

24-1020a - Master Copy

24-1020a - Why Are We Losing Them When They Leave For College?^[1]

Article read by Scott Reynolds, **Bible Readers:** Stephen Tuck and Wyatt Woosley

This detailed summary by ChatGPT

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(Transcription by TurboScribe.ai)

Why Are We Losing Them?

Scripture Readings:

1st Scripture Reading, Stephen Tuck

Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

2nd Scripture Reading, Wyatt Woosley

2 Peter 3:3-5 (ESV)

knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,

Sermon

Preacher: Scott Reynolds

Introduction

I came across an article on the *Apologetics Press* website, (and apologetics is, if you remember from Tom's Wednesday night class on apologetics, is not feeling sorry for something and apologizing, but it is reasoned arguments or writings in justification of something, like a theory or a religious doctrine. That is, apologetics is reasoned arguments or writings in justification of something, like a religious doctrine). Anyway, I came across an article on the *Apologetics Press* website that I felt we needed to see. It's on a significant, relevant topic and expertly written. I'd like to present it to the church in accordance with the Apologetics Press copyright permissions. The article entitled: *Why Are We Losing Them When They Leave For College*, published October 20, 2019 by Apologetics Press, Inc. The URL for the article to the Apologetic Press website is posted in the notes of this presentation that is available on our website now.

The article was written by Kevin Cain, JD, a doctor of Jurisprudence.

Kevin Cain begins his article by asking...

Why Are We Losing Them When They Leave For College?

We took her to Bible class. We took her to worship services regularly. We took her to countless youth events, trips, and activities. She was baptized at camp when she was 14. I thought we did everything right before she left for college. We did what the preachers and elders said we should do when it comes to raising our sweet daughter. And yet, when she left home for higher education, she left the church about the same time. She does not attend worship services or Bible class. She is not involved with any other Christians or on-campus Christian organizations. She is not in contact with any of her old church friends. She's gone, and it breaks my heart every day. Where did we go wrong? Too many parents have lived a similar experience. If it only happened once, it would be a tragedy. But when we see it happen time and time again, it is an epidemic. The obvious question is "why?" Why are so many of our young people leaving for college and leaving the church at the same time? What are we missing? What did we fail to teach them? What went wrong?

There are countless theories as to why this epidemic continues. People speculate they are leaving because the church is too conservative; the music is boring; the preacher uses too much Scripture; the church is outdated on its views of marriage and women's roles; the parents were too strict; the church building is outdated; or the youth minister didn't connect with my child on a personal level. Theories and opinions abound, but what is missing are facts and objective answers. Parents and elders are looking for answers—why are they leaving and what can be done?

First, are the statistics as bad as we have heard? The short answer is "yes." Campus Renewal out of Austin, Texas estimates that between 60% to 80% of Christian denominational students leaving for college also leave their faith behind as well.^[2] Another study by respected pollster George Barna involved interviews with 22,000 adults and over 2,000 teenagers in 25 separate surveys (hereinafter the "Barna Study"). The purpose of this survey was not only to determine how many young people were leaving religion, but also to find out why. This survey among "conservative" evangelicals concluded that two-thirds of young people give up on religion when they head for college.^[3] While these are general studies outside the churches of Christ, these numbers are nevertheless alarming. While the numbers at the congregation you attend may be better, any statistic above 0% is worrisome.

So, who do we blame? When things go this wrong on this scale, we like to blame the elders, the youth minister, the preacher, the church (as a whole), global warming, or pretty much anyone but ourselves. If we can point the finger at someone else before they point the finger at us, we don't have to feel too bad about these alarming numbers. Right?

Interestingly, the Barna Study delves deep (and I mean deep) into analyzing why these young people are leaving religion behind. For example, the Barna Study determined that of all the 20-something evangelicals who attended church regularly but no longer do so now:

- 95% attended church regularly during elementary and middle school.
- 55% attended church regularly during high school
- 11% were still going to church during college^[4]

From those stats, we see that only 11% of those who have left the church did so during college years. Almost 90% of them were lost already in middle school and high school—before going to college. About 40% are leaving the church during elementary and middle school. This shocked me when I first read it. We are not losing most of our young people when they leave for college and have to face the world alone for the first time. Most of them are checking out (mentally if not physically as well) in junior high and high school. We are losing them earlier than we might have thought. The Barna Study goes on to make an interesting comparison between those who regularly attended Bible class and those who did not regularly attend Bible class. Compared to those who grew up not attending Bible class, students who regularly attend Bible class are:

- more likely NOT to believe all accounts/stories in the Bible are true or accurate;
- more likely to doubt the Bible because it is written by men and has errors in the translating;
- more likely to accept that gay marriage and abortion should be legal;
- much more likely to believe that God used evolution to change one kind of animal into another;
- more likely NOT to believe the earth is less than 10,000 years old;
- more likely to believe dinosaurs died before people were on the planet; and
- more likely to believe that good people don't need to go to church.^[5]

These statistics appear to be upside down. How could it be that a person who grew up attending Bible school is less likely to believe in basic Bible principles as compared to a person who did not regularly go to Bible class? That simply doesn't make sense. I'll admit; I had to read these results several times before I finally concluded that I was not misreading or misunderstanding all this. Are we doing something wrong or missing something in our traditional Bible class curricula?

What we begin to see from these important findings in the Barna Study is a significant correlation between believing in the creation account and whether they will remain faithful to God or whether they will come back to the church. There is a direct tie between what they believe about Genesis and their attitude toward Christianity.

The conclusion here is painfully obvious: If the authority of God's Word is undermined in Genesis, this leads to a slippery slope of unbelief about the whole of the Bible. If we as teachers, parents, preachers, and elders have been chipping away at the accuracy and reliability of the events in the first eleven chapters in Genesis (or we ignore cultural attacks on Genesis 1-11), if we really cannot rely on these events as being historically accurate, why should we believe in the accuracy of the details of the life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50? Why should we believe the accuracy of Moses delivering Israel from slavery in the book of Exodus? Why believe the account of David and Goliath? How could we believe in the miracles of Elijah and Elisha? Why should we even believe the prophecies of Jesus? Ultimately, why believe the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John if we cannot rely on the accuracy of Genesis 1-11? Our kids are smart enough to know that when we compromise in one area of the Bible (like Genesis 1-11), we can hypocritically compromise wherever we want. The damage has been done, and for most of our young people, it depends on how they view the foundation and the very beginning of the Bible and the Creation account.

The Barna Study also looked into the beliefs of young adults who said they plan to return some day (like when they have kids of their own) versus those who never plan to return.^[6]

[When Asked]	[of those] Planning on returning	[those] Never coming back
Do you believe all the books of the Bible are inspired by God?	76.4% said yes	41.9% said yes
Do you believe in creation as stated in the Bible?	92.1% said yes	47.8% said yes
Do you believe in the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?	91.3% said yes	50.6% said yes
Do you believe all the accounts/stories in the Bible are true/Accurate?	58.5% said yes	16.8% said yes

Those who have left and never plan to return have serious doubts about the accuracy of the Bible, especially when it comes to Creation. In those early formative years, they were clearly left with questions and reservations about the reliability of God’s word and the Creation account in particular. And now, after years of doubting the first chapters of Genesis and years after a constant bombardment of evolution in school (and pretty much everywhere) and increasing compromises by religious institutions regarding Creation, they find themselves gone with no thought of ever returning.

In 1859, Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* and 12 years later *The Descent of Man*.^[7] In these two volumes, he made popular the idea that single-celled organisms changed through the process of evolution into ape-like creatures and eventually into humans.^[8] In response, many of the religious institutions in England, and eventually across the United Kingdom and Europe, began to adopt Darwin’s ideas.^[9] They reinterpreted the Genesis account of Creation and proposed views such as “theistic evolution.”^[10] They compromised what they had always taught (God created the world in one literal week) and tried to engender scientific credibility by claiming that God worked through evolution to create the world. To see the long-term effect of this compromise, just look at the superficial state of religion in Europe today. It can be summed up by looking at the beautiful cathedrals and places of worship throughout that continent—amazing museums filled with architectural works, but lacking in the work of the Lord.

The damage was done, and the slope was more than just a little slippery. This thinking and rationale of making compromises in the Creation account sent a very clear message to everyone, especially to the upcoming younger generations. It was now acceptable to use man’s ideas to re-interpret the Bible, rather than to use the Bible to judge man’s ideas. God set up a system where He laid out His divine perspective on how man should view the world (Psalm 32:8). God made man (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, man should listen to God, the Creator (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). When man started listening to sources outside of God, a spiritual perspective would encourage man to judge those worldly ideas by God’s standard to see if they are sound and righteous (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1). But now, young people see organized religion doing something altogether different. Now they see church leaders conforming and changing God’s Word to fit alleged scientific theories and notions, rather than an accurate view of the physical world that corresponds perfectly with the Bible—a divine source these young people once believed was the “truth.”

Here is the rational next step that signals the beginning of the end for so many young people. “If I can’t trust the Bible in the earthly things, why should I trust it in the spiritual things?” That is a fair question. If you answer that you cannot trust the Bible in either arena, then what good is God’s Word? And that is the conclusion that many young people are reaching. In contrast, if you are struggling and want to compromise and believe the Bible may not be scientifically accurate but it is still relevant for spiritual matters, then think about what message that sends. Under this perspective, if a young person has questions about how to feel about God or think about his fellow man, then you go to the church for answers. If you have questions about facts and reality, you go to school and ask your science teacher. This practice of trying to harmonize Creation with evolution (often called “theistic evolution”) has created an environment where the church has basically disconnected the Bible from the “real world.”

The first chip to fall—and where the slippery slope begins—is the belief that the Earth is billions of years old. The battleground is not necessarily evolution, as there are many evolutionists who still believe in God, and there are many who do not believe in God and also do not subscribe to the theory of evolution. The major attack on biblical authority today starts with the attack on the first verse in the Bible, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Notice the growing level of disbelief in the statistics below as they bottom out on the subject of the age of the Earth.

- 77% believe in Noah’s ark and the global flood
- 75% believe in Adam and Eve in the garden
- 62% believe Abraham fathered Isaac when he was 100 years old
- 60% believe in the Tower of Babel
- ONLY 20% believe the earth is less than 10,000 years old^[11]

The number one area of disbelief among young people who are leaving religion and their faith behind is the age of the Earth. This is where we are losing them. This is where the line in the sand has been drawn. For those surveyed who did not believe in the accuracy of the Bible, the Barna Study asked the reasons why they did not believe the Bible events are accurate:

- 24% said they were written by men.
- 18% said the Bible was not translated correctly.
- 15% said the Bible contradicts itself.
- 14% said science shows the world is old.
- 11% said the Bible contains errors.
- 7% said there’s so much suffering in the world.
- 4% said Christians do not live by the Bible
- 4% said evolution proves the Bible is wrong.^[12]

Interestingly, 82% of those who said they did not believe all the accounts in the Bible are true and accurate did so because of doubts about the authority of the Bible. This is the problem and a significant reason why they are leaving. This should come as no surprise to the Bible student who knows through inspiration what people will be like in times like this.

Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God (2 Peter 3:3-5).

In this period of time where scoffers and critics will ridicule faithful Christians for anticipating the return of Christ, notice that these same people will deny the Creation account. And from a sinful, strategic perspective, it makes sense. If you can get them to doubt the first historical act of God in the Bible (God made the world in six days), getting them to doubt the rest of the Bible will be easy work.

This is not to say that there are not other factors at work and relevant causes of this dilemma. However, it seems clear that basic beliefs about the first few chapters of Genesis are a significant part of the problem as to why so many young people leave the church.

The Solution

The problem is devastating, the numbers are heartbreaking, and the cause of all this is discouraging. So, what can be done? Is the point of all this just to scare us and make us feel bad, or is there something we can do? The good news is there are answers and solutions, but it will take hard work to right this ship.

Rewrite Our Curriculum

This is not to say that we have not been doing a good job of teaching our children about the Old Testament, Christ, the Church, and salvation. However, we may be under-emphasizing or overlooking a critical component in a balanced spiritual course of study—APOLOGETICS. We need more classes on apologetics, especially on fundamental questions on the existence of God and the first eleven chapters of Genesis, especially the historical reality of the Creation account. Please do not be prideful and say, “We’ve been doing this for years” or “I’ve spent years developing these lessons.” That work should not be overlooked and is genuinely appreciated. However, it is time to take a fresh perspective on what we are teaching in light of these alarming statistics. Greater emphasis on apologetics and the historical reality of the Creation account is needed in our classes.

Start Younger

We need to be teaching apologetics at younger ages. And yes, this obviously includes our high school and junior high students, but also our elementary and even pre-school children. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Apologetics Press offers a variety of resources to help you instruct and instill within our young people a belief and love for God, His word, and His creation. There is the “Learn to Read” series that uses the theme of “God created everything” to help children begin to read. My personal favorite is *Dogs, Frogs, and Hogs*. These books contain simple phrases like “God made dogs.” Like the early readers we were introduced to in public school, these books take simple phrases and concepts, mingle them with God’s creative power, and engrain them into precious minds who need to know God.

There is also an “Early Reader” series that uses more words and somewhat more sophisticated topics to impress on slightly older children the complexity and beauty of God’s creation. The little boys I read to love *God Made Insects*. The girls tend to like *God Made Puppies*. There is something for everyone here. The level of information increases when you move to the “Advanced Reader” series. These include titles like *Copies of God’s Design*, *Human Body*, and *Migrating Animals*. As your children grow in their reading skills and in their ability to process information, these readers follow them all along the way emphasizing over and over again the reality that God made it all.

As your kids get even older, there are books that mature with them while tackling more difficult concepts. *Dinosaurs Unleashed* is one of the best sellers at Apologetics Press, and the kids love it. The art-work is amazing, but the message is invaluable—God made everything, and that includes dinosaurs. There are other books for this stage in life, like *How Do You Know God is Real?* and *Wonders of God’s Creation*. One of my personal, creative favorites is the *Dinosaur Field Journal*. This is a great resource for the adventurer inside our sweet children.

As they reach their teenage years, there are other excellent books that challenge our young people to question what they are hearing in the world and to be secure in their faith. These include *The Dinosaur Delusion*, *Truth Be Told: Exposing the Myth of Evolution*, *Always Be Ready, Out With Doubt*, *A Matter of Fact*, and *Reasons to Believe*.

Finally, every student leaving for college should be equipped with the *Defending the Faith Study Bible* from Apologetics Press. This Bible is filled with resources designed to arm our teens and college aged youth (and older people like me) with information to combat the atheistic assumptions and difficult questions that so many young people face in school and among their friends. This Bible has helps and resources throughout that include:

- Scores of special sections that cover topics such as God’s existence, science and the Bible, God’s justice and hell, defending the Bible’s position on prayer, theistic evolution, and the Bible and slavery.
- Comments written and produced by faithful members of the Lord’s Church.
- Thorough and complete refutations of alleged Bible contradictions and discrepancies.
- A litany of positive evidences for the inspiration of the Bible, such as documented archaeological discoveries, comparisons of modern scientific findings with the biblical text, and historical evidence that validates the predictive prophecies of the Bible.
- Biblical answers to some of life’s most profound questions such as: Why did God create people? Why do good people suffer? How will it all end?

And the good news is that while there are many books and resources highlighted in this article, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Apologetics Press has countless volumes of books, readers, magazines, and other sources to help fortify your children’s faith and assist moms and dads in reaching one of the greatest goals in their lives—see their children remain faithful to God. Please take advantage of these resources.

More Teachers Willing To Step Up

If we are going to have more classes on apologetics, we will obviously need more teachers willing to tackle these classes. We not only need teachers to step up in Bible class, but also parents to get more involved in teaching and reinforcing apologetics at home. Unfortunately, we tend to think of

apologetics as somewhat of a specialized discipline where only experts (like the staff at AP) can effectively teach this material. I'll be the first to admit that the folks at Apologetics Press are outstanding teachers and preachers, especially in the area of apologetics. They have unique knowledge and talents that make them exceptionally qualified and true blessings in the church. I get it.

However, you probably don't know much about how to treat Type 2 Diabetes or Reye's Syndrome. Nevertheless, I am confident that if your child was diagnosed with one of these conditions, it would not take you long to become an expert in this arena. Your child's physical condition would require you to learn a considerable amount of complicated medical information, but you would master it, because your child's life is worth it.

We need to get just as serious and motivated when it comes to the spiritual welfare of our children. Yes, I know, apologetics can seem a little complex and will require some study and effort on our part, but it is worth it. Our children are leaving the church in alarming numbers, and a significant reason why is because of how they view the first few chapters of the Bible. The world is constantly attacking the Bible, and especially the Creation account. We need to get prepared, and we need to prepare our children. They are worth it.

History, Not Stories

I know this will sound like nitpicky semantics, but please stop calling historical events in the Bible "stories." It is not that this is in any way inaccurate. But when our children hear the word "stories," they think of everything from Winnie the Pooh to Harry Potter. The term "stories" can imply that the information to be revealed may not be entirely accurate. When we talk in class about the "story of Creation," our children may be equating this in their minds with the fiction in story books we read to them about talking bears and flying superheroes. Let's start talking about the Creation "account" rather than a story. Let's refer to the Flood as an "event" or a "historical reality" rather than a story. We can do better to impress on our children that what happened in the Bible (especially in the first 11 chapters) is just as real as when men landed on the moon, when George Washington was our first president, and when Shakespeare wrote Hamlet. Let's get real with our teaching.

What Is Not the Solution

To the surprise of many, one interesting thing gleaned from the Barna Study is that young people largely are not leaving religion because the worship and singing is not cool enough. To look at some churches who subscribe to the "Sister Act" theory of church retention, one could easily conclude that young people are leaving the church because worship services just aren't exciting enough. Some have the mindset that if we just make our worship and singing culturally relevant, the young people will flood back into the pews and stay with us. The statistics simply do not support this assumption.

Becoming "culturally cool" may have an immediate short-term impact on enthusiasm and attendance, but it is just a Band-Aid for a much deeper disease. While contemporary music and a concert environment is popular these days in many worship services, it is not the problem. The Barna Study made clear that the primary problem driving young people away is not "cool" worship services, but their rejection of belief in basic Bible teachings. We don't need gimmicks, entertaining concerts, and light shows in worship. We simply need the preaching of God's Word.

Are there other things that can be done to help address this problem of young people leaving the Church? Absolutely. Pray for them every day that God would bless and protect them as they increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with man, and especially in favor with God. Remove hypocrisy from the lives of elders and parents who interact with these young people. Be consistent with your kids in terms of emphasizing the importance of spiritual matters over everything (including sports and academics). Keep your kids involved in church and spiritual activities, and surrounded by godly influences. These are all helpful and worth consideration. But at the core of this problem is whether our kids believe the first few chapters of Genesis. No more excuses. No more compromises. It is time to take a stand and proclaim: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and after six days, God saw that it was very good.

The Invitation

The invitation is being extend now to anyone who is subject to it, as we stand and sing.

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[2] Paul McCants (no date), Campus Renewal, Campus Ministry, p. 1, <https://www.campusrenewal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Campus-Renewal-Campus-Link-Grant-Proposal.pdf>.

[3] Ken Ham and Britt Beemer (2009), *Already Gone* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books), pp. 22-23.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[7] Charles Darwin (1859), *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray); Charles Darwin (1871), *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray).

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Ham and Beemer, p. 75.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.