad. Satan knows that so tries to get me to sin when I let a poor defenseless animal upset me.

- The Devil can only get me to do wrong things if I LET HIM. Genesis 6:1-3 tells us that Eve, the first woman, was tempted by Satan to get her to do the wrong things. Satan cannot make anyone do anything wrong just like God can’t make anyone to what is right. We each have to make a choice, one way of the other. To deny we are at war with God’s enemy causes us not be overcome by the Devil.
- The Devil can be defeated if we use the things God has given us to beat him. II Corinthians 10:3-6, Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:12-18 all explain how we can fight against and beat Satan. I like to say that God has made it possible for us to win over temptation and sin. God has been fighting this war against Satan a whole lot longer than we have and He knows how to help us win it. I like to call our ‘ammo’/‘tailor-made truths, specific Scriptures God gives us to use against Satan who uses ‘tailor made temptations’ to make us fail and fall.

Something important for us to remember is that God has defeated the Devil by sending Christ to die and overcome death. He, (The Devil) has lost the war against God. BUT Satan still can win the battles, the little wars that he fights against us every day. He can do damage, and he can hurt people. This is because he is mad at God and wants to hurt Him by getting us to do wrong things. Unlike the other wars, fighting against Satan is a good war; one God has already won it! Through His help, we need to win it every day.

This helps us to understand that war has become part of human life. It is not something God wanted to have happen. By allowing people to choose the right or the wrong, however, conflict between people brought about W-A-R! Even though God loves every life and does not want it destroyed, by murder or killing, He allows wars to protect the freedom and the rights of people that are precious and important!

We also realize that war is a part of everyday life because of Satan’s war against God which has resulted in our being part of ‘spiritual warfare’. Even though we know that God has won this war, we need to fight and win the battles every day through His Written Word, the Bible, and His Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Sadly, war is a way of life, between God, and us between individuals, between groups of people, between the Devil and us. War is a way of life because of human sin. God can use war for good purposes, something that is hard for us to understand. Yet we try to trust God to use even bad
things to make good things happen. The wars to preserve peace and save people’s lives are ‘good wars’; this is why we as Christians may be called to war to protect our county. *(SEE AUTHORITY)*

Many people including Christians believe that all war is wrong. They believe that Christ came to a world to give peace on earth, good will to all people. They refuse to fight. These people are called conscientious objectors, they object to becoming part of a military because they feel they must obey God even when it means that they disobey government who requires them to fight.

In Romans 13, God instructs people to obey the government even when they disapprove of war/fighting. Let’s compare war with paying taxes. We don’t stop paying taxes because we disapprove the way our government spends it! It is very important to realize that war is a necessity of life. Why? Because we have to fight for our freedom. And freedom isn’t free; it requires a price both to protect ourselves and others. Many of you know someone who has paid the highest price possible, giving their life for freedom. We should grieve for their loss and be grateful for the liberties they make possible for us in this country….

**MODERN REASONING**
All authority is to be doubted and disobeyed if we chose to, which includes going to war. And beside we should make peace not war!

**RESPONSES**
1. People have a broken relationship with God which results in people killing people in war.
2. God allowed people to kill other people only under special circumstances—which he no longer allows today.
3. God actually uses war to make peace.
4. We can obey Him when we fight the right kind of wars.

**RESOURCES**
Wilson, James. *The Principles of War* (Spiritual Warfare)
Allen, Joseph. *War: A Primer for Christians.*
Arterburn, Stephen. *130 Questions Children Ask About War and Terrorists*

**FACT**
There has been a war somewhere in the world every day since World War I.

**LIFE LAB**
*Teaching Aim:* War is a conflict between individuals, groups of people, and nations.
Activity: Set up a tug of war between two groups of people. After the contest, discuss the following.
- What was the purpose of the ‘tug’?
- Did the purpose serve God’s purposes?
- What factors were involved in who won?
- What did it feel like to win; to lose?
- Give examples of ‘good wars’ and why they are fought?
WOMAN'S RIGHTS

Now here’s a serious topic, especially for females who take it very seriously, as they should! The reason they should is because it has to do with several important questions regarding the place of women in the world.

QUESTION ONE: How did God view women at the beginning of time?
All we have to do is take a look at the first book of the Bible, Genesis, to see how God felt about women.

In Genesis 1, God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are involved in the creation of the world and all life on it. In chapter 1: 26, 27 God says, “God created human beings; he created them god-like, reflecting God’s nature. He created them male and female. In the King James, the word is: Let us create man in our own image.” It is also significant to see that God created both the man and the woman in His own image and after His likeness. The point: God created both sexes to be like Himself. Some people have a hard time understanding how a male God could create a female woman in ‘his own image’. The easiest way to explain this is that God has the qualities of both the man and the woman. So although the woman didn’t look like a male God, she had many of his qualities. Thus, she was created in His image.

This account in chapter 1 is confused a bit by the creation account in Chapter 2, however. In chapter 2:7 it tells us that God created man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living being. (NIV) Then in 2:21, 22, God records the fact that he took a rib out of man’s side and made a ‘womb-man’ meaning, she was a part of man. The man was already created from the dust and thru the breath of God and the woman was made from the man. She was part of the same original creative act in Chapter 1. Some have suggested that God did not make woman out of the head of man so she could rule him or from the foot of man so she would be his servant/slave, but took her from his rib, so she could be alongside of him. For those romantic types, it can be said that the woman was made from the area close to the man’s heart. (Ooh, how sweet it is!)

One of the things, however, that a man needs to be reminded of is that Adam was the only man to not be born of a woman. God made him first, and then He made the woman. But any macho man who wants to make a big deal out of a man being greater than a woman should remember this: After Adam, no man would be here at all if it weren’t for the woman! In the words of old 60’s hit song, “woman draws her life from man and gives it back again.”

One thing is for sure: men and women are equal because neither would be here without the other!
In Genesis, chapter 3, God again gives an illustration of man and woman being equal in a weird part of the Bible, the part that records that sin came into the world. When it comes to punishing the first man and woman, both get sent to their room. (They needed a BIG time out.) Having to work hard to make a living punishes the man. Having children punishes the woman. Now some believe that because the woman was made to have a hard time giving birth to her kids, God gave her the greater punishment. They assume that this means that she committed the greater sin; God considered her sin worse than the man’s. This is a viewpoint we will see again when we look at the place of women in the New Testament in I Timothy 2.

If this is true, then why did God kick both the man and the woman out of the garden? Because both were equal in His eyes and both of them committed the first sin; both of them ate of the fruit that was forbidden to them. Only their punishments were different. And they had to be; after all, men couldn’t have children! By the way, this is why many women feel that they got the worst end of the deal!

The Old Testament nowhere indicates that woman was to be treated as inferior to men even though that has often been the practice. The reason for this practice, I think, was due to the fact that all the men after Adam actually felt inferior to women. After all, Adam knew that He had failed God and found it easy to blame the woman for the mistake. This is exactly what Adam did in Genesis 3. God says in 3:16 explains to the woman that in addition to having pain in having children that she “would desire to rule over her husband. You’ll want to please your husband but he’ll lord it over you” In other words, she would desire to be equal but he would want to be superior to her! So, since the beginning of time, men and women have struggled over ‘who would be in charge’. As Adam felt inferior to the woman, Eve somehow wanted to prove that she was superior to him. To protect himself, Adam and many ‘adams’ who have come after him have tried to look and act like the ‘boss’ when in fact they know they aren’t. They have made the woman feel like she is not equal to him and made her feel like she was a second class citizen.’

Another look at how God viewed woman at the beginning of time is found in the Old Testament book of Judges, chapter 4. Here God allowed a woman by the name of Deborah to be put in the position of a judge (not unlike women in our modern world; we’ve got 3 women on the Supreme Court.) This is especially significant when all the other judges in the book were men. By the way, Deborah’s name in the Hebrews language means, orderly motion. I think that is important. It describes her as a person who brings order into things; she makes her moves count. This is why woman are so important to men and to society; they are really good at putting things in order, from homes (houses) to organizations. As the bumper sticker reads, “We not only need women in the home, and we need them in the house…of representatives!” I agree!

And who can ignore the fact that a woman named Esther, a Jewish woman in a Persian country, was made to be the queen of the country? Even though a closer reading of the text indicates that Esther had somewhat of a submissive role before the king; she could only go into the throne
room if he extended his scepter to her and invite her to speak. She was still the queen. The king, in fact, he did take her advice, which resulted in her saving her people, the Jews, from being killed off! (Perhaps she was considered an equal, after all.)

I also find it significant that God uses the female terms to describe his relationship with his Chosen People, Israel. He refers to her as his wife, his daughter, and his bride. Certainly this indicates that God looked at a woman as someone very special, someone created in His image, one along-side the man, the one who would give him life, one who would be used for the working out of his special purposes throughout history.

QUESTION TWO: How did Christ feel about women?
For the answer to this question, we need to go to the New Testament.

Here, we first see Christ’s feeling about his own mother. It appears that Christ had a very special and strong relationship with his mother, Mary, who was in reality his foster mother. More than once, Jesus shows great honor to her by both what He said and what He did, even when she didn’t understand exactly who He was or what He was supposed to be doing. Certainly Christ practiced what He preached: He considered women equal members of the human family and deserve to be honored and treated properly.

The New Testament also does not indicate that there is any distinction between men and women in the eyes of God. We do see several instances when women were made to ‘look’ lesser compared to men, even though this was not how Christ saw them.

For example, in Ephesians 5, Paul says to wives, “Understand and support your husbands in ways that how your support for Christ.” The old King James Version says, “Wives submit to your husbands.” More than one man has used this proof that men are superior to women and women are inferior to men!

There’s the really troubling text in I Timothy 2. Here Paul says, “I don’t let women take over and tell the men what to do. They should study to be quiet and obedient along with every one else. Adam was made first, then Eve; woman was deceived first. On the other hand, her childbearing brought about salvation, reversing Eve.” Sure sounds like Christ and the Church viewed women as inferior, doesn’t it?

But let’s look at these passages more closely. In The Ephesians 5, the text also says in 5:21, of men and women, husbands and wives, “submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ.” This implies that both of them are equal before God, On the other hand wives are told to ‘submit’ to their husbands. Men/husbands, on the other hand, are told to love their wives and care for them as they care for themselves. I conclude that if husbands are to be like Christ, who was the Savior of the church, then they have the bigger job! The Message says it this way: “The husband
provides leadership to the wife the way Christ does to the church, not by domineering but by cherishing.” I believe that husbands who love and care for their wives (Cherish them) will have women who will respect and cooperate with them in making a marriage work! (Support them). The key here is that as men love/cherish their wives as God instructed them to do and Christ modeled how they were to do it, the women will support/respect their husbands. I call this the CHERISH/SUPPORT Cycle.

But they are clearly equals, in the same position before God but with different responsibilities; (after all, remember, the husband cannot bear children.)

In I Timothy, Paul is writing about conditions that existed in the first century when the church first started. Here women wanted to know more about their faith and perhaps disturbed services by asking questions. Paul simply explains that the women were to be reverent before God. He also goes on to suggest that they were the ones who got humankind into trouble in the Garden of Eden and should basically ‘stay at home and have children.’ Again, many men and many groups of people like churches have misused these texts to make women feel inferior to men and have not treated them the same way as they do men. I agree that this situation was only part of that culture not a model for all cultures over time.

I remember, for example, a woman in one of my churches (a pastor’s wife even), who wasn’t permitted to teach anyone above the sixth grade because she would be a woman teaching a man! I remember asking the church leadership to explain to me then how it was that there were women on the mission field sponsored by our church who were able to teach and preach to men in churches, in Africa, for instance. I believed that they were not being consistent with the Scriptures which taught that men and women were equal and should be treated and used the right way, especially in the Church that Christ Himself set up. (Africa and America should not be different.)

This leads us to a two very important parts of the New Testament that have to do with The Church. The first is in Galatians 3:26-28. We read, “In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jews, slave and free, MALE AND FEMALE. Among us you are all EQUAL. (Caps Mine). We are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.”

In John 1: 12, we read. “Yet to ALL who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”

Remember the New Testament was written in the time when culture did not support the worth and rightful place of women. The women of Greece were not allowed to eat with her husbands guests or leave the house without a male escort. Greek men viewed them as inferior from birth. That is still true today, for instance, in China where more baby girls are eliminated than baby
boys. In Rome husbands could divorce their wives who went outside without a veil. Christ came to bring Christianity which would change all that.

In describing the last days on earth, in Acts 2, Peter, the Preacher, records the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Prophet Joel, who said, “in the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people, your sons and daughters will prophesy, even on my servants both men AND women.” Once again God indicates how he feels about the place and role of women. (And Joel lived in Old Testament times!) Remember, too, that in Christ ALL are equal in both belonging to His Family and ALL have abilities and gifts that are to be used in His Church.

From time to time, we use ‘Spiritual Gift Surveys’ with people who are becoming members of our church to help them know and use their gifts in the ministry. Once in awhile, a woman finds that her leading gift is that of being a pastor. I remember one woman who didn’t want me to see her ‘gift list’ because she was sure that women could not be pastors! I assured her that there were lots of different ways to be a pastor. A pastor is basically a shepherd who can care for his/her sheep inside or outside the pulpit on Sunday mornings! Many people have a hard time with this because they think that only men can be pastors. This is a perfect example of how God made both men and women in his image. God who has male and female qualities gives those qualities to men and women. Both men and women can be leaders.

This leads us to our final question.

QUESTION THREE: How are men and women created differently?

First, we must consider that fact that men and women are made differently both in their bodies and their brains. Because God created them, they came this way, so to speak. Studies confirm that women are built for instance, to bear children, men aren’t…great news for men! They also confirm that men are less communicative, they actually function more out of one side of their brain than another. Obviously a woman goes thru different physical cycles (and emotional cycles) than a man, something, which men do not understand! (Ask a woman!)

Does the fact that they are created differently physically and emotionally make them unequal as persons? NO!! They can be equal but different. Different does not mean one is greater than the other; it simply means that they have strengths/functions in different areas. They need each other to function. Adam needs even a woman along-side him today along side just as he did in Eden.

Secondly, for all the progress we think we’ve made as one advertiser put it, in “you’ve come a long way baby”---we really haven’t. The ‘glass ceiling’ has not been broken. This term is used to describe the opportunities women have in the job market and politics to ‘catch up with men’. A recent study of store managers revealed that both men and women who are managers of women earn 1 up to $1,000.00 to $2,000.00, less than those who manage men!!! And women’s pay and
opportunities for leadership still lags way behind where men are. As to the treatment of women, three things are still around after all this time.

1- **Attitudes toward women as inferior to men.** The ‘Adams’ are still trying to look like the leaders (even though they may not feel they are) by considering women as second–class citizens in lots of ways.

2- **Harassment of women.** This is when a man speaks rudely to a woman or makes statements that are offensive to her, usually concerning sex. This is obviously a sign of disrespect and one that women deeply resent!

3- **Abuse of women.** Statistics indicate that many more women are beaten up than men. Men with bad attitudes towards women often express them in destructive actions.

My take on this is that as our society moves further away from following the laws of God and the teachings of Christ, people’s treatment of each other will only get worse, including men’s treatment of women.

The world in general and even our nation has never really understood or accepted the model Christ established of how to treat women. Our attitude towards people of other races is also reflected in how we treat women. *(SEE RACISM)*

I personally have great respect for women because of three very important women in my life: My mother, my wife, and my daughter…not to mention the many women I have known and worked with during my time in ministry. These women not only show me that they are every bit equal to me and men…but, quite honestly, they often reveal to me that they are actually SUPERIOR, in many ways. (Especially in picking up on details, being sensitive, and seeing things that men often miss.) Wise are the guys who realize this! And by the way, the way that a man treats a woman tells me a lot more about him than it does her. A man who treats a woman as an equal and gives her the respect that goes with then status is a secure, wise, sensitive, and strong man. A man, who treats a woman otherwise, is just the opposite.

It’s time to re-enter Eden (before sin) by affirming the equality and dignity of both sexes. It’s time for men to stop pretending to be superior and dominate over women and for women to obtain and enjoy the right and privilege of not being made to feel and treated as inferior. It’s time for women to be secure as God made them by being respected and cared for as God intended them to be.

When this truly happens, women will not need to compete to surpass men. They can and will respond with respect and gratitude for the men who treat them the way they deserve to be treated. When they are cherished by men, they will find a whole lot easier to support them!
MODERN REASONING
Women are inferior to men, because of what the first woman did and men have a right to disrespect and mistreat them.

RESPONSES
1. Men and women are both a reflection of the God who made them.
2. Christ considered women equal to men as people as well as in the church.
3. Men today need to treat women with the same honor, respect, and dignity which Christ does.

RESOURCES
MacDonald, Fiona. Women in 19th Century America.
Toussaint, Pamela. I Call You Friend: Four Women’s Stories of Race, Faith and Friendship.
La Porte, Jean. The Role of Women in Early Christianity.

FACT:
In 1971 women made up 4.5 % of the nations state legislators. That rose to 5.5 % in 2000.

LIFE LAB
Teaching Aim: Equality and opportunity is something that woman deserve like everyone else. Activity: Divide Group into Male/Female. Now present a list of rights, privileges, and demands to each one which is different. Then, reverse the lists. Talk about which ones women do and which ones men do. Discuss how each gender can treat the other gender better.