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SERIES: GOING AND GROWING

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TITLE: Loving God With All Your Mind Pt. 1

“You lost me.” This is the message of a significant portion of young people ages 18-29, who are abandoning their faith. They’re saying, “You lost me.” The Barna Group discovered that 59% of Mosaics, that is 18-29s, have dropped out of attending church, and are leaving their Christian faith; 50% admit to being significantly frustrated about their faith; 38% have significantly doubted their faith; 32% have felt like rejecting their parents’ faith. These are troubling statistics.

The exodus of one-time Christians isn’t just reduced down to the youth. It is impacting all age groups. In 2007, the American population was made up of 16% non-religious people. This 16% was made up of atheists, agnostics and others who claimed no particular religious affiliation. On May 12, 2015, a new report showed that 23% of Americans are now non-religious. That is second to evangelicals, which make up 25% of the American population. There are many reasons why this has happened, and each story I read mattered, and shed light on this problem.

One of the main reasons I believe that people are abandoning their faith is because of Christian anti-intellectualism. Neil Postman says this, “. . . *Americans are the best entertained and quite likely the least well-informed people in the Western world.*” I think he’s right. Listen to these American statistics: 42% cannot identify Japan on a map; 15% cannot identify the United States of America on a map; 50% of students don’t know of the Cold War; 60% of adults have never read a book; 41% of American teens cannot name the 3 branches of government. But in good news, 59% can name the Three Stooges.

We in America love our entertainment. We love sitcoms, movies, sports, YouTube, video games, and so on. According to the Bureau of Labor & Statistics, in 2013 the average person spent 3-6 hours a day watching TV and movies. Only 9 minutes, up to an hour, are spent over a weekend reading a book or magazine. In fact, only 6% of Americans read a book a year. Now, none of the leisure activities I mentioned earlier are bad. They are good ways to relax and pass the time. I think each of us need to ask, “When is too much media and entertainment too much?” and “What will this excess of entertainment cost me as a believer?”

Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland suggests one consequence: “*Anti-intellectualism has spawned an irrelevant gospel. Today, we share the gospel primarily as a means of addressing felt needs.*” So one effect is a cheapened Gospel: One that appeals to the emotions and the experience of the hearer, not of the mind. It is a Gospel that says, “Do you want to be a better mom? A better husband? Have a better life? If so, choose option A: Christianity!”

Now I get it – some of the things mentioned, such as being a better spouse or parent, should be a result of following Christ, but that can't be all. It is intellect that tells me that in order to drive from Nebraska to Los Angeles, I have to drive west rather than east. It is intellect that helps us balance a check book. Our spiritual ledger is in the red, without salvation through Christ. Knowledge of our sin, and a solution through Christ, powered by the Holy Spirit, brings us to Salvation.

This move to anti-intellectualism began in the mid-1700s, but it began gaining speed in the 1800s. This happened because of three main areas of study: philosophy, science, and German higher criticism. In philosophy, the thinking of David Hume and Immanuel Kant, who appealed to the 5 senses to gain knowledge, said God could not be known. Charles Darwin impacted science by his claims of macroevolution. This created a ripple effect, hitting the claims of Genesis. Last was German higher criticism, which called into question the historical reliability of Scripture. Since these three big movements, Christians have slowly become averse to intellectual inquiry, and moved out of intellectual culture and public dialogue. The result is a saltless and lightless culture. I appeal to you today – this cannot remain the norm. Philosopher William Lane Craig warns us, *“As Christians, their minds are going to waste. One result of this is an immature, superficial faith. People who simply ride the roller coaster of emotional experience are cheating themselves out of a deeper and richer Christian faith by neglecting the intellectual side of that faith.”*

This is why is why **we are starting a new series, called “Growing and Going.”** We do not want to be people with immature and superficial faith. **We are committing this month to growing in our faith: Understanding more about what it means to be a follower of Christ.** We desire to grow deep roots, so our faith is strong in the storms and successes of life. But **we also want to strengthen our faith, so we can get going.** God did not save us to sit down in life. God has us where He wants us for a purpose. It's not to seek a comfortable life, where we hunker down in our homes, killing our brains with YouTube and Netflix. No way - **God saved us on purpose and for a purpose. That purpose is to glorify Him through our obedience, and make disciples while going through life.**

Today, we want to lay the foundation for this month. In our short time together, I want to discuss why **every Christian can have a strong and reasonable faith by avoiding 3 snares of anti-intellectualism.** We know that God is gracious. According to John 1, God has poured out grace upon grace. You will see how grace is present in our ability to reason, and also how we approach the people and institutions who challenge our faith. Let's begin by looking at **the first snare of Christian anti-intellectualism: Fearfulness.**

DISCUSSION:

N: Before we go further, let me bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. I just mentioned fearfulness. Have you ever been afraid to discuss the claims of the Bible?

C: No, not really. I am afraid sometimes of misrepresenting what the Bible says. I write, and so I have, what I call the Bible police, reread and read and read it again - different eyes. Because I don't want to communicate something wrong. I don't want to lead someone down the wrong path.

I want to make sure my theology is right. And you know something, I've gotten real comfortable with getting a question, and just saying, "I don't know the answer, but let's find it out together." I don't get too bent out of shape about that anymore.

N: That's good. What about you Arnie?

A: I don't really get into those deep conversations like I used to, when I went to Christian school as a kid. I don't let myself, because we used to argue and argue and argue all this kind of stuff, about what the Scripture said and all of that - and I wasn't even a believer then. And what I try to do is focus on the other person, and find out where they are, because most people that want to start a fight on some kind of thing, it's really - it's much, much deeper than that. And it's a spiritual issue that's out there that Christ knows. So I don't get in those arguments much anymore.

N: Well, and I think what we need to do is what Cara was talking about - how we don't always have to give an answer right then and there. We can pause and say, "Look, that's a great question. Give me a little bit of time to think about it and research that. And then let me get back to you". Terrifies me, to being like, the Bible Answer Man. Now, generally speaking, the people in those positions, they get the same questions over and over again, just worded a little bit different. But I remember, one time when going through an interview for a church - One of the guys asked me this question. He's like, "Well, what does Leviticus... mean?" And I go, "Can I have a Bible? I don't have the Bible memorized. So can I, you know, get a look at it?" He shows me it. And I just go, "You know what? I honestly don't know. I've not studied that passage exclusively. If you give me some time, I can probably give you a better answer than 'I don't know'. But I mean, that's just the truth, that there's a lot of information there". And he goes, "I just want to say thank you, because you were humble enough to just say you don't know, but you're willing to research it." And I think that is a good posture for us to have. And when the steamrollers come, like Greg Koukl would say, "Get out of the way; let them run over someone else, because they're not there for an answer. They're there to humiliate you."

Fearfulness happens for several reasons. I want to look briefly at two. **First is a fear caused by persecution from believers.** Some people *inside* the circle of Christianity have posed honest questions and doubts. Unfortunately, some have been told to shut up. This breaks my heart; it saddens me, because we've been telling people for so long that there are no dumb questions, but what many have meant is, "There are no off the table questions, except the ones about doubt, science, and controversial topics." This response of, "Don't ask such questions" happens more often than we like to admit. Here is the effect in the life of one well known author, **Dan Brown**. Dan Brown hit the big time of authorship, with his landmark work "*The Davinci Code*." Listen to his account as a young man:

"I was raised Episcopalian, and I was very religious as a kid. Then, in eighth or ninth grade, I studied astronomy, cosmology, and the origins of the universe. I remember saying to a minister, "I don't get it. I read a book that said there was an explosion known as the Big Bang, but here it says God created Heaven and Earth and the animals in seven days. Which is right?"

Unfortunately, the response I got was, “Nice boys don’t ask that question.” A light went off, and I said, “The Bible doesn’t make sense. Science makes much more sense to me.” And I just gravitated away from religion.”

Oh, so sad. We don’t know conclusively that if his minister would have entertained his question more, that Dan Brown would have remained in the Church, but I can’t help to believe this had a devastating blow.

My kids are always asking me really great and tough questions. My son Landon will often ask me things like “Dad, God is Jesus. Jesus is God. God is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Jesus.” “Yes, Landon, God is three persons in one.” “I don’t get it.” Now what would happen if I were to tell him, “Now, nice boys don’t ask that question”? But I don’t do that. Instead, I reason with him and talk through who God is, in His wonderful complex-simplicity.

Francis Schaeffer lived an important practice: he was always ready to give “honest answers for honest questions.” That’s what I want us to do today. That’s why we’ve created a YouTube series called, “Hard Questions / Real Answers.” We want to provide real answers to life’s hardest questions. You can find this series through our website backtothebible.org, and also on our Back to the Bible YouTube page. This is a great resource that has new videos each week.

We also have a helpful resource for non-believers called, “Is Christianity for You?” If you have friends, family, and peers who aren’t believers, but have questions about our faith, you can send these videos, and our “Digging Deeper” studies to them. Here at Back to the Bible we want to help you grow in your faith. In fact, your spiritual journey is our number one priority. And we want to help your friends, family, and other acquaintances in their spiritual journey as well. That’s why we’ve created so many additional resources for you to share.

I believe there are some very big discussions we as Christians need to be open to dialoguing about – discussion about the topics of the Big Bang cosmology, evolution, the age of the universe, the reliability of Scripture, the problem of evil, and more. These are real topics of discussion, not because we need to be afraid of science or history, but because we need to know what we believe, and why we believe it. When we talk about these issues and address the doubts of believers, we are showing them grace.

If we are honest, we all have faced doubt of some kind relating to our faith. What a wonderful and empowering conversation to a doubting or questioning person, that you too have struggled, but have found answers, comfort, and a stronger faith because of your inquiry.

John 1:16-17 (NIV) states, “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” We have experienced so much grace from God, despite our disbelief and doubt. We must show our grace to our inquiring brothers and sisters. Such grace results in discovering truth.

So, I’ve mentioned the first kind of fear we experience in sharing our faith – the fear of persecution from *within* the church. The second kind of fear is a fear that happens when *outsiders* ask us questions about our faith. It is one thing for a fellow believer to ask us a hard question, but what about someone who believes something different than us? They are seeking

understanding. Or what about those skeptics or cynics, who are trying to poke holes in your faith?

I suggest, first, we show them grace. I want to ask you a serious question that I want you to really think about: Why are you a Christian? I'm dead serious, why are you a Christian? You must be able to know what you believe, and why you believe it. Many people still claim Christianity as their religion of choice, but few know what that really means. Even fewer know why they believe it. A reasonable and thought out faith is one that is ready to answer those who inquire, and seek to discredit our beliefs. At times our discussions with outsiders will be intense and emotional. But I love the reminder that Paul gives us on his method and assurance for our encounters. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."**

I love this passage. Our weapons are not the weapons of this world. No, we have divine power – that is God's power – to destroy strongholds. What are these strongholds? They're arguments, propositions, alternate explanations – all of which are not true. The real battle is of the mind and Heavenly realm.

Houston Baptist professor and apologist John Mark Reynolds nailed it, when he wrote, *"If Christianity is true, then every argument will, if pursued to the end, lead to Jesus."* So we must not tell insiders who have questions and doubts to shut up. Likewise, when outsiders ask or attack, we shouldn't shut up, but respond with grace and respect.

Are you afraid of pursuing truth? I have been. When I was young, I had no reason to doubt or question what I was being taught. And as I grew up, I began to be cognizant of all the differing worldviews and philosophies out there. We need to face the fact that there are many religions in the world today. There are many worldviews for sale. Have you ever looked at them and asked the question: could they be true? Could I be wrong? Could their answers to life's toughest questions be more coherent? I don't know how many of us have done this. Now, you may have come from another religion. Maybe you were an atheist. But have you actually stopped and looked at all the options on the table?

I can tell you with integrity, as an adult, I have. I have looked at atheism. I've looked at Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism. I've looked at the cults. Here's what I've discovered: They do not provide real and coherent answers for life's hardest questions. Questions like: Why are we here? Where did we come from? What happens to us when we die? Where does morality come from? No other worldview provides a coherent answer for these questions. Christianity does.

N: So, let's bring in Arnie and Cara. Cara, what's been helpful for you to answer questions about the faith? What might you recommend for our listeners?

C: Besides Nat Crawford? [Is there anything better?] Yeah, you know what, Nat? I acquired a really good study Bible early on - and I know Back to the Bible has the Warren Wiersbe one - that just kind of answers and explains things as you go along. I think that's pretty awesome - just make sure it's a good one with good theology. There are reputable websites, too, like Gotquestions.org - I love them; I use them all the time; I recommend them to people. Also, too, the guys that you have on this podcast, Nat. They're great, because they've dedicated whole books to answering the questions that are hard to answer: you know, Why pain?; and Why sin?; and Why all the stuff that we have questions about?

N: Yeah, there are a lot of hard questions, but I think that there really are good answers out there. One thing I picked up for my son recently - he's going into seventh grade - and I picked him up the Apologetics Study Bible: great resource for kids, good theology, but also reasonable answers for the hard questions of life. And the reality is, the questions aren't going to go away. They're going to come quicker, faster and harder. And so the more resources we have, the better. Okay. So what about this, Arnie - from your perspective, what's the difference between belief and conviction and how have you arrived at conviction?

A: So belief without conviction has little to no impact on one's behavior, when compared to someone who has no belief and no action towards Jesus Christ. [Hmm]. Belief with conviction shows a completely different behavior from people over time. And that's the problem when you have kids is, no matter how great of a parent you are, by the time they get 17, 18, they pretty much have your belief system, no matter what you've tried to do. And the problem is, that is a belief without being tried, without Mom and Dad there, so it's a belief, pretty much without conviction. And if you fed them Kool-Aid, or forced them - you know, either way - you're going to end up with somebody who, by the time they're 22 or 23, doesn't go to church anymore. Doesn't - who's changed all those kinds of things - because they had belief for sure, but they didn't have their own conviction that affected their actions.

N: I think you probably just talked to a lot of people out there, that's going to hit home. So how do you move personally, from belief to conviction, and how do you help those who we know and love move from that belief to conviction?

A: You're asking me son? You're the pastor.

N: Hey, I've done enough talking for today. I'm turning it over to you guys. I mean, I think that's - what's really - let's talk about this, because I know that there are parents out there who are hearing this, and they're going, "I think I did things right. Not perfectly, but I did things right. They said the right things, but now they're off doing their own life, their own version. And I know it's not right." So I mean, what should they do in those circumstances?

A: My parents used to ask me, "What did we do wrong?" And would mean it sincerely, you know, like, "Is it our fault you're a spiritual nightmare?" You know, "Did we do something wrong? Did the school, the Christian school?" you know, I went to, and honestly, they did everything they could. The only problem was, I had a belief without conviction, and that's an individual thing. That's why Jesus didn't create - you know, He created your kids and all of that -

but He didn't create them as robots. And you can do the best you can. But if they grow up with very little conviction - in other words, their behavior looks pretty much like everybody else's - you're going to end up with kids, that are what we call, either "the nones" - they have no religious affiliation - or "notional Christians", but they're basically "going nowhere with Jesus". And they look exactly like the people that are "going somewhere without Jesus".

C: Well, look how God treated them in the Garden. And then they still made the choice to sin against Him. So I plead with God - well, I say, I used to plead with God - and say, "Lord, you can't take me out, because who's going to raise these kids?" because I'm trying to do it biblically, but God loves them more than we do. And we have to hand them over to Him. And you know, all we can do is put what we can in them. And you know, I'm teaching my kids Apologetics and the things, but they have to make it their own. And we just have to trust God in those circumstances. That's all I can say about that. I've had to reconcile that, right?

N: The one thing I can encourage any parents, grandparents out there, who do have kids, grandkids, great-grandkids, who have wandered away from the faith, even though they know the truth - is pray for them - pray for them. That prayer may take 10, 20, 30, 40 years, but possibly down the road, God will get their hearts into the right place, and they will turn to Him. Sometimes we know that's not the case, but the reality is, even when you are done raising those kids, you can still pray for them, and still lead by example. But there's no doubt: It is hard to watch as they wander.