

## **THE AIM OF THIS CURRICULUM**

Many people think that those in the military, high government offices or important financial positions control the world. In this they are mistaken; our world revolves around *ideas*. Militaries exude power and authority, yet they are prisoners to the ideologies of their representative nations. Politicians and those in positions of governmental authority may think they rule the world, but they are held captive by the ideas they have embraced about government. Executives in large corporations may think they have the world by the tail, but they too are indebted to their ideas/beliefs about business practices/values and economic trends. Ideas lie behind every historical event and social policy. Ideas are the guiding force behind every twist and turn in public opinion; they determine what we accept or reject in the arts, media, business, medicine, education, government, church, family, etc.

We will never fully understand our world unless we understand the ideas that form its structure. Issues like stem-cell research, abortion, the homosexual rights movement, and political correctness will bewilder us if we divorce these issues from the ideas on which they are based. The reasons behind the cruelty of Ted Bundy, Joseph Stalin, or Adolf Hitler will elude us unless we understand their ideas. Without a thorough understanding of ideas, we will watch with feelings of helplessness and uncertainty as our world constantly tries to persuade us of the validity of its beliefs and practices.

*Understanding the Times* is about ideas. This curriculum will help you understand that everyone has a "worldview," a way of interpreting everything that happens in the world. The Bible has an explanation for the universe, but so does Islam, Secular Humanism, Marxism, Postmodernism, and the New Age movement. Each of these worldviews is founded upon ideas. A worldview will dictate (consciously or unconsciously) how we should interpret and respond to the world around us. If we can understand the prominent worldviews in our world, we will better understand the underlying framework of many issues that Christians face. We will learn how to anticipate the response of a Muslim, Secular Humanist, Marxist, Postmodernist, or New Ager. Where once you saw thousands of confusing issues, you will see a big picture. Moreover, as you journey through the complex yet enlightening information this curriculum contains, you will learn to see ideas from a biblical Christian perspective.

The goal of this curriculum is to help open your eyes to the war of ideas competing for your heart and mind. You will begin to realize that the worldly problems we call "issues" are symptoms, not the disease. The disease is found in Romans when Paul declares, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Because all human beings are sinners (the *disease*), we will naturally produce and indulge in sin (the *symptoms*)—"For the wages of sin is death" (6:23a). We must start addressing the disease if we want to be effective in dealing with the symptoms.

Another way to look at this is to say that *ideas have consequences*. Since our world is utterly opposed to God, it produces bad ideas which, in turn, lead to bad consequences. Yet there is hope in the midst of this sinful world. Those who understand the ideas that rule the world will have the opportunity to influence the world of ideas. First Chronicles 12:32 tells the story of one small tribe in Israel that was chosen to lead because it "understood the times, and knew what Israel ought to do." It is our hope that you too will be understand our times and thus know what God would have you do.

## **THE NEED FOR THIS CURRICULUM**

Our goals for this curriculum are twofold. The first goal is defensive: we want to help protect Christian youth from being deceived by anti-Christian worldviews. The second goal is offensive: we want to train up Christian leaders who can actively champion the truth of Christianity in a culture of relativism, paganism, hedonism, and confusion.

"Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible world-views are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society... the struggle now is for the hearts and minds of the people. It is a war over ideas. And someday soon, I believe, a winner will emerge and the loser will fade from memory. For now, the outcome is very much in doubt."<sup>1</sup>

What James Dobson and Gary Bauer describe is the current struggle among worldviews as Christians, Muslims, Secular Humanists, Marxists, New Agers, and Postmodernists vie for the hearts and minds of

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Dobson and Gary L. Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of Our Kids*, (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 19–20.



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individuals. Many Christian students, parents, and teachers falsely assume that Christian youth are immune to false ideas simply because they have been raised in a Christian environment. However, even students raised in Christian homes, who attend church regularly, and are enrolled in Christian schools are vulnerable to non-Christian ways of thinking. Christian youth in large numbers are rejecting certain biblical truths or even turning away from Christianity altogether. Without proper worldview training, the trends outlined below will likely continue:

**CHRISTIANS RENOUNCING THEIR FAITH IN COLLEGE:** According to findings published in a UCLA dissertation, Dr. Gary Railsback notes that up to 59% of Christians renounce their faith before graduating from college (this is up from 51% in 1989). Shockingly, there is little statistical difference between Christian students enrolled at secular and Christian institutions.<sup>2</sup>

**CHRISTIANS THINKING MORE LIKE HUMANISTS:** Each year, thousands of Christian school students take the Nehemiah Institute worldview assessment test. Students are presented with a series of relevant questions, and then asked to pick the multiple-choice answer that best expresses their beliefs. Based on their answers, students are scored along a spectrum from "Biblical Christian" (100–70) to "Moderate Christian" (69–30) to "Secular Humanist" (29–0) to "Marxist" (anything below a '0' score). From 1988 until 2000, it was found that students enrolled in Christian schools moved from an average in the low 50s (meaning they scored at the lower end of "Moderate Christian") to an average of about 20 in the year 2000 (meaning they responded to key social, political, and religious issues like a Secular Humanist).<sup>3</sup>

**REJECTION OF MORAL ABSOLUTES AMONG CHRISTIAN TEENS AND ADULTS:** The well-known Christian statistician George Barna reports that among teenagers, a mere 9% of Christian teens believe in moral absolutes versus 4% of non-Christian teens.<sup>4</sup>

While these trends are alarming, we must remember that God's truth is more powerful than the false ideas capturing the minds of our culture. For years, the Christian community has drawn a line between the *sacred* and the *secular*. Christians have been encouraged to focus only on "sacred" activities and avoid involvement with "secular" activities such as politics, culture, science, or philosophy. In reality, no such distinction exists. *Understanding the Times* is a call to understand the spiritual nature of the struggle between good and evil, and the way in which it impacts every area of life and culture—the distorted sexual mores, the rewriting of history to exclude God, and the attempt to impose a humanistic utopian vision on the world. This curriculum operates on the premise that *this* generation must be prepared to undertake a *pro-active* Christianity—one that seeks to *redeem* culture and all of God's creation, rather than *reject* it.

This curriculum does not teach that Christians are victims of some global conspiracy. It holds firmly, however, to the biblical description of evil as persuasive and in direct rebellion against God's will.

Years ago, Francis Schaeffer astutely noted that Christians were beginning to view the world in "bits and pieces instead of totals." In the twentieth century, Christians rather abruptly lost sight of their responsibilities in society, and gradually lost the ability to discern good from evil. Christianity entered a downward spiral in which we quickly lost the capacity to stand for righteousness and justice. Before long, complicated "issues" seemed so overwhelming that most Christians numbly retreated from their societal responsibilities into the comfort zone of *self*. Generally speaking, Christianity ceased to reflect God's love and character to the unbelieving world. Today, many Christians are more concerned with their personal faith, personal growth, and personal church than with the world at large that they are called to love and serve.

<sup>2</sup> This study was done in 1989 by Gary Lyle Railsback, "An Exploratory Study of the Religiosity and Related Outcomes Among College Students," Doctoral dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1994. A follow up study was done in 2001 but has not yet been published. The greatest losses were at Catholic universities reporting 59% of Christian freshmen renounced their faith by their senior year, Protestant universities showed a 31% loss.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, Christian students in public schools scored considerably lower, with an average of 8.2 in 2004.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/index.php>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=106&Reference=C>

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## 180-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	✓
1	Read Student Manual 'Preparation'	Read UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.1'	
2	Watch "Introduction to Worldviews" video		
3	Review "Introduction to Worldviews" video questions	Read UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.2'	
4	Review UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.2' questions	Read UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.3'	
5	Review UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.3' questions		
6	Read <i>Playing with Fire</i> essay	Assign Dear Doug Letter	
7	Review <i>Playing with Fire</i> essay questions		
8	Watch "Loving God with Your Mind" video P1		
9	Watch "Loving God with Your Mind" video P2		
10	Review "Loving God with Your Mind" video questions		
11	Watch "Ambassadors for Christ" video		
12	Review "Ambassadors for Christ" video questions		
13	Read <i>Total Truth</i> essay		
14	Review <i>Total Truth</i> essay questions	Dear Doug Letter assignment Due	
15	Take Introduction Test		

## 90-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	✓
1	Read Student Manual 'Preparation'	Read UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.1'	
2	Watch "Introduction to Worldviews" video	Read UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.2-0.3'	
3	Review "Introduction to Worldviews" video questions		
4	Review UTI Textbook 'Introduction 0.2-0.3' questions		
5	Take Introduction Test		