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Born in India in 1946, Zacharias immigrated to Canada with his family twenty years later. While he was pursuing a career in business management, his interest in theology grew; subsequently, he pursued this study during his undergraduate education. He received his master of divinity from Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. Well-versed in the disciplines of comparative religions, cults, and philosophy, he held the chair of evangelism and contemporary thought at Alliance Theological Seminary for 31/2 years. Zacharias has authored or edited more than twenty-five books. He and his wife, Margie, have three grown children, and they reside in Atlanta.

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Vince has commended the Christian faith at many universities, including the University of California, Berkeley; Johns Hopkins; Carnegie Mellon; Princeton; Oxford; and Cambridge. He has also spoken at Google headquarters and Passion City Church.

Vince is married to Jo, who also works with RZIM as the dean of studies for the Zacharias Institute.
Only the truth of Jesus can answer the deepest questions of life. The popular “isms” of the day leave the most fundamental questions unanswered. But how can believers learn to respond with grace and truth to these secular gods? *Jesus Among Secular Gods* is designed to equip believers to give a reason for the hope they have (1 Pet. 3:15).

The rise of secular gods presents the most serious challenge to the absolute claims of Jesus since the founding of Christianity itself. Not only has the Christian worldview been devalued and dismissed by modern culture, but its believers are also openly ridiculed as irrelevant. In this study, Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale challenge the popular “isms” of the day, skillfully point out the errors in their claims and providing convincing evidence for the absolute truth found in Jesus.

This study will prepare you to face today’s biggest challenges to the Christian faith head-on. It will help seekers understand Jesus’ claims and will provide Christians with the knowledge to express why they believe Jesus stands tall above other gods.

As you complete this study, you will not only learn why Christianity stands tall above secular gods, but you will also be prepared to explain the claims of Christ with gentleness and respect to a world that has embraced these “isms” with fervor.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many people worked diligently to make this project possible, and we are deeply grateful to each of them. Randy Pistor showed enormous skill, insight, and generosity in his work on the Personal Studies for this project. With her characteristic distinction, Danielle DuRant offered meticulous and discerning comments during the editing phase. My trusted agent, Andrew Wolgemuth, was an eminently wise and attentive guide through the entire publication process. The commitment to excellence of Joel Polk and the entire LifeWay team pointed at every turn and in such an encouraging way to the ultimate excellence of Jesus, who is both the inspiration and the aim of this project.
Jesus Among Secular Gods provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to explore major secular worldviews and examine how followers of Jesus should respond to them. This Bible study book includes six weeks of content, each divided into two main sections: “Group Time” and “On Your Own.”

**GROUP TIME**

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. This group session is designed to last one hour, with approximately 20 minutes of teaching and 40 minutes of personal interaction.

Each group study uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God’s Word, and with the video teaching.

**START**
This section includes questions to get the conversation started and a review of the previous week’s study.

**THIS WEEK’S TOPIC**
This section introduces the content for the current week.

**WATCH**
This page includes a place for students to take notes as they watch the video. It also identifies key terms and definitions referenced in the session.

**DEBRIEF**
This section includes discussion questions and statements that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.
ON YOUR OWN

BRINGING UP YOUR FAITH
Here students will find the week’s question and a few thoughts to help them begin conversations with people who are not yet Christians.

JOURNAL
A journal page provides space for students to reflect and process the conversations they have each week with non-believers.

PERSONAL STUDY
Two personal studies are provided each week to take students deeper into the ideas that shape secular worldviews and to guide believers to respond to these ideas from a Christian perspective. These pages challenge students to grow in their understanding of God’s Word and to make practical applications to their lives.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE
Consider going even deeper into this content by reading the book on which this Bible study is based: Jesus Among Secular Gods (FaithWords, 2017), ISBN 978-1-4555-6915-1.
WEEK 1

Be Prepared
Today, we have all sorts of information at our fingertips but we have no idea how to answer the most fundamental and important questions of life. We live in a time filled with choices, with an endless menu of beliefs on our digital doorstep; an age of offense, when choosing one belief over another labels us as narrow, exclusive, intolerant, and extremists; and an age of distraction, when social media takes up hours of our days. These three factors make it more difficult than ever to make an informed decision about the deepest questions of life.

What are some of the biggest questions people ask about life?

One of those big questions is: What is the meaning of life? Take a few minutes to record a one sentence answer to this question. Then, share your answer with the group.

How do your answers differ? How are they alike?

What a gift it is that Jesus gives us so many ways to respond to that central question of life! When faced with these big questions, we can become absolutely paralyzed as we choose how to respond. This is why the Bible tells us we should always be prepared to give an answer for what we believe.

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15
This is one of the most difficult times to be a Christian. When it comes to the Christian faith, the cultural landscape has shifted, and the challenges have intensified.

It used to be that if you were a Christian, people thought you were a little weird, maybe even naive. Today, Christians are often targeted as the enemies of progress. Now more than ever, we need to be prepared to defend a Christian way of seeing the world. But can faith be defended?

Richard Dawkins wrote:

*Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.*

The biblical definition of *faith*, on the other hand, comes from Hebrews 11:1:

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

HEBREWS 11:1, KJV

Which of these two quotes do you think accurately describes faith? Why?

Blaise Pascal—the brilliant seventeenth-century mathematician, physicist, and inventor turned theologian—claimed that God has given us enough evidence to believe in Him rationally but not so much evidence that we can believe in Him based on reason alone.

Do you think that is a fair statement? Why or why not?

What rational reasons do you have for believing in God? What elements of your faith go beyond reason?
1. Christianity doesn’t ask us to be _______ - _____ - ______.

2. The ______________ of Christ is central to the apologist.

3. Sometimes ______________ come en route to faith.

4. Sometimes God ____________ us in different situations in our lives, but ultimately takes us back to why He is the ____________.

5. Receive all questions as a ____________.

6. Sooner or later, if you don’t _____ the question, ______________ ______________ will.

7. The day you stop asking questions, you are either fallaciously assuming you are ______________ in your knowledge, or you’ve really ______________ growing.

8. If you do not answer the ________________________, you really aren’t answering the question.

9. ______________ has become such an assumption in our time.

10. Everybody has a ______________.

**WORDS TO KNOW**

**Absolutes:** a principle that applies to all people, whether they choose to believe it or not; unrestrained or without exception

**Apologetics:** the argument or justification for your beliefs; why you believe what you believe

**Existential:** from the heart; relates to our experience of existence

**Philosophical:** from the head; relating to the pursuit of wisdom; basic values, beliefs, ideas, and attitudes of an individual or group of people

**Secularism:** belief system in which one is either indifferent to or rejects religion
First Peter 3:15 says:

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15

What are the five instructions given in this verse? Highlight the one you find most challenging.

When people ask tough questions about God and no one takes their questions seriously or provides them with good answers, they often conclude that good answers to their questions must not exist.

What is a question about faith you’ve been afraid to ask because you thought people would not respond well?

Have you ever asked a question about faith and felt that you were looked down on for doing so? Share about that experience.

The health of the church in the days ahead will mostly be determined by the way we handle questions.

How can we help make the church a place where challenging questions about faith are welcomed and affirmed?

What are two or three questions about faith you hope you are never asked by a non-Christian because you would not know how to answer them?
If you knew the questions in advance for an interview for your dream job, you would spend time preparing to respond well to those questions. The opportunity to remove an obstacle to faith in a person’s life is even more important than getting your dream job, so you need to take the time to be prepared.

**What can believers do to be personally prepared to respond to questions about faith?**

**What is one way you hope to be better equipped as a result of this study?**

**PRAYER**

- Read Ephesians 3:14-21, and make Paul’s prayer your own. Ask God to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within you.
Use the following questions to start a conversation with a non-believer this week.

Make it a goal this week to ask the following questions of someone who is not yet a Christian.

What is your biggest objection to Christianity?
What do you think it would take for you to change your mind about God and become a Christian?

Remember that, when we defend and share the faith, we want to win the person, not just an argument. God didn’t come to save questioners with clever answers; He came to save questioners through a relationship with Him that is founded on grace. We need to model grace, and that begins by being good questioners and good listeners. Remember:

*Behind a question is a questioner, and if you do not answer the questioner, you are really not answering the question.*

RAVI ZACHARIAS

All questions should be received as gifts. The answer to every legitimate question is something true, and all truth is grounded in God. Therefore, every question, even the most hostile, is an opportunity to share something about who God is and what He has done.

For Christians, asking tough questions is not a sign of a lack of faith but an act of worship. When you think about it, asking questions and listening well to the answers is the way you get to know a person. The same is true of God. God is not a theory—He is personal. Therefore, asking deep questions about Him is the way you get to know Him better.

As you have conversations about faith, remember that listening to the response is as important as asking the question. Listen attentively and sympathetically to the answers you receive. Be ready to respond to their questions, even if you do not have all the answers.
ON YOUR OWN

JOURNAL
Use this page to reflect on your conversation.

Whom did you talk with? What was your overall experience with this conversation?

How willing was the person to have a conversation with you? What obstacles did you encounter?

What insights did you gain about communicating truth with gentleness and respect?
FAITH AND REASON: IS FAITH BLIND?
Imagine you overhear someone say, “I’ve been doing some reading, and while Jesus may have been a decent moral teacher, He certainly wasn’t God. All that stuff about His death and resurrection was made up centuries later by corrupt church leaders who were after power and money. It’s all legend; there’s nothing historical about it. That’s why they call it faith.” Then another person asks you, “Is he right? Is Jesus’ resurrection just a legend?”

How would you respond?

THE MEANING OF FAITH

Take a moment to think about the word faith. How would you define it?

Compare your definition with the following two definitions.

 Faith, being belief that isn’t based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion.²
 RICHARD DAWKINS

 Faith is a response to evidence, not a rejoicing in the absence of evidence.³
 JOHN LENNOX

How does your definition compare with these two definitions?
To which definition is yours most similar?

In what important ways do these definitions differ in their understanding of the relationship between faith and evidence?
Which definition do you often see used by the world and by the church?

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND EVIDENCE

While it may be surprising, even to some believers, Lennox’s definition is actually the true biblical definition of faith. The Bible explicitly defines what faith means: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, KJV).

Rather than translate the Greek word ἔλενχος as evidence, newer translations use assurance or conviction. As a result, the connection between faith and evidence is sometimes overlooked. However, the connection becomes even stronger when we consider that faith is a translation of the Greek word πίστις, which includes the idea of trust.

Putting these pieces together, we see that biblical faith is ultimately belief and active trust in God, based on the spiritual perception of the evidence He has provided us. In other words, biblical faith is anything but blind! To quote Lennox once more, “Just as in science, faith, reason, and evidence belong together.”

The next time you’re engaged in conversation and someone says, “Belief in God is just blind faith,” how could you respond?

LOVING GOD WITH YOUR MIND

In Romans 12:2 the apostle Paul wrote, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your ____________.”

Without looking up this verse, what word would you expect to fill in the blank?

Now, look up Romans 12:2 in your Bible. What did Paul tell us to renew? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
Nurturing the mind is incredibly important for the Christian faith. In fact, it is one way we worship God. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the law, He replied:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

**MARK 12:30**

This comes from a key verse in the law, which commanded the Israelites to:

> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:5**

A visual comparison of these verses reveals something interesting.

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<th>Deuteronomy 6:5</th>
<th>Mark 12:30</th>
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<td>Strength</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mind</td>
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*As you reflect on this, consider why Jesus added the mind to the list of ways we can worship God. ([Hint: Read 1 Cor. 2:12-16.](#))*

It seems natural to say, “Love God with your heart,” because the heart—the seat of our will, desire, and emotions—is frequently connected with love in our culture. It also seems natural to say, “Love God with your soul,” because the soul is the very essence of our being. But practically speaking, loving God with the mind may be less familiar.
Read each of the following verses in your Bible. Record how each verse provides us with a way to love God with our minds.

- **Proverbs 1:5**

- **Proverbs 9:9**

- **Proverbs 10:14**

On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not at all and 10 being all the time, how well are you loving God with your mind? Mark a number on the scale.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

How does loving God with our minds prepare us to give a reason for our Christian faith?

What is one step you will take to love God with your mind this week?
A REASONED DEFENSE

RECLAIMING ARGUMENT

The word argument has a bad reputation these days, especially among many Christians. Talk about providing an argument for the Christian faith, and someone may quote the apostle Paul:

The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone.
2 TIMOTHTY 2:24a

This view is unfortunate because an argument does not need to be emotional at all. In other words, quarreling and arguing are two very different things. Properly defined, an argument is “a coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a point of view.” The classic example of a logical argument comes from introductory philosophy courses:

PREMISE 1: All men are mortal.
PREMISE 2: Socrates is a man.
CONCLUSION: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

This is a sound logical argument. Arguments are not controversial; arguments are true or false, inaccurate or probable. Rather, it is the subject matter of arguments that can sometimes generate more heat than light.

How does this differ from the way you typically view arguments?

With arguments it is the delivery or the intent—often to illustrate why another person is mistaken—that triggers an emotional response. For this reason arguments must be presented graciously and respectfully, as Peter urged: “Do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15). However, nothing is emotional or wrong about an argument itself.

What are some steps you can take to keep your emotions in check as you make an argument, especially when you are passionate about the subject?
In the context of evangelism, many object: “You cannot argue someone into the kingdom of God.” Scripture is very clear that new birth, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and adoption into God’s family are acts of God, not humans. Through the process of conversion, a person goes from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Arguments don’t save people; this is a supernatural act of God. Still, arguments are important in removing intellectual barriers to faith in Christ.

Read the following passages and reflect on ways God approves of using argument to thoughtfully engage with others.

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<td>What approach did God take in dealing with Job? How did Job respond?</td>
<td>When speaking to the Israelites and urging them to repent, what does God’s invitation to “reason together” with Him suggest (v. 18, ESV)?</td>
<td>What is the significance of Paul’s claim that “we demolish arguments” and “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”?</td>
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Argument is just one approach the first disciples used to engage with their non-Christian neighbors. Read each verse and highlight the action verbs that describe the early believers’ approach to contending for the gospel.

*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”*

**Acts 2:40**

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.***

**Acts 5:42**

*[Saul] talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.*

**Acts 9:29**

*The Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

**Acts 17:11**

*[Paul] witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus.*

**Acts 28:23**
What stands out to you in this list? Explain.

How do these Scriptures challenge your view of evangelism?

Why might evangelism include more than sharing a simple version of the gospel?
HISTORICAL TRUTH, NOT LEGEND

Not only did the early church value the importance of thoughtfully engaging with others on matters of truth, but it also valued faithfully preserving and transmitting important evidence about Christ. The clearest example of this effort is known as a creed, which consists of important truths compressed into as few words as possible. Creeds helped believers to teach young Christians and prepare to defend the faith from intellectual attack.

What are some biblical teachings that were passed down to you by older family members, church leaders, or Christian mentors?

The New Testament includes ancient creeds that already existed prior to its composition. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 to see one of the most important creeds recorded by the apostle Paul.

What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8

Paul most likely learned the creed from Peter and James during his visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18-19). Paul used the Greek term historeo, which means “to gain a historical account,” to describe his visit with Peter (v. 18). Because many scholars date Paul’s conversion between AD 31 and AD 33, the creed would have been developed quite early.
We can safely conclude that the resurrection of Jesus is not a legendary development. Legends and myths take several generations to develop. Because the creed recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 was formed (at most) just a few years after Jesus’ crucifixion, there was no possible way for legendary elements to creep in, because there was no time for this corruption to occur.

Equipped with this historical information, how could you respond to someone who claimed Jesus’ resurrection is a legend that developed over time?

What other internal evidence does the Bible present about its reliability? What Scriptures would you point to?