

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Teaching High School Students an Apologetic Curriculum on Relativism**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to  
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this action research project is to develop and teach an apologetic curriculum on relativism to the high school students at Eastern Hills Church. The research project will measure the student's prior knowledge of relativism and show that an apologetic curriculum on the topic can be used in order to grow their knowledge of the worldview that inhabits their generation. There were twenty total student participants. Eight total male students ranging from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level. There were twelve female students ranging from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade level. Each student was given an identical introductory questionnaire in order to measure their prior knowledge on the topic of relativism. The students participated in a curriculum that contained three sessions. These sessions contained teaching on theories of truth, theories of relativism, statistics of their generation's worldviews, and a biblical examination of truth in relation to relativistic worldviews. After the curriculum, the students were each then given the same questionnaire as before, in order to measure if they gained knowledge on the topic. These two questionnaires were then statistically compared to see if the created curriculum on relativism helped solve the problem presented by this church. The research found that the purposed curriculum was successful in teaching the students and aiding their knowledge of relativism. Not only did their scores immensely increase on the topic but using apologetics as a tool was successful in teaching the students.

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## **Abbreviations**

COVID-19	<i>Coronavirus Disease 2019</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
Gen Z	<i>Generation Z</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
VBS	<i>Vacation Bible School</i>
US	<i>United States</i>

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

Explaining and defending why one holds a particular worldview is an important aspect of life. This holds especially for those who prescribe their belief to the Christian worldview. Not only will the Christian belief stand contrary to other beliefs in this world, but as people who are called to be disciples, the goal is to go into the world and share the news of Jesus. This call is for everyone who calls themselves Christian. Old or young, everyone in Christ is instructed to share the gospel with a world that often has stark differences in worldviews. Those who fall within the younger generation must be able to give a well-reasoned defense to those who ask why they believe what they believe. Apologetics is that tool that will provide this ability to those who are seeking to offer reasons for their beliefs.

This research will explore the effects of an apologetics curriculum on relativism within Eastern Hills Church's high school ministry. The research seeks to answer the question; will an apologetics curriculum on relativism provide the youth the ability to reasonably defend their Christian worldview in a growing relativistic culture? It will seek to understand what capacity these students have to defend their faith against this worldview and then train them through a specified apologetic curriculum on relativism. The hope is that this specialized training will address the church's lack in providing their youth program with a curriculum on relativism and an understanding of relativism and how it affects worldviews, which they have not had prior. The research will test their ability to understand relativism and their ability to give an appeal and

defense for the Christian worldview before the curriculum. It will then test the result of this knowledge after participation in the curriculum. If the results are successful, the apologetics curriculum on relativism would be deemed an important aspect of this youth ministry and should be incorporated.

### **Ministry Context**

All ministries have a full, rich, and complex context from which they work.<sup>1</sup> The high school ministry at Eastern Hills Church is relatively young. What is of particular interest has been the turnover in student ministry pastors. An ever-changing structure from this turnover may play a role in the lack of a well-developed apologetics program for their youth. The current student ministry pastor, Mat Dawson, now wants to start incorporating apologetics within the ministry. This increasing desire to train the youth is shown in the expanding ministry workshops and his allowing the researcher to be involved apologetically on a more routine basis.

The lack of ministry resources plays a significant part in the ability to provide such a curriculum for their students. Given that the church's budget is focused on paying off its enormous debt, paying for a specified apologetics program is not in the budget. The church will have to rely on those who volunteer to do this. Unfortunately, those in this position in the past did not have the training to do so. This research and specified apologetics curriculums could fix this dilemma. Not only will it be provided by someone trained and involved in the ministry, but it will come at no cost, and the budgetary problems will not play a role.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 14.

### Ministry History

Eastern Hills Church was founded in 1981 by Pastor Harold Burdick. It was located in Williamsville, NY. It started small, with nineteen members in the original congregation. Pastor Harold's wife started the preschool ministry the first year in operation. In 1987, Pastor Burdick resigned and handed the leadership of the church over to Pastor Karl Eastlack. As the congregation grew, the church built a new facility on another property in Williamsville, NY, just a few minutes down the road in 2001. During his leadership, the church began its first high school ministry called "Ground Zero" in 2006. Attendance grew to roughly 100 to 150 students in any given week. In 2009, Pastor Eastlack left and handed the church's leadership over to the now-current pastor, Patrick Jones.

The high school ministry went through some changes over the past sixteen years. It has gone through four head youth leaders. The current leader is now Pastor Mat Dawson. The high school ministry moved locations, days, and times. It first resided at the original campus and took place on Tuesday nights. It now takes place and is located at the current church location on Sunday nights. The lineage of head youth pastors in order is Chris Emery, Andy Broad, Tyler Johns, and now Mat Dawson.

### Relationship with Ministry

The researcher has both direct and indirect relationships with the high school ministry. The researcher has lived the entirety of his life within the current demographic location where the ministry occurs. The researcher's current home church has overlapped directly with Eastern Hills Church ministry throughout the years. This is where much of the indirect relationships come from. The currently residing home church of the researcher has also overlapped with specific events and retreats in which the Eastern Hills youth group was also involved.

The direct relationship started years ago. The direct relationship is where the content of this research will be conducted. The researcher attended the high school ministry youth group and the college ministry on a sporadic basis. Even though the church was not the researcher's home church, the researcher attended the youth ministries. The history of experience is well familiar. Over the past year, the direct relationship took more of a specific form. The researcher started helping by volunteering as a small group leader within the high school ministry. The research will specifically include the current students attending the high school ministry where the researcher personally volunteers. This volunteering consists of being involved with the current small groups and thinking through strategies with the head pastor of the high school ministry as a small group leader. It wasn't until this research was produced with the high school ministry that the leadership asked this researcher to speak on some apologetics topics. The lack of any apologetic curriculum shows this.

For example, during the Easter season of 2022, the leadership asked for a two-week apologetic sermon series on proofs of the resurrection of Jesus. Although thrilling as it is to see them ask for this, the ultimate desire of this research is to produce a result that persuades them to have apologetics in their regular ministry scope and sequence. The researcher also leads a small book club, learning apologetics of the Christian worldview, with a handful of students that often attended the high school ministry. This book club meets outside the typical scheduling of the high school ministry. This is strictly extracurricular and offered to those who desire to learn more about the faith in which they believe.

The direct relationship with the high school ministry is young but growing. It is encouraging that the church has allowed, and is so willing to bring, this research to the high

school youth program. Over time this direct relationship will continue to grow and produce fruit in current and future high school students at Eastern Hills Church.

### Ministry Practices

The high school ministry meets weekly on Sunday nights from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm. The high school ministry participated in mission work before the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), and the leaders aim to start the mission work again in 2023. The mission work includes summer camps for churches in Buffalo. A child may attend these camps even if they do not attend Eastern Hill Church. They also do a once-a-year Vacation Bible School (VBS) that is separate from the summer camp located at the church. The high school ministry also has gone to the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica to help build schools and houses in underdeveloped communities.

The high school ministry conducts four yearly workshops. The ministry does evangelism training courses during these workshops. These courses do not currently include an apologetic curriculum but are strictly designed to teach the gospel of Jesus to those seeking more information. One of the church's workshops for upcoming freshman students within the high school ministry is "High School 101." This is dedicated to teaching these students how to survive high school and be Christian. These workshops have not historically included a curriculum on apologetics and relativism. Given the statistics of Generation Z (Gen Z) found within chapter two of this thesis, a curriculum on apologetics and relativism should be included. The church also has baptism classes where students learn about baptism for those who feel called to be baptized. These classes teach more about the biblical understanding of baptism and how to prepare to give one's testimony. Each student is required to give their testimony when they are officially baptized. Finally, the high school ministry has a program called "Next Step." This

program is to train the parents of students. This training is about bringing up your child in a secular world. Parents and students find this program extremely helpful, seeing that most high school students attending the ministry attend public schools. Before COVID-19, the church conducted quarterly weekend retreats every year.

The weekly services are typically contemporary worship services. Each week the high school ministry worships with three contemporary Christian worship songs. After these songs, the students receive a sermon that's approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length. Once a month, the high school ministry Sunday service becomes a worship night. During this night, the worship service typically has six contemporary worship songs; then, the service moves into "prayerful activities." These activities contain specific stations allowing the students to focus their minds and hearts on what the Lord has done and is doing in their lives. All of the sermons focus on six main categories. The categories are authentic faith, spiritual disciplines, moral boundaries, healthy relationships, wise choices, and ultimate authority. Many of these contain the idea of loving others, being kind to others, and helping others.

The high school leadership rarely brings in guest speakers to teach the students, but when they do, it is most often on topics within the six main categories listed above. Pastor Dawson has not taught any apologetics-oriented sermons as the student ministry pastor. He is excited and desires for apologetics to be incorporated into the structure of the ministry. The church has one other local church where each high school ministry has continuous relationships. This church is named Kenmore Alliance Church. The relationship with Kenmore Alliance Church includes pastoral training and continuous strategizing for both high school ministries throughout the year.



## Ministry Resources

Finances within churches are often challenging to discuss. As it is more secure information, Pastor Mat Dawson shared what he believed he could. The high school ministries' budget is at the bare minimum to achieve the base goals for the year. The past pastor took on more financial debt than the church could handle, so the current leadership's goal is to pay off the "larger than needed building" within the next couple of years. Pastor Dawson wished he was able to have more finances for the ministry. These additional finances could provide missions and retreat opportunities that the students seem to grow immensely from. Given the current debt of the church, the head pastor understands that the short-term goal of paying off their building debts, which causes less funding for their youth ministry, will, in the long term, provide more financial opportunities for all areas of the church's ministries. The high school ministry has roughly an \$11,000 budget for the entire year to achieve its mission and goals.

Additional resources include the twenty volunteers that the high school ministry has every week. None of these volunteers are professionally trained, but they are personally called to help the church. Some of these volunteers belong to other churches in the Buffalo area. The volunteers desire to gather more parents of the students that attend to help volunteer regularly. The high school ministry does not use any pre-ordered ministry packets to organize the sermon preparation. Other than the books Pastor Dawson personally orders for the high school ministry and himself, no additional funds come in from different ministries for support.

## Ministry Demographics

The high school ministry is located at 8445 Greiner Rd., Williamsville, NY, 14221. Since it is a high school ministry, there are small groups for both males and females. Every year freshmen to seniors are represented by each gender group. The high school group ranges from

seventy to one hundred students that attend every week. Roughly 60 percent of these students that attend are female. The ethnicities are almost entirely Caucasian Americans, except for three to five African American students who attend. Most of the students come from above-average socio-economic backgrounds. Pastor Dawson previously discovered through a personally designed survey that the high school ministry has twenty-five different home churches and eleven high schools represented at the time of this writing. The array of students that come from other home churches was shocking. The reasons Pastor Dawson discovered include that most of the home churches of these students do not have a high school ministry or the size of the ministry was so small that they did not want to attend it. On average, these other ministries had roughly ten to fifteen students in attendance. These students desired to participate in a larger community for fellowship.

### **Problem Presented**

The problem is the high school students at Eastern Hills Church are not being taught an apologetics curriculum on relativism. The students have yet to be introduced to an apologetic understanding of this worldview and its effects. The church has brought in speakers on occasion to speak on apologetics in general. Still, as for the topic of relativism, it has yet to be incorporated into the regular methods of presenting the Christian worldview. This problem has not historically been addressed within this ministry. None of the high school ministry pastors have training in apologetics and relativism, and they lack a depth of knowledge on how to approach it. If the high school ministry leaders desired to institute an apologetics and relativism curriculum within the youth ministry, they would begin by purchasing and inaugurating a preplanned program. As of right now, this attempt to institute an apologetics program on relativism or use apologetics as a tool is not in the scope and sequence for the next five years.

The desire is for the apologetics curriculum on relativism that this researcher seeks to create and teach, will resolve the high school ministry's problem. The leaders would no longer need to reach out and purchase any program or curriculum. They would have one designed specifically for their local ministry and demographics. The hope is that the research is successful and that other local church ministries will look to this ministry for help.

This designates a problem that they are not taught how worldviews affect their lives and how to defend these worldviews from the Christian lens. The Christian worldview has all too often become just one of the religious systems and belief systems that students grew up with in the present culture.

To have a rich life as a disciple requires more than merely reciting what Scripture has stated. Being a disciple means believing in objective, non-relativist truths found in God's Word and living out those beliefs. It also means being able to defend the Christian worldview; one must know why it is true or if it is even something worthy of defense. There is a substantial concern for these high school students with their lack of ability to do just this.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to develop and teach a curriculum on relativism to these high school students in apologetics. The curriculum will include key topics and beliefs of relativistic worldviews and what the Christian belief says about truth, how this truth is played out in reality, and how to discuss and defend Christian beliefs against relativistic worldviews. It will also include segments on foundation tools, such as how to communicate well, how to comprehend, and see logical fallacies common in these sorts of discussions.

To know what areas need to be included within the curriculum, the curriculum will be based on the most recent research conducted on Gen Z. This generation titled "Z" fits the year

range in which the Eastern Hills Church high school group falls.<sup>2</sup> The curriculum will be dedicated to approaching a handful of topics that are specific and crucial to this generation's faith and how it relates to relativistic worldviews. It will also incorporate a range of methodologies in teaching these topics.

The hope is that after the students have gone through the curriculum and done the work, they will be well-prepared to answer questions and know how to defend and understand their Christian beliefs better than when they started. A prior and post-exam will be given to determine if this curriculum helped them grow in their understanding of their faith.

### **Basic Assumptions**

Given the brevity of time and depth of the category, this thesis also moves forward with some basic assumptions. These assumptions play a part in how the research will be conducted. The curriculum will be created based on these prior beliefs. The basic assumptions are explained below. These are assumed to be true before the study for both the research and the conclusion.

### **Research Assumptions**

The first assumption of this research is the assumption that high school students will desire to grow in their faith. It is taken for granted that some of the students are indeed in Christ and follow the call of a disciple to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18). Apologetics is a tool for both those in Christ and those seeking to know more about the Christian worldview.

The second assumption is that at least one high school student has not decided to follow Christ and will desire to know more about the Christian worldview. Given the amount of time spent in leadership roles within high school ministries, it has yet to fail that there has been at

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<sup>2</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z: Caring for Young Souls and Cultivating Resilience*, vol 1 (Ventura, CA: Barna Group), 10.

least one person attending that truly has not made a real decision to place Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The third assumption is that the students will desire to sign up for the prepared curriculum this thesis will create. Given the first and second assumptions, this thesis will take for granted that students will desire to attend and that the students will sign up and show up to learn the curriculum.

The fourth assumption is that the students can understand the material presented. The curriculum will be designed for this age frame, but the ability to comprehend even at the high school level is assumed.

The fifth assumption is that the data obtained while researching Gen Z is true for the Gen Z of Eastern Hills Church, meaning that the confidence gathered from the research data for Gen Z holds true for Gen Z in the Eastern Hills Church local area. Given the limitations of the research in the literature review, this thesis holds that the confidence done by these studies will hold.

The sixth assumption is the parent's willingness to allow their children to participate in the research. Most students fall within the age frame of being unable to transport themselves, so reliance upon parental figures is crucial. This assumption believes the parents of the students will desire this for their youth and be willing for their children to participate.

### Outcome Assumptions

The first and foremost outcome assumption is that after going through the curriculum, the students can be better suited for the appeal and defense of the Christian worldview. In other words, the curriculum succeeded in its desired intent to grow the knowledge of these students.

The second assumption is that the intended church will desire to know the results. The hope is that the church's heart will also desire the continuation of this curriculum in the years to come. If the first assumption proves true, the church should incorporate the curriculum within the youth ministry in the foreseeable future.

The third assumption given the prior two is that the other local churches will look into this for their youth ministries. Given the demographic similarities of the local churches, these other churches should have confidence in the curriculum if the results are successful at Eastern Hills Church.

The fourth assumption is that the research may prove to show an increase in knowledge and desire to know the Christian worldview more in the students. The end result may not be the desired result. If this is the case, at least the research showed what was not successful, and the local churches will have something to learn from.

The fifth assumption, if the research is successful, the students will move in a forward direction in their faith and knowledge independently afterward. Knowledge begets knowledge, and continual growth from these students after the curriculum within the apologetics field is desired and assumed.

### **Definitions**

This research concerns creating and teaching an apologetics curriculum on relativism for the high school ministry at Eastern Hills Church. Within this curriculum are key terms used to teach the students apologetics within the worldview of relativism. These terms are often used and discussed in conversations about Christian belief. Those who hold to this belief ought to be prepared to discuss the context of these terms. These terms will be used throughout the curriculum to create high school students who can know and defend their Christian worldview.

*Apologetics.* “The practice of offering an appeal and a defense for the Christian Faith.”<sup>3</sup>

To produce high school students to desire and want to use apologetics as a tool for their faith, they must first know what it is. Apologetics consists of both propositional and non-propositional efforts. Chatraw writes, “[apologetics] answers both why a person can believe (defense) and why a person should believe (appeal).”<sup>4</sup>

*Authenticity.* “The internal call to compose an original life, a life that makes sense.”<sup>5</sup> The goal is not to have the students follow the average flow of society, for the world will not look well on those who genuinely follow Christ as their Savior. They must understand that being authentic in their walk is important.

*Equal Validity.* Within the discussion of relativism, one aspect of this particular worldview is the value of ideas. This term represents how many different ways of seeing the world are all equally valid.<sup>6</sup>

*Fideism.* Apologetics stands in contrast to this view of faith. This view means faith is indeed blind.<sup>7</sup> Faith and reason work hand and hand. Knowing this, the students ought to be able to see that all of reality can then relate to the Christian worldview. Faith is not some belief stuck within the twenty-first-century cultural context but is given by a transcendent being.

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: an Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Justin Ariel Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics: The Beauty of Faith in a Secular Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Paul, Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: against relativism and constructivism* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2018), 51.

*The Gospel.* The good news about the key events of Jesus's life. These key events display Jesus as the resolution to Israel's conflict.<sup>8</sup> McKnight writes that today, Western church culture has been less evangelical and more soterian.<sup>9</sup> If Christians are called to defend the true gospel of Jesus, the church ought to defend the fullness of the good news and that it can be known.

*Incarnation.* For Jesus to die for sins as a true and real human, He must first become a true and real human. This is the understanding of the incarnation. Christians know God directly through Christ,<sup>10</sup> and this is a wonderful thing. Christians should also carry the same kind of approach when employing apologetics.<sup>11</sup> Christians know that God has revealed Himself and His plan by the incarnation. This is a universal truth and not relative.

*Individualism.* "Life is about me."<sup>12</sup> The students live in a world surrounded by apathy for the Christian worldview, and this has much to do with individualism within the western culture. Scripture points out that the church is a body, and each has talents to use for the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–27); this contradicts the individualistic worldview. McDowell points out that individualism is particularly alluring to Gen Z because everything they consume, be it music, news, or television content, is designed to be desirable.<sup>13</sup>

*Inside-out apologetics.* Though this is an apologetic strategy, this strategy seeks to understand where the person first comes from. It will be crucial for the students to know how to

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<sup>8</sup> Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>10</sup> Sean McDowell, ed., *A New Kind of Apologist: Adopting Fresh Strategies, Addressing the Latest Issues, Engaging the Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2016), 113.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So The Next Generation will know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2019), 90.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



Speak to others when sharing their faith; this strategy needs to be absorbed and used. It can be defined as "entering a person's social imagination and engaging their ideas from within it."<sup>14</sup>

*Kalam.* Taking in a literal way, the term Kalam is the Arabic word for speech.<sup>15</sup> This concept holds one of the most persuasive proofs in its formation of the impossibility of an infinite regress. It may very well be the soundest argument for God's existence.<sup>16</sup> This will be important when discussing grounding for various morals. This is commonly seen within the arguments for objective morality. Believing God exists helps locate moral commands better.

*Objective Truth.* Objective truth is mind-independent truth or truth that is external to oneself.<sup>17</sup> Do the students believe that truth is objective or does the truth lie within the realm of the non-objective? This will help lay out a foundation for understanding their worldviews on relativism.

*Relativism.* "There is no absolute right and wrong, and so ethical decisions should be based on what is commonly accepted in each person's culture or on each individual's personal preferences."<sup>18</sup> This is one of the most common worldviews found within Gen Z.<sup>19</sup> This contrasts the Christian worldview, such as morals and divine revelation. The students need to understand this system of thinking and be able to counter it in their lives and others.

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<sup>14</sup> Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 63.

<sup>15</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>17</sup> Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z: Caring for Young Souls and Cultivating Resilience*, vol 2 (Ventura, CA: Barna Group), 56.

*Scientism.* “Scientism is the belief that science, especially natural science, is the most valuable part of human learning because it is much the most [*sic*] authoritative, or serious, or beneficial. Other beliefs related to this one may also be regarded as scientistic, e.g., the belief that science is the only valuable part of human learning.”<sup>20</sup> This relates to problems of how faith and science correlate. Given relativism's view, how Christians understand scientific claims is important. Even though scientism works against knowing the Christian faith, it helps advance arguments against relativistic worldviews.

*Theodicy.* Humans look around and see many terrible and evil events happening in this world. If God is whom Scripture seems to declare He is, why do all these events happen? Can God be vindicated of these events? Why does God allow them? This is known as the problem of evil. McGrath writes, “Many Christian writers have written on this theme without necessarily providing the kind of decisive intellectual resolution of the issue that some might have hoped for.”<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, these evil events will continue in every person's life, so a well-reasoned defense and answer must be given. This category will be taken with them through the rest of their lives.

*Worldview.* The presupposed filter through which one sees the world. Rasmussen defines them as one's theories of everything.<sup>22</sup> The curriculum inevitability comes across other worldviews and how to understand them. It will be helpful for the students to realize that they have their own, and they, too, must try to seek out the truth of their own worldview.

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<sup>20</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing The Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Joshua Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 7.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation is the deadline for the research. Specific time frames are given in which the research must be completed. This requires the research to be planned out and instituted well.

The second limitation is that the students must sign up for the research curriculum. The researcher may try to do everything in his might to persuade the students to join, but the final decision is truly out of the hand of the researcher. The tools the researcher has falls into the delimitations as stated below.

The third limitation is that the students may sign up and never show up and leave midway through before the research is completed. The goal is to have an 80 percent retention rate throughout the whole process.

The fourth limitation is the schedules of the students. Often, high school students participate in extracurricular events that may interfere with the research. The goal is to choose days and times in which these extracurriculars will not interfere with the research. The research may have to have the quality of "adjustability" due to this problem. This will also require minors to complete the Institutional Review Board (IRB) form to achieve this research.

The fifth limitation is the truth claims of the students who will participate in the research. If the students are not honest about what they know before and after the curriculum, then the results will not be accurate. The aim is to have the student's confidence and trust going into this research, so this limitation will not occur or at least be minimized.

The sixth limitation is any unfortunate technological interference. The technology may fail during the research, pushing the research's timing back. This may be the least problematic

limitation, but it is still something that must be hedged against to keep everything organized and on schedule.

The seventh limitation is the students' attention span going through the research. This will vary from student to student. The research must incorporate the understanding of Gen Z's attention span and plan accordingly. If each part of the research is too long, the ability to stay with it mentally and physically may be difficult. If the research is too short, it may be insufficient for what the students need to learn.

The eighth limitation is the parent's schedule. Some students may be unable to transport themselves, given that the research falls within the high school age bracket. This means transportation for these students will have to come from outside of themselves. On top of a schedule that does not interfere with the student's schedule, the research will be at the mercy of the plans of those transporting the students.

The ninth limitation is the personal life and schedule of the researcher. Life often throws us curveballs, so the ability to plan well and adjust needs to be focused. A family member or someone close to the researcher may need the researcher's attention, which could harm the research.

### **Delimitations**

The first delimitation is the location of the study. Location will have much to do with the student's desire and ability to participate in the study. Placing the study in an unfamiliar location may decrease the student's desire and ability to attend. The study will be located at the church building where they come for youth ministry. The church has classrooms that are available throughout the week and on weekends. These classrooms are conducive to PowerPoint and video teaching methods.

The second delimitation is the length of time of the study. High school students' attention span is restricted, so the ability to determine the length of each course in the curriculum is determined appropriate by the research. The goal is not to overrun them with information and for them to be able to retain what they have learned. The teaching will take over three weeks at one and a half hours per week. Each week will have one hour of lessons followed by a thirty-minute question and answer session in case the students have follow-up thoughts and concerns.

The third delimitation is the topics and material created for the thesis' intended curriculum. There are more areas within apologetics that the time allotted to finish the thesis allows for. Given this, the categories are up to the researcher's discretion. The topic the researcher has selected is relativism.

The fourth delimitation is how the research will be presented. The style and method all play a role in how information is processed and understood. The presenter of the curriculum has a major role in the student's ability to comprehend and pay attention to the information being taught. This also includes the style of personal presentation. How the presenter looks plays a role in attention span and perceived authority.

The fifth delimitation is the materials given to the students. The researcher will use slide presentation handouts. The goal is for the students to take their own notes on the handouts. These handouts give the students all the information to take home and study at a future date. They will be provided with a utensil for writing. The researcher will also purchase binders for them to keep the material organized for future use.

The sixth delimitation is how many students will be involved in the research. The total sample size falls within the limitations of the research, but within that total sample size, the research determines how many will participate. The research requires a big enough sample size

to justify confidence in the research's outcome. The researcher aims for twenty students to participate. The goal is ten female and ten male participants. The hope is that two students from each grade level and gender will participate. This leaves two open spots for other students who desire to attend the teaching sessions. This helps the researcher measure the effects broadly through both genders and multiple grade levels within the high school students.

### **Thesis Statement**

If high school students are taught an apologetics curriculum on relativism, they will be able to give reasons for the biblical worldview they hold. This curriculum is designed and implemented by the researcher. Since the researcher has a direct relationship with the ministry, the curriculum can be designed based on the student's specific needs and knowing how the students learn. There will also be a system of tests to establish if the students grew in this knowledge after going through the set curriculum. These tests will be run before going through the program and then after. After going through this curriculum, the hope is that those who went through it will be able to understand the relativistic worldviews and be able to give a defense against those worldviews from the Christian faith. The students should not only be able to provide these answers, but the hope is that their faith and walk with the Lord will increasingly grow with confidence.

The hope is that when the students are put in situations where a response to defend the Christian worldview is required, they can provide these answers from the topics within the curriculum when they were not able to prior. The students should be able to provide more than just bullet point facts for answers but be able to successfully have continuous conversations with those who desire to know more about the Christian faith. Another success of this curriculum is the increasing desire to grow more afterward. It is one thing to sit back and listen to these types

of discussions, and it's another to willfully seek out this knowledge independently. The desire is to see a spark lit in the students to be hungry for more knowledge of their faith and understanding of different worldviews. This should all be done for the purpose of increasing God's kingdom. If this research project is successful, it should give confidence that this curriculum could work at other local churches and on additional topics.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A review of relevant discussions and research is crucial when formulating a resolution to the proposed problem for the doctor of ministry thesis. This literature review is designed to look at recent statistics on relevant themes, topics, and issues confronting Gen Z, discuss current literature on relativism and provide biblical support for apologetics and defense of biblical truth. It will then look at methods and current theories that have been used or those that are needed to incorporate within current Gen Z ministries. The following literature sources played a significant role in this research.

### Literature Review

Student ministry is too often treated as a necessary evil when in fact, it is the heart of the church's growth engine.<sup>23</sup> This means that one ought to cultivate their church's way of activity with a central eye on youth ministry. This begs the question of how the church must focus attention on its youth. The literature review gives increased confidence in showing the importance of apologetics as a tool for Christian youth ministry when dealing with relativism.

### Who is Generation Z?

When asking the state of local high school youth ministries, it is impossible not to speak of the generation from which they come. The students within high school youth ministries are classified as what is known as Generation Z. Born between 1999 and 2015, this generation constitutes “between 69 and 70 million children and teens, the largest American generation yet.”<sup>24</sup> This generation makes up roughly 25.9 percent of the United States (US) population and

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<sup>23</sup> James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 151.

<sup>24</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 10.



accounts for 40 percent of all consumers.<sup>25</sup> Out of all generations, this one is the most engaged with social media, with average reports of up to sixteen or more hours a week spent,<sup>26</sup> with 91 percent of them going to bed with their mobile devices. Gen Z's online expenditures are more than any other previous generations.<sup>27</sup> Regarding self-identity, this generation relies heavily on personal and professional achievements, as well as which hobbies they have.<sup>28</sup> Religion, as a form of identity, is found in fewer than fifty percent of the generation.<sup>29</sup> "Gen Z is a driven group of people. Their ambition is not only a source of motivation but also a marker of identity."<sup>30</sup>

Even though this generation is driven to make something of themselves and a name for themselves, they are a very tired generation, and tiredness is their most common negative emotion.<sup>31</sup> Roughly 41 percent feel some pressure or anxiety. This may come from either internal pressure brought on by themselves or external pressure brought on by parents, teachers, and social expectations.<sup>32</sup> Seven out of ten Gen Zers agree that older generations do not fully understand their generation's pressure, yet still, 73 percent go to the older generation for advice. Seventy-five percent agree that these older generations have Gen Z's best interest in mind.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Barna and OneHope, *Guiding Children: To Discover the Bible, Navigate Technology and Follow Jesus* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group), 9.

<sup>27</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 2, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 2, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

## The Religious Beliefs of Generation Z

To fully grasp what is needed for their faith's health, understanding that faith's state is first required. The literature review examines the most recent research on the state of this generation's faith. This may only be universal for some students of this generation. However, it should bring confidence that the current students may very well be going through these same familiar faith resemblances. Thirty-seven percent of this generation think it is impossible to know if God is real, compared to 32 percent of all adults.<sup>34</sup> This epistemological problem is seen in other aspects of this generation's ability to know what is actually true. This generation grew in its lack of interest in attending church from a younger age. Those most interested in attending church fall from roughly 60 percent from ages zero to five to roughly 40 percent from ages fifteen to sixteen.<sup>35</sup> Forty-one percent of Gen Z think the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful full life, compared to 61 percent of elders.<sup>36</sup> Seventy-eight percent of Gen Z believe in God, yet roughly only 41 percent attend weekly religious services of any kind. Only 8 percent would say a religious person is one of their role models.<sup>37</sup> Regarding being more spiritually mature, roughly 16 percent of Generation Z desire to be more spiritually mature as an accomplishment by the age of thirty.

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<sup>34</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 64.

<sup>35</sup> Barna and OneHope, *Guiding Children*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 67.

<sup>37</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 43.

## Generation Z and Truth

To discuss the beliefs of Generation Z, a good starting place is how this generation understands truth. What is truth? Truth is a property of the proposition that stands behind the words used. The desire is that the propositions one believes and holds fit like a perfect puzzle piece to reality. It is easy to see how the youth can be misguided in this area. Gould believes that truth is one of the three initial longings of the human soul and ought to be a starting point when doing apologetics.<sup>38</sup>

The Barna Group, in their research, points out some interesting findings of Generation Z and truth. They state that "there is a growing sense among Gen Z that what is true for someone else may not be true for me."<sup>39</sup> This is scary for many of these teens (34 percent); believing something to be true makes that thing true.<sup>40</sup> Reality does not need to line up with their beliefs; their beliefs determine reality. More than half of all Americans, teens (58 percent) and adults (62 percent), think many religions can lead to the same place.<sup>41</sup> They think it has become impossible to attain the absolute truth of one's belief.<sup>42</sup> As one participant stated, "There is always room for truth to change."<sup>43</sup>

This stems from Gen Z's need for factual evidence. Barna stated that 46 percent, or "nearly half of teens, on par with Millennials, state 'I need factual evidence to support my belief.'"<sup>44</sup> It is no wonder this generation's moral relativism is the majority opinion, with 44

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<sup>38</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 29.

<sup>39</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

percent stating that it is not okay to challenge what someone else believes to be true.<sup>45</sup> Just truly believing something makes it true.<sup>46</sup> This is almost on par with that of Millennials (47 percent).<sup>47</sup> With missions being a part of discipleship (1 Thess 2:9), it has become easy to see how this generation could become less effective in proclaiming the gospel in the future.

### Generation Z and Church

Among young Americans who do not belong to the church, some interesting phrases are used to describe what they believe about the church: anti-homosexual (91 percent), judgmental (87 percent), hypocritical (85 percent), and old-fashioned (78 percent).<sup>48</sup> When asked which images best represented the church for this generation, the top two were the symbol of the cross and that of a finger point, signifying “judgment, condemnation, and ‘bible-thumping.’”<sup>49</sup> More than half (57 percent) of Gen Zers say that church involvement is either “not too” or “not at all” important, with only 20 percent stating that it is “very important.”<sup>50</sup> This has a factor on their attendance, with around 22 percent or about one in five Gen Z attending church weekly and 28 percent stating they have not attended church in the past year.<sup>51</sup>

What are they looking for out of the church when they attend? Among practicing Christians, the top two reasons for attending are to learn about God (73 percent) and to grow and understand more of their faith (68 percent).<sup>52</sup> This is fascinating in that they desire to understand

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<sup>45</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 2, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 65.

<sup>47</sup> Barna and Alpha, *Reviving Evangelism: Current Realities that Demand a New Vision for Sharing Faith* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group), 10.

<sup>48</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 70.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 2, 57.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

what they believe intellectually. This is important because "at the core of a maturing Christian life lies the intentional, steady development of confidence in God and the Bible based on knowing why we believe these things."<sup>53</sup> Another problem is that even though practicing teens desire to know more about God and their faith, Gould states that "the Church has grown anti-intellectual."<sup>54</sup> According to parents whose teen goes to church, only 57 percent are very satisfied with how their church spiritually forms their teen.<sup>55</sup> Apologetics would be a helpful tool to help them in their search for what they desire the church to do for them, especially when it is certain that the next level of college will indeed test their faith and provide their minds with a sense of some doubt. Gentry writes, "Doubt can be an inherently neutral thing. How one deals with doubt, however, can either be a good thing or a bad thing."<sup>56</sup> This generation is looking for a rich understanding when they attend church, and the current adult generation ought to be giving it to them.

### Generation Z and the Bible

Millennials and teens are increasingly skeptical about the Bible.<sup>57</sup> When asked how they would define the Bible, only 22 percent of Gen Z thought it was the Word of God and could be taken literally. Thirty-four percent believed the Bible to be inspired and not necessarily taken literally. In comparison, 31 percent stated that it is not inspired and not God's Word but contains

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<sup>53</sup> Moreland, *A Simple Guide to Experience Miracle*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Gould, *Cultural Apologetics*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Barna and OneHope, *Guiding Children*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Austin Gentry, *10 Things Every Christian Should Know for College: A Student's Guide on Doubt Community and Identity* (Braintree, MA: Gentry Publishing), 53.

<sup>57</sup> Barna Group, Youth Specialties, and YouthWorks, *The State of Youth Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group), 84.

good advice through stories.<sup>58</sup> Only 41 percent believe it contains everything a person needs for a meaningful life.<sup>59</sup> This could also help us understand why roughly 18 percent read their Bibles more than four times a week and 28 percent only once a week.<sup>60</sup> White states, “Perhaps the most defining mark of the members of Generation Z, in terms of their spiritual lives, is their spiritual illiteracy.”<sup>61</sup> White continues to argue that being post-Christian is not the appropriate category for this generation. They do not even remember what it means to be Christian, which is far scarier.<sup>62</sup> It is not that they have once been Christian and decided to move past it; they do not even know what it means to be Christian in the first place anymore.

### Generation Z and Science

If Christianity is true, science ought to be a companion and friend to the Christian worldview. This, unfortunately, is not the case today with youth. There are two major views in school that are attacking youth. The first view is called scientism. This view states, “when we have competing knowledge claims from different sources, the scientific will always trump the nonscientific.”<sup>63</sup> The second view is that of naturalism, which states that nothing but physical reality exists. Any incorporeal being then cannot exist. God being Spirit (John 4:24), then, cannot exist. Therefore, the Christian belief is false. Scientism only adds pressure to accept the truth from those who make it their profession. Still, with this fear and lack of understanding of the natural sciences, there is a resounding “awe and wonder about the universe.”<sup>64</sup> For Generation Z,

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<sup>58</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Barna and OneHope, *Guiding Children*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 131.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 136.

nearly half (49 percent) in 2007 to 58 percent in 2014 feel this to be the case in their own lives.<sup>65</sup> Nearly 50 percent of thirteen to seventeen year old's desire to pursue a science-related career.<sup>66</sup> What makes church for the youth look anti-intellectual "is that 1% of youth pastors say they have addressed any subject related to science in the last year."<sup>67</sup> In the most recent Gen Z study by the Barna Group, 24 percent of Gen Z believe science and the Bible to conflict, while only 17 percent are willing to hold to the side of the Bible, giving their view of the conflict.<sup>68</sup> They also found that 31 percent believe they are referring to different aspects of reality, while 28 percent believe they can go hand in hand.<sup>69</sup> The result is that 72 percent of Gen Z believe there is a lack of correlation between the Bible and science or that they must be mutually exclusive. Kinnaman writes, "I knew from church that I couldn't believe in both science and evolution.... I knew from church that I couldn't believe in both science and God, so that was it. I didn't believe in God anymore."<sup>70</sup> Many feel the church is too black and white regarding the Christian faith and science, which could be why such a low percentage, almost none, speak to their youth about this area. Many in this generation believe in the incongruence yet still hold on to their belief in God.<sup>71</sup> What needs to be clarified is how long this will last, especially when they move on to the universities with the next step of their lives.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>66</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy, and completely unprepared for adulthood* (New York, NY: Atria), 139.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 65.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 139.

<sup>71</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 66.

## Why Apologetics Matter

What should be the next step forward? These trends appear not favorable or desirable for the youth within the church and the community in general. Gen Z lives within a different age of culture, and the church's readiness requires catching up. This generation is fraught with social media, fake news, inquisitive minds, and a lack of understanding of truth. Chatraw and Allen write, "The overarching framework of Christendom was not called into question so much as the sincerity of the individual's faith. In the past, doubt could be summed up with the question, 'Am I a true believer?' In our late modern age, the question has become, 'Is Christianity true?'"<sup>72</sup> The more this generation forms relativistic beliefs, the harder it will become to persuade them that Christianity is, in fact, the truth. Morrison writes, "Too many Followers of Jesus seem to be losing their confidence in the truth of Christianity."<sup>73</sup> Christian youth must see their Christian faith as a complete view of reality,<sup>74</sup> and not just something true and conducive to their lives in their present stage. They must see this as something true for everyone and at all times. Apologetics as a tool is the practice for youth to be able to handle the current relativistic culture they find themselves.

The English word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*; when translated, it means "answer" or "defense."<sup>75</sup> Apologetics is an appeal and a defense for the Christian faith. Chawtraw writes, "In other words, apologetics, through word and deed, answers both why a person can believe (defense) and why a person should believe (appeal). The goal of apologetics

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<sup>72</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Chamberlin and Christ Price, eds., *Everyday apologetics: answering common objections to the Christian faith* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press), 21.

<sup>74</sup> Greg Koukl, *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How it Ends, and Everything Important that Happens in between* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 15.



is to clear away the debris of doubt and skepticism to make a path for the gospel to be heard.”<sup>76</sup>

Since this is how the practice ought to be viewed, it becomes easier to see how apologetics gets at the heart of the current religious climate in which Generation Z is.

Apologetics can address the relativism Generation Z exists in.<sup>77</sup> Discovering and understanding the nature of truth and how Christ is the Truth (John 14:6) is crucial for those who are Christians. Not only does the Christian worldview proclaim to know the truth, but this truth is objective. This stands in stark contrast to that of relativism. For those in Gen Z that hold to a relativistic worldview, it is no wonder why studies find these categorical statistics the way they are. How is it that those in Gen Z are to believe that the Bible is the Word of God if they are unable to know that God exists or that they can know if the Bible is true?<sup>78</sup> If they believe humans cannot know God, how can they know His moral imperatives? If the body of Christ believed this more fully and incorporated apologetic curriculums such as that on relativism, these concerns and beliefs held by Gen Z could look much different.

Apologetics is not only a biblical mandate for all believers (1 Pet 3:15) but for disciples who are called to be on mission, each person ought to be able to think hard and discuss the difficulties of doubt within the culture. White asks scholars to think about the most critical outreach of one's ministry life. He suggests that if anyone hesitated even one second before answering "children's ministry," there is a need to start rethinking how the church does ministry.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>77</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 65.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>79</sup> White, *Meet Generation Z*, 149.

Every local ministry has its own Generation Z that they must understand and train for discipleship. This training should contain a defense of the biblical worldview. This literature review instigated the most recent statistics of that generation. Given that the local high school youth students fall within this category, this review should give confidence that they, too, experience these sorts of things. Apologetics is a helpful tool that is biblically mandated and can address this generation's current concerns and beliefs.

### A Brief History of Relativism

In order to understand relativism, great nuance is required. There are many different terms and ontologies used when discussing this belief system. One of the reasons for this is the vast history behind it. Many big players are involved in its history. During the eighteenth-century enlightenment, German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) sought human reason as the finder of truth.<sup>80</sup> He believed that the human mind interprets senses, and the result was called knowledge.<sup>81</sup> This Kantian belief structure took objective truth out of the question, brought truth claims into the realm of purely subjective, and located it on the individual level. The world could not be known apart from the concepts and terms humans use to grasp.<sup>82</sup> Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) understood truth as something that must be chosen and acted out.<sup>83</sup> He was called the “father of existentialism,” and the philosophy “attributed to him stresses personal choice and

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<sup>80</sup> Jim Denison, *The Coming Tsunami: Why Christians labeled intolerant, irrelevant, oppressive and dangerous-and how we can turn the tide* (Brentwood, TN: Forefront Books, 2022), 19.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Boghossian, *Fear of knowledge: against relativism and constructivism* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Denison, *The Coming Tsunami*, 19.

identity as the basis for life.”<sup>84</sup> If truth is something that each culture and person must define for themselves, the end is purely subjective terms.

Another contributor to relativistic thought is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). He followed in Kant's footsteps and argued for the inability of reality itself to be reflected by language.<sup>85</sup> Since everything then is on the individual level, one ought not to impose beliefs on others.<sup>86</sup> This is rearing its head even in today's youth, where roughly 47 percent of millennials believe "it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith."<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche's contemporary, Charles Sander Peirce (1839–1914), believed truth is something cultures can decide and agree upon. This truth should be what is most pragmatic and best for most people within the culture;<sup>88</sup> once again finding its foundations in relativistic beliefs. Through the centuries, relativistic worldviews have penetrated how people believed and knew what was true.

#### Relativism: Associated Terms and Concepts

One of the difficulties of fully understanding relativism is the variety of nuanced attempts to define it, apply it to reality, and the neighborly concepts that work with these understandings. Before attempting to resist and argue against relativism, it is crucial to grasp these varieties and models within the literature.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Denison, *The Coming Tsunami*, 19.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>87</sup> Barna and Alpha, *Reviving Evangelism*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Denison, *The Coming Tsunami*, 20.

It has been said that postmodern philosophies and postliberal theologies hold relativism which is in common with enlightenment thought.<sup>89</sup> “You know your truth, I know my truth, but neither of us knows the truth.”<sup>90</sup> Relativism is an epistemological theory that applies to knowledge of reality, a metaphysical theory denying real changelessness of reality, and an ethical theory denying true understanding of objective or transcendent moral principles.<sup>91</sup> Elwell considers two categories of relativism, totalistic and limited.<sup>92</sup> Totalistic relativism is “whether the cultural and psychological variables determine, predispose, or occasion certain metaphysical beliefs.”<sup>93</sup> The distinct person, in the end, is reduced to events, relations, and influences around them.<sup>94</sup> Limited relativism, in a sense, is similar but recognizes that there is meaningful human existence,<sup>95</sup> even if it is not objective. In common church vernacular, relativism stands at the opposite end of something being objective. This may not necessarily be all that true, as will be discovered later. The question that derives from this research is where truth can be located. What is needed is an examination of the philosophical literature.

Two main questions are how one should philosophically define relative and objective. Dr. Limbaugh defines objective as “independent of mind and language.”<sup>96</sup> To Limbaugh, objective is in contrast to non-objective, not in contrast to something being relative. Something being relative stands in contrast to something being non-relative. Relative is a category of context-dependency.

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<sup>89</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1002.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1002.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1003.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> David G. Limbaugh, “The Flexibility of Reality: An Essay on Modality, Representation, and Powers” (PhD diss., University at Buffalo, 2018), x, ProQuest Dissertations.

It is “the idea that beliefs are only true relative to a particular frame of reference or perspective.”<sup>97</sup>

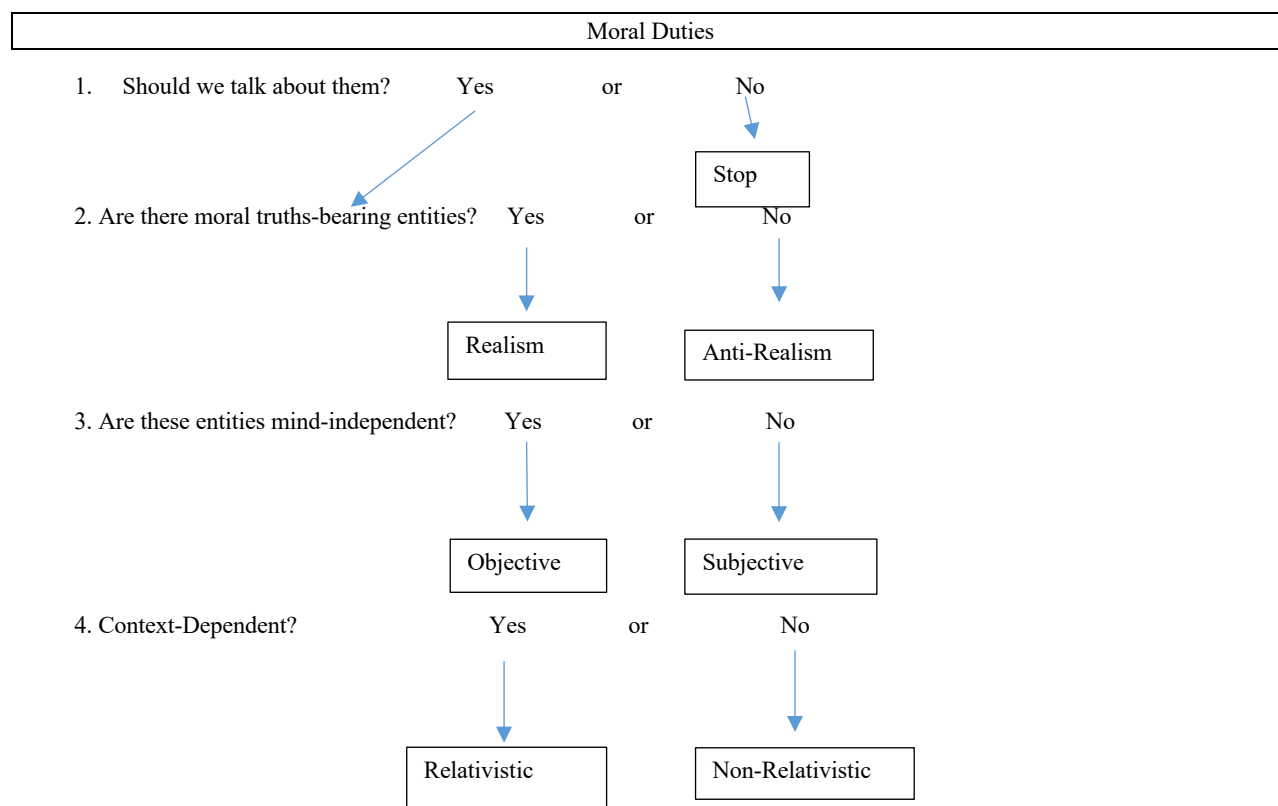


Figure 2.1: Moral Duties Ontology<sup>98</sup>

Given the ontology above, a few important questions must be asked to help understand this idea of relativism in the current apologetic curriculum. Is truth mind-independent? Do beliefs derive "from a reality that exists independently of any human investigation?"<sup>99</sup> Also, is truth context-dependent? If so, which context?

A major form of relativism is moral relativism. McDowell discusses two forms of moral relativism: cultural and individual.<sup>100</sup> Both are mind-dependent, yet still are relative contexts.

<sup>97</sup> James K. Beilby, *Thinking about Christian Apologetics: What it is and why we do it* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 120.

<sup>98</sup> This chart was created in conversations with Dr. David Limbaugh.

<sup>99</sup> Paul Helm, *Objective Knowledge: A Christian Perspective* (Leicester, EN: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 29.

<sup>100</sup> Joseph M. Holden, ed. *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics*, 374.

Cultural relativism "is the belief that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the culture," and individual relativism is "the belief that the individual person determines moral values."<sup>101</sup> This is a rejection of uniformitarianism, where there can be the right way of thinking,<sup>102</sup> and moves individuals into a view called individualism. Individualism is a form of relativism where one points the context narrative towards oneself. What is deemed correct or moral among groups is restricted to the individual, and each person "is guided by their own intuition."<sup>103</sup> Individualism grounds the context in the self, and because of this, individualistic factors move in "lockstep" with the decline in religion.<sup>104</sup> Twenge writes, "That makes sense given that religion by definition involves believing something bigger than yourself."<sup>105</sup> This form of relativistic belief forms a kind of "believe in yourself" religion, and this is difficult when Christians should place this kind of faith in God, someone other than oneself.

Another form that rears its head from relativism is constructivism.<sup>106</sup> The most influential is fact-constructivism, where facts are necessarily true only because humans have constructed them in such a way that describes and reflects individual interests and needs.<sup>107</sup> Only till humans entered the scene did things truly obtain to be facts since it is humans that construct them.

Relativism has certainly affected cultural and individual worldviews. For many, relativism has unfortunately fallen into a "throw the baby out with the bathwater" situation. This researcher suggests that the Christian worldview ought not to be too hasty. The problem that lies

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<sup>101</sup> Holden, *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics*, 374.

<sup>102</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Mere apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Books, 2012), 32.

<sup>103</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 155.

<sup>104</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 138.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Boghossian, *Fear of knowledge*, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 25.

within certain worldview systems is that they need to index themselves appropriately. One can hold to a Christian worldview yet still believe in some non-objective and relative parts of morality, yet still hold to biblical truth. The following section will briefly discuss the Christian worldview in relation to relativism and make a case for the Christian to leave the baby in the bath.

### The Christian and the Relativist

The claim above may, at first glance, seem intuitively unnerving. Given the common church vernacular, it is easy to see why this is the case. Under further examination and given the philosophical ontology above, Christians are open to a much more nuanced understanding of where beliefs and morals are grounded. To demonstrate this, two terms will be used.

Objectivity is a term often wielded by many Christians in their missions to argue for God's existence. During these worthy missions, the concept of objectivity often gets blurred. What typically is meant as transcendent is often used when stating objectivity. It is easy to understand how this can happen. The Christian worldview desires to ground its belief system in something other than the created order, something higher than nature itself. A feature of this creation is the ability to have certain beliefs that can be located between multiple reference frames. If a guest is late to an event in one culture versus another, even without additional information, it may be acceptable for one guest and not the other, given the reference frames of these individual cultures. The Christian looks for a ground that transcends creation and finds itself in an intelligent, moral, and uncreated ground, God. Objectivity is mind independence. The Christian worldview wants to agree with the ground, God, being an intelligent being. In fact, being Spirit (John 4:24), an intelligent mind fits the bill. Not only does the Godhead have intelligent relationships and conversations among themselves, but God has a mind in that He

holds foreknowledge. God, before creation, knew every instance of future events.<sup>108</sup> If one holds a Molinist position, God even intelligently knows all counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (1 Sam 23:6–13).<sup>109</sup> God, from His words, spoke out the entirety of creation and organized all the physical laws that have been discovered (Gen 1–2). All things, invisible and visible, were made by and through God (Col 1:16). God, indeed, is brilliant! To help show this further, it is helpful to understand that some philosophers hold to the existence of abstract objects to explain their belief in mathematical objects, propositions, and more. The chart below shows a layout of different kinds of beliefs.

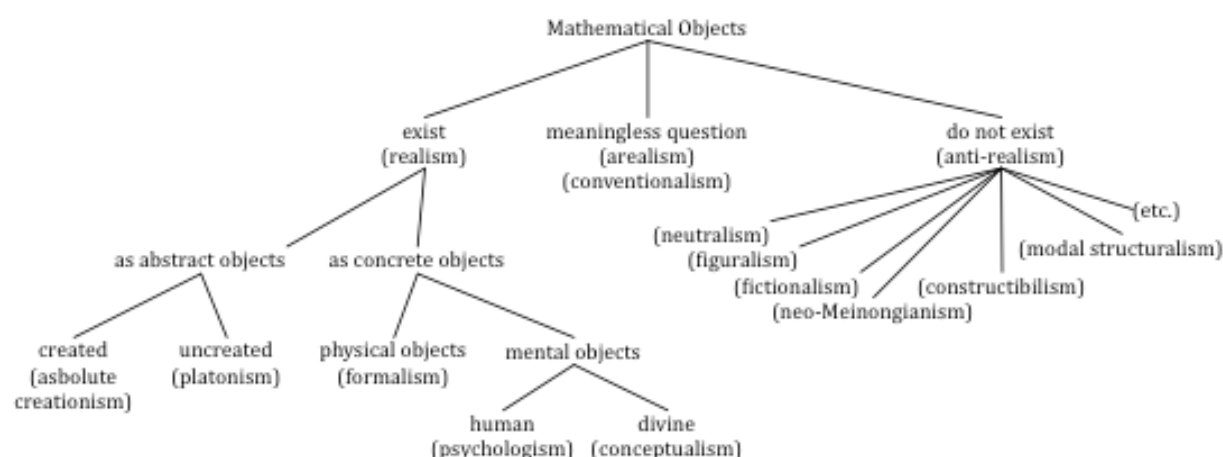


Figure 2.2: Mathematics Objects Ontology<sup>110</sup>

Within these models, realism is the belief that these objects exist; among realism, there are those that hold to divine conceptualism. According to Plantinga, this view locates numbers, properties, and propositions as divine ideas.<sup>111</sup> Now think about God's foreknowledge. If God

<sup>108</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene: OR, Wipf and Stock, 1999), 35.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>110</sup> William Lane Craig, *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism: Aseity* (Houston, TX: Springer, 2017), 166. See Appendix I, for Springfield Publishers license agreement.

<sup>111</sup> Craig, *God and Abstract Objects*, 170.



foreknew certain events would come to fruition, were these beliefs independent of the mind of God? They are not mind-dependent if they are located within God's mind. If God knew from eternity what is truly moral, would this knowledge then not be mind-dependent? This leads to a need to understand that something non-objective is okay to hold with the Christian worldview. Often objectivity is referenced as truths outside the perception of humans even existing. Independent of human thinking, these truths still are true. They are mind-independent in that manner. The Christian worldview ought to be comfortable with this idea as well. This still should not hinder any Christian belief that God has a mind and uses it. What is meant by objective should not deter from a defense of God's existence but nuance it correctly to help move the discussion along.

Relative morality cannot locate actions in a moral space without a reference frame. This can be seen with moral groundings in culture and individualism. The Christian worldview desires to index morality to God's nature instead of culture or the self. This is the goal since God's moral nature does not need a reference frame and, therefore, truly is not relativistic, yet a Christian may believe their moral duties and commands are. Some hold to what is called a divine command theory of ethics.<sup>112</sup> This theory, if true, holds that Christians “can plausibly explain the nature of moral obligations or duties by identifying them, with God’s commands.”<sup>113</sup> This would make human moral obligations or duties relative and indexed to God's commands. This is certainly okay since God's nature is perfect and non-relativistic, and God cannot violate His nature. One can plausibly hold to a non-relativist nature of God yet still think their moral obligations or duties are relative to something.

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<sup>112</sup> Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide: Coming to terms with the justice of God* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Books, 2014), 149.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Holding these two thoughts and given the definitions and ontology above, the Christian worldview should not be scared of relativism. The crucial point is that beliefs, such as morals being relative or indexed to something, should not be immediately rejected. God's thoughts, not being objective and mind-independent, should not necessarily be rejected either. The Christian worldview needs to defend against the improper and unbiblical forms of these beliefs. Christians are called to be truth-givers in all things. The following section will do just that. It will discuss the logical conclusions of the unbiblical forms of relativistic beliefs discussed above and seek to reject those forms.

### Rejecting Non-Christian Forms

It is impossible to avoid the discussion of morals, and this holds, especially for Gen Z. Recent studies have shown that the top three common topics discussed with Gen Z kids are current events, sexuality and marriage, and healthy consumption of popular culture and media.<sup>114</sup> All topics are riddled and ripe with moral discussions. Forty-six percent of youth pastors find that spiritual and moral relativism are the defining factors of Gen Z.<sup>115</sup> This correlates to 68 percent of youth pastors having biblical spiritual growth as the biggest struggle for youth ministry within the Gen Z generation.<sup>116</sup> This section seeks to discuss the logical conclusions of the unbiblical forms of relativism discussed above and seeks to reject those forms.

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<sup>114</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 1, 84.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

## Rejecting Cultural and Moral Relativism

McDowell holds three objections to cultural relativism. First, those holding this position cannot embrace moral reformers consistently.<sup>117</sup> By this, he means that since culture is the decisive factor of that which is moral, "then by definition the moral reformer is the one who is mistaken, because he or she is condemning the moral code of a given society."<sup>118</sup> Second, those who hold this position cannot critique other cultures as immoral.<sup>119</sup> If Christians have indexed morality to culture, what makes the American way of morality different than those who live in West Papua, where some tribes still practice bits of cannibalism? Intuition often reveals that this may be incorrect, but how can one genuinely argue against it? Intuitionism may be tough to plot out, but as an element in everyday life, it has been an essential tool for unbelievers and believers (Heb 4:12).<sup>120</sup> This has often reared its head within the category of religion.<sup>121</sup> Religious relativism claims that individuals or cultures decide religious beliefs and morals.<sup>122</sup> It is tough to see how this helps describe portions of reality for the sake of religious endeavors. McDowell's third point is that cultural relativists cannot promote tolerance as a virtue.<sup>123</sup> Promoting different cultures' norms as equally valid is different from holding tolerance as a meta-cultural standard.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Holden, *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics*, 375.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Helm, *Objective Knowledge: A Christian Perspective* 92.

<sup>121</sup> Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 120.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Holden, *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics*, 375.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 376.

## Rejecting Individualism

"We all are different, and that's good,"<sup>125</sup> has been heard by those who hold and embrace individualism. This has led to stark behavioral and cognitive dissonance within the younger generations.<sup>126</sup> Indexing everything to oneself comes with some serious flaws. Some of these flaws include the possibility of influencing others. If individualism ran rapidly throughout culture, the ability to communicate truths and influence individuals realistically fails. If truth is indexed to the individual self, how can one truly believe truth, such as morals can and should affect others? McDowell lays out three additional flaws of individual relativism. First, relativists cannot consistently raise the problem of evil.<sup>127</sup> Evil would be all different ideas to all different sorts of people. Therefore, making evil a universal truth and concept assumes this individualistic view to be incorrect. Second, relativists cannot consistently claim to have improved their morals.<sup>128</sup> Progress is often a word heard around these sorts of circles, but the idea of progress assumes some standard they are moving towards, but the individual is indexed as what the standard should be. Of course, a standard may be subject to change, but to suggest this progress is universal for all to achieve is to fail one's relativistic test. Third, those who hold this view cannot consistently accept praise or offer blame.<sup>129</sup> McDowell writes, "After all, the concept of praiseworthy behavior implies that there is an objective standard someone has violated."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 138.

<sup>126</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 158.

<sup>127</sup> Holden, *The Comprehensive Guide to Apologetics*, 376.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

## Theological Foundation

If the proposed solution of an apologetics curriculum on relativism is to be instituted within the high school ministry, two ideas must first be established. First, does the Bible speak to using specific tools as appeals and defenses for the Christian faith, and if so, to whom does it speak? Second, does the Bible speak to or about the idea of relativism? If the biblical account reconciles with these two ideas, then the proposed solution of using an apologetic curriculum has its biblical grounding. This portion will examine the biblical data about the importance of apologetics for ministries for discipleship formation. It will then examine biblical testimony concerning the nature of truth.

### Apologetics in the Old Testament

When discussing the topic of apologetics, most commonly, one is apt to think of more classical arguments, such as arguments for God's existence. Though this is one approach, it is harder to recognize the understanding of apologetics throughout the Old Testament. This examination needs to be more widely appreciated, and more work should be aimed in this regard.<sup>131</sup> Even though the term derives from the Greek word *apologia* found in Scripture in the New Testament,<sup>132</sup> if apologetics is the practice of offering an appeal and a defense for the Christian Faith,<sup>133</sup> the Christian faith also defends who Christians believe God is and why God acts in certain ways. In the Old Testament, there are three main categories of this nature. The first is a defense by man, the second is a tangible collaboration, and the third is a defense by God Himself.

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<sup>131</sup> Brian K. Morley. *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 29.

<sup>132</sup> Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 11

<sup>133</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 17.

Throughout the Old Testament, people defend God's actions. In the book of Job, after God has allowed Satan to take everything but Job's life, even though his friends were terrible counsel, Job still understood God was wise and righteous even if he could not see why things were happening to him. Job responds to his friend Zophar's accusations that with God are power and wisdom (Job 12:13). In fact, Job desires to argue and reason his case with God (Job 13:3) in that he does not believe he is guilty of these happenings. In all of Job's calamity, he desires to prepare his defense and is well-reasoned against his friends and their improper beliefs about God's system of justice.

Mankind and God tangibly collaborate to appeal for the truth of who God is. Isaiah appeals to courtroom images when he challenges his opponents.<sup>134</sup> When challenging the worthlessness of idols, Isaiah explains, “Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob” (Isa 41:21). Habakkuk argues not to trust in items that are made by man’s hand (Hab 2:18). Elijah asks God to send down fire to consume those who are against him as proof that God is for Elijah and that He is the one true God (2 Kgs 1:10). Morley remarks that this was a common practice known by the ancient people and that the revealing of the true God is shown through miracles done by God’s people.<sup>135</sup> The Old Testament is full of man and God working together to give a case for God's actions and status as the one true God of this world.

God's actions alone are His greatest defense of who He is, found in the Old Testament. God sent plagues down on Pharaoh to convince Pharaoh to let His people go (Exod 7:3). God foreknew Pharaoh's heart would be hardened, yet He still offers up proof. Commands in the Mosaic Law are grounded in this exodus event.<sup>136</sup> “The people should not fear the Canaanites

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<sup>134</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 30.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>136</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 250.

since the God who triumphed over the Egyptians would also triumph over them.”<sup>137</sup> The ability to tell the future was also a distinguishing mark of God being the true God (Isa 41:23; 46:10).<sup>138</sup> The psalmist states that the heavens act as an apologist for God.<sup>139</sup> God, throughout the Old Testament, continues to give an appeal and reasons for the truth of Himself and the truth of what He is doing throughout His creative work. Though the term *apologia* does not appear in the Old Testament, certainly, the idea and concepts behind providing an appeal and a defense for the Christian belief are present.

### Apologetics in the New Testament

Apologetics appears nineteen times in both noun and verb in the New Testament.<sup>140</sup> One particular biblical model does not reveal itself from Scripture,<sup>141</sup> but the defense and appeal (offensive and defensive) of the Christian faith do. Though the term *apologia* is used only nineteen times, Scripture is full of context for this idea, even if the term does not appear.

The classic proof text of apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15. Peter makes an appeal to always be prepared to make one's *apologia* to anyone who asks for a reason. Though it naturally fits in a forensic sense, this defense language is also "applicable figuratively for a reasonable defense."<sup>142</sup> Instead of being intimidated (3:14), boldness and gentleness (3:15) should inhabit a well-thought-out offering of one's faithful response. The audience Peter was speaking to continue to face trials in both physical and psychological fields.<sup>143</sup> It does not take much for one's faith to be

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<sup>137</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 250.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 31.

<sup>140</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 12.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>142</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 260.

<sup>143</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 16.

attacked to see how one may begin to doubt and ask their own questions about their beliefs.

Peter's understanding of how culture works appeals to the believer to be prepared propositionally and offers up a dispositional model of Christlikeness. All tenants in Christ must strive to portray themselves in this manner.

In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul confirms that he stands and is appointed for the *apologia* of the gospel (Phil 1:16). Using his jailed position, he ironically uses what was originally a military term,<sup>144</sup> to lay out a sum total of his whole ministry.<sup>145</sup> Wherever the challenge to the Christian belief may come from, Paul has set out to defend the gospel of Christ. Paul also sees those in Christ as partaking in his chains and defense (vs. 3–7). His chains and sufferings are a part of his commission, and in these commissions are also the Philippian partners.<sup>146</sup> “If Paul suffers, so do they; if he defends and vindicates the gospel, so do they.”<sup>147</sup> Standing before trial gave Paul the chance to proclaim the message of the gospel,<sup>148</sup> even to those who stood as his judge. He saw every opportunity to defend the gospel, even in chains, and the church stood with him.

Paul is all too familiar with his share of struggles while working for the kingdom of Christ. These troubles especially came from those who came to faith in God's work through Paul. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth (2 Cor 10:1–18), there is information about certain people coming into the church with a false gospel, leading them astray and attempting to run Paul's name through the dirt. In verses 4–5, Paul speaks of knowledge as a weapon to destroy the

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<sup>144</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians 1:1–2:18: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2017), 208.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 27.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 28.



fleshly warfare in the church. Paul admonishes them to take every thought captive and to punish any and every disobedience (vs. 6). Paul here could be alluding to the Old Testament proverb as he wages this intellectual war (Prov 21:22).<sup>149</sup> There was a rebellion afoot, and “Paul was ready to put them in their place.”<sup>150</sup> There is a true knowledge of God, and this divine power opposes these false fleshly attacks on the gospel and destroys them.<sup>151</sup> Paul was ready to punish opponents and those who were undermining and attacking the gospel of Christ that he was sharing.<sup>152</sup>

Even though the term *apologia* is referenced only in the New Testament, the context in both the New and the Old Testament is consistent. As believers in the gospel of Christ, Christians must stand to give an appeal and defense for the truth of this gospel. This was not only a call for the disciples but all in Christ were called to be prepared and share in this. Young and old, there was no age discrimination to the gospel's truth. As believers in the body of Christ, Christians are called to be prepared in this manner. This being the case, there then stands a problem of not training the high school ministry at the Eastern Hills church. The students must also be prepared to give an *apologia* in a like-kind manner. The proposed curriculum to the problem will face this head-on and train the youth to give their *apologia* in the world they live in.

### The Bible and Truth

Scripture shows that using apologetics as a tool is crucial, and everyone is called to be prepared to defend their belief (1 Pet 3:15). The next section discusses what the Bible states

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<sup>149</sup> Judith A. Diehl, *2 Corinthians: The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 322.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

about the nature of truth. If everything is relative to specific cultures and individuals, then the truth claims of the gospel are only good news to those who decide it or whom nature allows it to be. This would therefore oppose what is found in God's Word.

### **Truth in the Old Testament**

An immediate problem with the English term “relativism” is that it did not come into use until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>153</sup> This may cause pause, but upon understanding, the ideas behind the term have existed before the term that describes and organizes it. The topic at hand is the biblical testimony of truth. How does the Bible speak of the idea of truth? Those who hold to the Christian worldview ought to hold to the nature of truth found in God's Word and ought not to be like Pilate (John 18:38), where asking what is true is more than a way to end a conversation.<sup>154</sup>

In the Old Testament, the term truth appears 120 times, and the majority reflect the use of the Hebrew word *'emet*.<sup>155</sup> The root meaning connotes "support" and "stability" and is connected to both "truth" and "faithfulness."<sup>156</sup> “Truth is that firm conformity to reality that proves to be wholly reliable, so that those who accept a statement may depend on it that it will not turn out to be false or deceitful.”<sup>157</sup>

Dr. Nicole lays out two main categories found with the usage of this term in the Old Testament. The first category is the category of faithfulness. Nicole lays out three points of

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<sup>153</sup> Maria Baghramian, “Relativism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2015): 11, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/>.

<sup>154</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 926.

<sup>155</sup> D. A. Carson and John B. Woodbridge, eds, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 288.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

understanding. First, the term *'emet* is referred to as an attribute of God.<sup>158</sup> Nehemiah declares the Lord has acted faithfully, while everyone else has done wrong (Neh 9:33). Second, what is said of God can be applied to humans (Ps 145:18). Third, faithfulness or reliability can be extended to objects which do not have the capacity for decision-making (Josh 2:12; Jer 14:13; Prov 11:18).<sup>159</sup>

The second category is the category of conformity to fact. Nicole writes, “here the foundational issue is that *'emet* represents that which is conformed to reality in contrast to anything that would be erroneous or deceitful.”<sup>160</sup> Elijah, when confronting the prophets of Baal, used the principle of the excluded middle (1 Kgs 18:21). “He [Elijah] drew a stark contrast between irreconcilable options.”<sup>161</sup> Groothuis argues that John presupposed a theory of truth called correspondence, building on the context of manifesting the truth of Jesus Christ (John 7:28; 8:16).<sup>162</sup> In Psalm 15:2, telling the truth contrasts with slandering and giving a false, malicious report. The prophet Daniel speaks of prophecies that will come to pass as true (8:26; 10:1). “It is because truth is conformity to fact that confidence may be placed in it or in the one who asserts it.”<sup>163</sup> This is why the term *'emet* can be used in reference to God’s ways being that which He wills and acts (Ps 25:5; 26:3; 43:3). This also stands in stark contrast to that which is a delusion (1 Kgs 22:22–23; 2 Chr 18:21–22; Jer 20:7).<sup>164</sup> Faithfulness and conformity to the fact of reality are understood in the context of the term *'emet* found in the Old Testament. The

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<sup>158</sup> Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 288. Other verses include Ps 30:9; 69:13; 111:7–8; Isa 61:8.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>161</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2000), 62.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Hebrew Bible shows no indication that truth is interpreted by individual belief or mere social custom.<sup>165</sup> These were indeed the Hebrew understanding of truth.

### **Truth in the New Testament**

The concept of truth is also found in the New Testament writings. The words "grace and truth" are often combined in the New Testament. This is reminiscent of the Hebrew phrase "mercy and truth."<sup>166</sup> Continuity between the two Testaments' understanding of truth is seen in the 129 uses of the Hebrew term "amen."<sup>167</sup> "The term truth and its cognates occur frequently in the New Testament, in fact, 183 times."<sup>168</sup> Nicole points out two major ideas in the New Testament's view of truth. First, like in the Old Testament, there is conformity to fact. Paul uses the noun *aletheia* to distinguish truth from that which holds falsehood.<sup>169</sup> There is a difference between that which happened factually in reality versus a dream or vision (Acts 12:9), between empty pretense and correct motivation (Phil 1:18),<sup>170</sup> and the chance of not being saved based on the Bible's belief in specific truth claims about how reality works (1 Tim 2:4). Second, Nicole understands the New Testament to show completeness. "Contrast is not so much between correct and false, but rather between complete and incomplete, definitive and provisional, full-orbed and partial."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 61.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 293.

<sup>169</sup> Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 64.

<sup>170</sup> Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 294.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 295.

Groothuis gives eight distinctives of the biblical view of truth. God reveals truth, objective truth exists and is knowable (Rom 3:3–4), Christian truth is absolute (John 14:6),<sup>172</sup> Truth is universal (Acts 4:12),<sup>173</sup> the truth of God is eternally engaging and momentous, not trendy or superficial (Isa 40:8). Truth is exclusive, specific, and antithetical (Matt 7:13). Truth is systematic and unified, and truth is an end, not a means to any other end.<sup>174</sup> Crain writes that "truth, by definition, is narrow-it excludes infinite falsities."<sup>175</sup> In the biblical sense, truth is associated with the nature of the triune God (2 Tim 3:16), "as a perfection of His being."<sup>176</sup>

Truth, according to the Bible, is that which is ultimately, finally, absolutely real and the way it is. This makes it trustworthy and dependable.<sup>177</sup> It is like a rope, where several strands become intertwined.<sup>178</sup> As Christians go and make disciples, defending the truth of who God is, said, and continues to do is paramount. "Our goal is to communicate, as persuasively as we are able, the truth of God himself, as that truth finds its focus in the Word who became flesh and

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<sup>172</sup> This researcher believes that not all truths are necessarily absolute. Dr. Craig writes, "Absolute means 'regardless of the circumstances.'" "Relative" means "varying with the circumstances." One can agree, for example, that killing another person is not absolutely wrong. In some circumstances killing another person may be morally justified and even obligatory. To affirm that one's moral duty varies with the circumstances is not to say that one has no objective moral duties to fulfill ("*objective*" or "*absolute*" moral values, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/objective-or-absolute-moral-values>). This researcher believes that Dr. Groothuis would also agree with this statement. This researcher also believes some truths are absolute, like the example given by Groothuis above.

<sup>173</sup> The fact that some truths vary from time to time does not necessarily make all truths not universal or even all details about certain truths not universal. For example, truths are used for foreshowing within the Bible, such as when God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice. God desired the Israelites to sacrifice to Him, that is a universal truth about God's desire for Israel at that time, but this was supposed to point to Christ. The command to sacrifice was universal for all of Israel at that specific time, but not for all times. The totality of this plan would be considered universal. Some truths do not apply to all cases, such as moral commands and duties given to certain persons and not others. Still, it is universally true that God gave those certain people moral commands and duties. This researcher agrees with Groothuis about the universality of the verse's context given above.

<sup>174</sup> Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 65–81.

<sup>175</sup> Natasha Crain, *Faithfully Different: Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 101.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>177</sup> William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds., *Christian Apologetics: Past and Present*, vol 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 638.

<sup>178</sup> Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 296.

dwelt among us.”<sup>179</sup> Christians are called to be truth-tellers. The reason for this is three-fold. First, the truth about reality exists and often is independent of the existence of human beings. Second, God's character is the basis for not lying (Num 23:19; Prov 30:5; Titus 1:2).<sup>180</sup> “This, then is the ultimate reason why lying is wrong: it makes us unfaithful image-bearers of God.”<sup>181</sup> Third, Christians are called to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). This presupposes that the truth about salvation found in Christ is universally true and needed for humanity (John 14:6). If this is the case, the Christian must be prepared to tackle the challenge of those who hold to an improper and unbiblical relativistic worldview about truth.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

This section will examine recent research that has been done on apologetics and apologetic approaches to relativism with high school students. It will also examine the established curriculum and how the church in the study may or may not benefit from its use. What has been researched falls into two main categories. The first category is an already established curriculum that has been established and can be purchased by any high school ministry. These established curriculums incorporate the topic of relativism. These include online sources or retreats for high school students in order for them to be trained more in their faith through apologetics. The second are those that have either put high school level students through a specific apologetics curriculum or changed the curriculum students were already going through to see if better results could be achieved. Although there are plenty of apologetics curriculums available that include teaching on relativism for purchase through online sources, there have

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<sup>179</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 159.

<sup>180</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 319.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 320.

been few studies to show the effectiveness of such programs on high school youths. Eastern Hills Church could purchase one of these online curriculums. The resistance may come from being heavily budget-constrained, as well as being unaware of the effectiveness of such programs. This proposed curriculum and research hope to provide a result to such problems.

### Established Curriculum

This section will outline already established programs that Eastern Hills Church could purchase for their high school youth ministry. It will examine the contents and then offer critiques.

Impact 360 Institute is a well-established training retreat churches can send their student youths to. There are four major programs in which the students may involve themselves. The program that seems most reasonable is called immersion.<sup>182</sup> This two-week camp retreat program will teach the students both the biblical worldview and apologetics. The program is based on their 3-pillar model, which is recognized as know, be, live. This program includes an extensive range of topics.<sup>183</sup> The program includes learning and camp activities that the students can participate in during their free time. They bring well-known speakers to teach the students about specific apologetic and biblical topics.

Although this camp-like program seems well put together, a few critiques need to be addressed. Unfortunately, programs such as these do not address the problem at Eastern Hills Church. There are three main problems for Eastern Hills Church with trying to use these programs. The first is the church's budget. The church is unable to afford to send its students

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<sup>182</sup>Impact 360 Institute, "Immersion," accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www.impact360institute.org/immersion/>.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid. These topics include God's existence, doubt, truth, reliability of the Bible, the problem of evil, who Jesus claimed to be, moral relativism, how to defend the faith on campus, human sexuality, evolution, and the resurrection.

there. The costs are hefty at roughly \$1800 pre-tax per student. There are two other options. The first is for the parents of each student to absorb the expenses. The second is for the church to split the costs. Even if the parents afforded half the costs, the church's \$11,000 budget would be eaten up very quickly.

The second main problem is that there is a waitlist at the time of this writing, and the wait time is unknown to this researcher. Even if the church could send students, the ability to coordinate all the students to get off the waitlist together would be a complicated task. It may be the case that it would be impossible to coordinate. The third main problem is that it does not solve the problem of intellectual responsibility within the church. These programs take the responsibility off the church's shoulders concerning teaching the students apologetics. Eastern Hills Church should be able to provide this same teaching for their students.

Another ministry is Summit Ministries, which provides for the purchase of a program to train students in their Christian faith and other worldviews.<sup>184</sup> It is designed more for homeschooling but could have church applications. The costs are on a one-student-to-one-teacher basis, but there is the ability to purchase packets and textbooks per additional student at an additional cost of roughly \$32. Some topics include the nature of truth, evidence for God, biblical reliability, Jesus as the only way, and how to engage in conversation with those who do not believe.

The critique of this program is relatively the same as that of the prior one. Though the cost is beneficial for homeschooling, when applied to a youth ministry of a larger group, the costs are not something the church can afford. Being that it is designed for more of a homeschool atmosphere, those coming to the youth group would have additional textbooks and packets that

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<sup>184</sup>Summit Ministries, "Understanding the Times," accessed March 28, 2022, <http://understandingthetimes.com/>.



they would have to take home and do work. This would not be conducive to the student's likes and desires. Lastly, this program is bought on a yearly basis. In order to re-up the material and online sources, the ministry would have to continue to purchase a yearly plan. This also needs to account for new freshman students or newcomers to the youth ministry. Though possible, this program does not seem feasible for the church.

There are plenty of programs that the church could purchase or send their students away to to learn apologetics, but for Eastern Hills Church, none seem to be plausible for the situation of their ministry. A well-developed, free, taught, and trained in-house program for the church is what they truly need. The question that still resides is if this program will be effective. If this program is not effective, then continuing to establish it within the church curriculum would not be effective.

### Established Research

Knowing that others have also treaded similar grounds gives confidence to this research and its success. This section examines one previous piece of research intending to find their methods and results. It examines if the methods apply to this researcher's intentions. If they are, the methods are something to take note of, and if they are not, then a critique is offered.

In 2020, Chad Brown sought to formulate a strategy to teach theology and apologetics to high school students against human secularism.<sup>185</sup> In order to measure his testing, he used an original questionnaire. This same questionnaire was given prior to as well as after the curriculum in order to test the results. The questionnaire was fifteen questions long and was explanatory. This questionnaire was considered a one-hour pre-test. The scoring for each test was as follows:

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<sup>185</sup>Chad John Brown, "Combatting Secular Humanism: Creating a Strategy to Teach Theology and Apologetics to High School Students" (DMin thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), iv, accessed March 27, 2022, Scholars Crossing.

one = poor, two = fair, three = good, four = very good, and five = excellent. The students were to answer the questions to the best of their ability both times. The apologetics program that the students went through was set up as a two-day intensive. The students needed their guardians' permission before being involved in this intensive. Each day consisted of four thirty-minute lessons, each focusing on a different topic. On the first day, the topics were: what is a worldview, is the Bible reliable, is God a moral monster, and what is salvation and justification? Day two topics were: the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, evolution, and the attributes of God. Each intensive followed a Socratic dialogue format, utilizing discussion to teach better. The results were as he suspected. The average score of the same post-exam increased both in the correctness of answers and each student's confidence in knowing and defending their beliefs. Some of the percentage gains in their answers were up to 60 percent from their previous pre-test scores. Eight out of ten improved their test results, while the remaining two stayed roughly the same. Overall, the apologetics program met the assumed conclusion of the research.

This research helped the researcher understand the need for measurement. The ability to establish a good baseline may be difficult with some research, and using questionnaires pre and post is something to take note of. The terminology in scoring the test was also valuable to understand. It is difficult since someone may not be trained in apologetics or may be trained more and then base it on this type of range. Given that the researcher was the one teaching the courses and had the appropriate knowledge, it would follow then what he felt was sufficient enough as an answer.

The topics were decent but needed improvement. One cannot do such extensive depths on a broad range of topics given the amount of time for this research. Still, there is a topic this researcher finds essential in apologetics that was not used. Given the previous research on Gen

Z, relativism is something that these youths must be taught. Another critique is the format. Though thirty-minute lessons are suitable for the length of the session, having four of these sessions for this age frame may be difficult for this researcher to achieve to get volunteer students. More days and fewer lessons per day would be needed. All of these items will be considered and are helpful in how to plan a specific methodology for the apologetics curriculum on relativism for Eastern Hills Church.

Finding strategies that speak directly to the specified relativistic curriculum for Gen Z is challenging. The philosophical literature speaks to a phenomenon called student relativism. Since the 1980s, there has been much debate on how to handle this topic.<sup>186</sup> This next portion will examine the research done regarding student relativism and how different classifications of strategies have studied this topic. The goal of this section is to give confidence to strategies this researcher will incorporate, as well as discuss additional concepts that will be brought in during the curriculum.

Jonas Pfister sought to establish a new theory to teach relativism to high school, which he calls "epistemic conceptual change strategy." Many philosophers believe that student relativism may have a terrible consequence; interest in philosophy may be lost in general.<sup>187</sup> Jonas dealt with four general strategies for student relativism in his research: 1) philosophical position dealt with directly, 2) philosophical position dealt with indirectly, 3) unreflected attitude dealt with directly, and 4) unreflected attitude dealt with indirectly.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Jonas Pfister, "Classification of Strategies for Dealing with Student Relativism and the Epistemic Conceptual Change Strategy" (Teaching Philosophy 42:3, 2019), 221, accessed April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Scholars Crossing.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 227

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 222.

He had some interesting findings. The first position was to refute relativism; this was done by showing its claims and bringing classical-type arguments to object to its worldview.<sup>189</sup> Three problems were discovered with this attempt. First, some students were not convinced. Philosophically the teacher may have succeeded, but pedagogically the teacher had not.<sup>190</sup> “The students felt that negating the slogans meant lack of respect towards the beliefs of others.”<sup>191</sup> Second, there was a danger of gridlock in that the students perceived this attempt as an attack on their personal beliefs.<sup>192</sup> Third, since there is no established meta-ethic, the weight of the argument was not felt.<sup>193</sup>

The second position proposed a less coercive method and sought to offer compelling reasons in favor of different reasons.<sup>194</sup> In all, this attempt did not, in a classical sense, attempt to prove a moral position but rather advocate against others.<sup>195</sup> Ultimately, they found the students not convinced. It becomes easier to convince someone out of a position if they offer a better one to go to. No one wants to list their house for sale without knowledge of another roof able to cover their heads.

The third position attempts to get the students to clarify what they mean by asking questions.<sup>196</sup> The hope is that these questions will directly cause the student to move in the correct direction against their forms of relativism. The ultimate hope is that "the students come to

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<sup>189</sup> Pfister, “Classification of Strategies...,” 223.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 226.

recognize that what they represent is compatible with an ethical objectivism."<sup>197</sup> The results were that the students were not convinced that relativism was wrong, but their philosophical belief in a certain kind of relativism did fall into that category.<sup>198</sup>

The fourth position sought to provide a place for students to have ethical discussions,<sup>199</sup> and to work through their different ethical beliefs.<sup>200</sup> Ultimately, much of the worldviews did not change. It provided a space to converse but not a space to argue why certain views are wrong.<sup>201</sup>

Pfister offers what he calls an “epistemic conceptual change strategy.”<sup>202</sup> He found that the key factor is the “misconception about the nature of knowledge, thinking, and reasoning that must be overcome in the course of instruction.”<sup>203</sup> He saw that the students misunderstood how humans come to knowledge. He suggests that once the students know how beliefs are warranted and justified, they are more likely to accept different beliefs.<sup>204</sup> “The slogan must be: find your way! And this does not mean there is no truth. But rather: find out what you believe and question it until you can justify to others why it is true.”<sup>205</sup>

There is an interesting thread this researcher sees that runs through each position. This thread is the idea of tolerance for other people's belief systems. Tolerance is a key factor in student relativism. Even in Pfister's conclusion, tolerance is a thread that still runs through it. This researcher agrees that epistemic belief systems are important and should be taught.

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<sup>197</sup> Pfister, “Classification of Strategies...,” 226.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 239.

However, the more fundamental problem that could solve the problems with each section is a discussion on tolerance. Dr. Ihara is correct when he states, "relativism is not held by them [students] as a meta-ethical position but as a first-order ethical belief. It is a consequence of their beliefs in, and their understanding of, ethical tolerance."<sup>206</sup> Paden reconstructs what he believes to be an acceptable argument for student relativism.

- 1) Respect for persons requires that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion.
- 2) Therefore, it is wrong (i.e., permissible) to force anyone to change their opinion.
- 3) Arguments can force someone to change his or her opinion.
- 4) Therefore, it is not morally possible (i.e., permissible) to argue against someone's opinion.
- 5) If it is not possible to argue against an opinion, it must be true.
- 6) Therefore, if someone holds some belief, respect for that person compels us to say that belief is true for that person (even though it is not true for me).<sup>207</sup>

Premised, it becomes easier to see how these beliefs arrive within student worldviews. It becomes even more obvious to the researcher that the second premise finds much of the weight fundamental to student relativism.

Dominik Balg, in his research and attempt to offer a new strategy to deal with student relativism, attempts to show that the starting point of student relativism should be discussions about tolerance.<sup>208</sup> He writes, "it gets clear that relativistic views are not problematic per se, but only if they are connected to a specific intellectual attitude. And often enough, this attitude will

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<sup>206</sup> Craig Ihara, "Moral Skepticism and Tolerance" (Teaching Philosophy 7:3, 1984), 193-8, accessed June 10, 2022, Scholars Crossing.

<sup>207</sup> Roger Paden, "The Student Relativist as Philosopher" (Teaching Philosophy 10:3, 1987), 193-205, accessed June 10, 2022, Scholars Crossing.

<sup>208</sup> Dominik Balg, "Talking about Tolerance: A new Strategy for Dealing with Student Relativism" (Teaching Philosophy 43:2, 2020), 123-137, accessed June 10, 2022, Scholars Crossing.

likely be some form of tolerance.”<sup>209</sup> He discovered that using a positive or negative approach to relativism was only moderately successful as a strategy. Though they understood the arguments, the students began to exhibit relativistic beliefs in situations where being tolerant as an attitude is generally and culturally regarded as appropriate.<sup>210</sup> Balg came to find that, according to students, tolerance is meant to refrain from interfering in any way with another person's conflicting belief.<sup>211</sup> His solution was to teach tolerance as a starting point.<sup>212</sup> When doing so, he found two major effects: 1) students realized that for many forms of tolerance, the starting ground does not necessarily presuppose relativistic assumptions, and 2) Students will have a much more nuanced understanding of what it means to have a tolerant attitude.<sup>213</sup>

Understanding the relationship between student relativism to the belief in tolerance creates new ground to discuss relativism with the students during the curriculum. This section showed the importance of having tolerance within the discussion of relativism, the importance of having good epistemic reasons for why unbiblical portions of relativism are wrong and giving the students another place to land. The ability to create a format of discussion where the students do not feel their beliefs, is also important to the discussion of relativism, as shown by the above study.

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<sup>209</sup> Balg, “Talking about Tolerance,” 125.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Intervention Design**

#### **Participants**

The intervention will hope to include at least twenty students who attend the Eastern Hills Church high school ministry and have them fully participate in a created and planned apologetics curriculum on relativism. The researcher hedges roughly a 20 percent drop-out rate. The students are members of grade levels ninth through twelfth grade. Therefore, the researcher also aims to measure success through grade levels with the curriculum. The hope is to achieve at least five students from each grade level.

#### **Informing Participants**

Informing the students that they have been selected to be a part of this program will be done in person. Since the researcher is an active volunteer within the youth ministry, personal access to the students is available each week. If certain students do not attend the week when the researcher personally tells the participants they have been selected, the researcher will reach out by phone and email the student and parent forms.<sup>214</sup> The approval and access to this information will be within the consent forms.<sup>215</sup> To get the participant's consent, the researcher will prepare a verbal script underlying the intent of the research and the needs of those who participate in the

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<sup>214</sup> For consent forms, see Appendix G.

<sup>215</sup> For consent forms, see Appendix D & E.



research.<sup>216</sup> The researcher will have the students take home the recruitment script information and the consent forms. Both the parents and the students need to discuss the information. The researcher will have his contact information on the forms if the parents need to reach out and ask additional questions. Once the parents and the students consent to the research, both parties must sign the consent form and hand it back in the following week. Once all the consent forms are back, copies will be made for researchers, participants, and the church to keep in their files. This way, everyone has proof of each participant's consent.

### Intervention Plan

The intervention plan will be seven weeks in length. The third and seventh weeks will be this intervention's testing and measuring weeks. The curriculum will take place over three weeks. The students will take the curriculum at the same location and time as their high school youth ministry program. This will require approval found within the consent forms. The students will go to one of the church's classrooms. The students will receive their handouts and utensils each week once they arrive in the classroom. During the first week that the curriculum is taught, students will receive a binder purchased by the researcher to keep all the notes and handouts organized. They will be required to take these materials home and bring these items each week. Each lesson will be exactly forty-five minutes in length. This will leave forty-five minutes for open conversations. The total time each week of classroom teaching will be approximately ninety minutes. At 7:55 pm, the students will be escorted back down to the main ministry room by the researcher, and the students are free to do their usual after-service activities while they wait for their parents.

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<sup>216</sup> For the recruitment script, see Appendix F.

The testing will consist of a questionnaire.<sup>217</sup> The same questionnaire will be given to each student during the first and last weeks.

Weeks	Details
1	An announcement for the research project will be made prior to service. For those interested, a ten-minute meeting will take place after service. An information sheet and a consent form will be provided for those who come to the meeting. The students will attend their typical youth service.
2	This week collects the consent forms and any additional information the student or parents may need. Copies will be made in triplicate and handed out the following week. For the next two weeks, the researcher gathers the supplies for students and the curriculum. The students will attend their typical youth service.
3	This week the students involved will come in up to an hour early, before ministry time, to take the questionnaire. After the questionnaire, the students will attend their typical youth service. The researcher gathers supplies for the next week for students and the curriculum.
4	The students will take the typical time allotted for youth ministry and be taught the relativism curriculum.
5	The students will take the typical time allotted for youth ministry and be taught the relativism curriculum.
6	The students will take the typical time allotted for youth ministry and be taught the relativism curriculum.
7	This week the students involved will come in up to an hour early, before ministry time, to take the questionnaire. This is the post-questionnaire after they have gone through the curriculum. After the questionnaire, the students will attend their typical youth service. After the ministry program, the students will meet for a quick focus group.

Table 3.1: Weekly Layout

The students will have a maximum of forty-five minutes to complete the questionnaire. There will be no minimum time required for these questionnaires. The questionnaires will ask the students eight questions. The students will be required to give as much detail as possible to the eight questions on the questionnaire. A yes or a no will not be sufficient. The questions will cover the information that the students will learn during the curriculum. It will measure how well

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<sup>217</sup> For the questionnaire, see Appendix A.

they can defend their Christian worldview regarding relativism. The answers will be graded using qualitative scaling. Each level of quality will be represented by a numbered

Point Totals	Qualities
5	Presents clearly in the same manner and form as the curriculum, articulates information clearly and precisely, gives opposing thoughts found within the curriculum, and articulates those clearly and precisely, the logic of student's thoughts are valid and sound, incorporates two or more additional personal thoughts and or points that are not found within the curriculum
4	Present information clearly and precisely, not in the same manner and form as the curriculum, shows an understanding of opposing thoughts and beliefs but struggles to articulate and understand them, conclusions are correct but may not be as precise as the curriculum, incorporates one additional personal thought and or point.
3	Shows some understanding of the curriculum, shows some additional understanding of opposing thoughts and beliefs found within the curriculum, conclusions are close to being correct but need additional help, incorporates no additional personal thoughts and or points.
2	Shows very little additional understanding of the curriculum, shows very little additional understanding of opposing thoughts and beliefs, conclusions are wrong and require a lot of additional help, incorporates no additional personal thoughts and or points.
1	Shows no understanding of the curriculum, shows no additional understanding of opposing thoughts and beliefs found within the curriculum, the teacher is unable to see how students' conclusions are reached, incorporates no additional personal thoughts and or points

Table 3.2: Grading Scale

point total. Each point category will have specific qualities the researcher is looking for within each response. The student's responses will be matched with each quality and fit within the total point category. The point totals will be measured to discover if the curriculum for each student was a success.

### Test Questionnaire

The test questionnaire will include questions that range across all of the lesson plans. It will first set out to have the students define their terms. The researcher believes that the students need to have a good grasp of these terms to have successful conversations with others when

discussing the topic of relativism. It will ask the students to define terms such as relativism, truth, subjectivity, and objectivity. It will ask the students to give their understanding of what the Bible has to say concerning these terms. It will ask for biblical verses to back up their answers. On top of biblical reasons, the questionnaire will ask for logical reasons to accept or reject relativist views. The researcher is looking to see if the students have any knowledge of relativism and, if they do, how deep their knowledge of this topic runs. The questionnaire will also ask the students to discuss categories of the relativistic worldview and unpack them. The researcher is looking for the students to unpack the causal relation of the relativistic worldview they may often see daily. The hope is that the students can spot relativistic worldviews when they see them. Lastly, the questionnaire will ask the students to discuss how their belief in God's existence affects how they understand relativism. Does it make them change their minds on the topic? Does it solidify their understanding even more? The hope is that the questionnaire illuminates how much the students know about relativism. This is not only for the researchers' sake but also so that the students can conclude that they truly do or do not grasp the topic and that they need to be taught an apologetic curriculum on relativism. The researcher does not suspect that the students will score well on the first attempt at the questionnaire.

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

#### **Data Gathering**

There will be three methods to gather data. The first method used will be questionnaires. The goal is to qualitatively measure the student's responses to questions about relativism before going through the curriculum and after they have gone through it.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> For the questionnaire, see Appendix A.

Secondly, the research will include a participant's journal. These journals will be purchased at the expense of the researcher. The journals will be distributed by the researcher on week four. This is the first week the students will be taught the planned curriculum on relativism. The students will write down additional thoughts and questions in their journals. In week six of the curriculum, the students will be asked to hand these journals in after their last class. The students will have been informed about this when they first receive their journals at the beginning of the curriculum. The researcher will gather as much material out of the journals as possible and, the following week, hand the journals back to the participating students to keep. Suppose anything inappropriate or dangerous is found within the journals. In that case, the head youth pastor, Mat Dawson, will be informed immediately, and the journal and any notes from it will be handed over to the church immediately. Depending on the circumstances, the researcher becomes a mandated reporter, and the appropriate authorities will be called if required. The students are free to decide if they do not want to turn over their journals for that week, but they will be encouraged as it will help the researcher's information gathering.

The final week will end with a research focus group. This will occur after their regular small groups at 8:00 pm on the seventh week of the project. The focus group will meet for thirty minutes. The students are free not to join, but it will be encouraged. The goal of this focus group is for the researcher to receive any last thoughts or comments the students may still have. Additionally, the researcher will use this focus group to ask additional questions that were not on the questionnaire.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> For the focus group questionnaire, see Appendix C.

### Focus Group Questions

The focus group questionnaire will consist of twenty-one open-ended questions. The goal is to help the researcher understand the student's thoughts about the curriculum they just completed.

The first group of questions aims to help the researcher understand if the students thought the topic was relevant and helpful in their everyday lives. Did the information discussed change how they looked and understood their friends' and families' worldviews? Have they had any conversations with their peers about relativism? Does this make the students understand the gospel or read the Bible differently? Did going through this curriculum give them any more confidence when having conversations? Were there any avenues within the topic that they wished were taught? The researcher desires to know if going through this curriculum was worth them missing their typical weeks of service. It also seeks to understand what topics they would like to learn more about and if they thought more apologetic curriculums would benefit them.

The second group of questions seeks the students' practical needs. Were the slides helpful? Were the length of the sessions too short or too long? Did the students wish they had more time with the topic, or were they ready to move on to another? Did the researcher provide enough supplies for the students to achieve the most they could out of the curriculum? These practical needs are essential to the overall success of the curriculum.

### Weekly Content

In weeks four to six, the students will participate in the apologetic curriculum on relativism. Each session will be ninety minutes in length. The first forty-five minutes will be on the relativism curriculum. The last forty-five minutes will be used for questions and open dialogue on the lesson's information content they were just taught.

Week	Lesson Plan
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biblical call for apologetics</li> <li>- Gen Z statistics on relativism</li> <li>- What is truth</li> <li>- The biblical account of truth</li> <li>- Common theories of truth students will encounter</li> <li>- Q &amp; A / open dialogue</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open: Any questions pertaining to the previous week</li> <li>- Quick review</li> <li>- What is relativism</li> <li>- Objections to relativism and its forms</li> <li>- Q &amp; A / open dialogue</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open: Any questions pertaining to the previous week</li> <li>- A biblical understanding of tolerance</li> <li>- Cultural understanding of tolerance</li> <li>- Moral argument: The goal is to use this argument to ground the nature of objective morality</li> <li>- Q &amp; A / open dialogue</li> </ul>

Table 3.3: Lesson Schedule

### Unpacking Lesson Plans

Each lesson plan will be presented using PowerPoint. Each week the students will receive a copy of all the slides to keep in the binder they receive at the beginning of week 4. The last page of the slides will contain any additional notes the researcher prepared. The researcher will also provide extra loose-leaf paper in the classroom if the students need more space to take notes. These binders are for them to keep at the end of week seven. The researcher hopes that the student participants will reflect on the curriculum for future use.

Session One will have two primary purposes. The first purpose will be to help the students understand their generation better. Their generation's peers surround the students daily, so this is where most of their mission field work will be. In order to best reach others in their mission field, it is important to understand who they are to best reach them for Christ. The first part of this lesson plan will help them better grasp the worldview of many of those they are

surrounded by. The second purpose of this session will help the student understand truth. The lesson plan will do this in a few ways. First, it will look at the four most commonly held views of truth seen in society. It will examine what each view understands truth to be, and then it will look at objections for each of these views of truth. The researcher will then teach how the objections work for three commonly held views of truth. The first view of truth is called the correspondence theory of truth.<sup>220</sup> The researcher will examine the objections to this view and then respond to these objections. This will show that the correspondence theory of truth is the one the students should hold. The second section of this purpose will then examine both the Old Testament and New Testament understanding of truth. The researcher will show that both Testaments support the correspondence theory of truth.

This session was designed to be an introduction to the three-week curriculum. Not only was it designed to discuss the importance of these students understanding who their peers are, but it was also used to prove to the students that, given the recent statistics of their generation, their need to understand the topic of relativism was crucial. The students must be shown that what the research is teaching them is beneficial to their everyday lives, or else it seems to be just another adult preaching to them. If the researcher can successfully argue that they need to understand the topic of relativism, it seems fair to assume that the students may give more of their attention. This thought process and assumption proved true, given the session's response and questions.

The next section of this session was very deliberate. The idea was that if the students were to believe the truth about relativism that they were being taught, they first needed to understand what truth is and the different theories found within the literature. The four

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<sup>220</sup> This theory, simply put, sees truth as what corresponds to the way reality is.



commonly held theories of truth discussed were correspondence, coherence, consensus, and the pragmatic theory of truth. These four were taught due to the research done on Gen Z. The researcher considered these four the most common and influential theories of truth held by this generation. The goal was to establish knowledge of these commonly held beliefs of truth in order to discuss defeaters to three of the theories. What was found helpful for the students was not just being told which theory to believe but reasons to reject specific theories.

Lastly, the researcher landed on teaching the importance of biblical data pertaining to ideas of truth. This session was looking to philosophically ground the correspondence theory of truth in argumentation and show that it has ground in the biblical data. The researcher showed that the correspondence theory of truth is displayed throughout the Bible. This is not some new age theory taught in the West but has been understood since ancient times, and God's Word proclaims Christians understand as such. The notion of conformity was drawn out from Scripture to help the students best correspond the biblical data with the examples given within the lesson. This was intended to push the students to see Scripture as a legitimate source of truth since it at least understands how to interpret how truth should be understood, given the defeaters to other views within the philosophical investigation. It also was intended to give intellectual grounds for their desire to take the researcher and the research seriously in the following weeks.

Session Two will aim to examine the topic of relativism. This session has two major purposes. The first purpose is to help the students define and understand theories of relativistic worldviews. To accomplish this, the researcher will define common terms used in the literature. This will help the students and the researcher start on the same page with this discussion. The second purpose of this lesson plan will explain commonly held types of relativistic views and then seek to offer and teach defeaters to these views. The goal of this purpose is to not throw the

baby out with the bathwater<sup>221</sup> when discussing relativism, but to reject non-biblical views of this worldview. It will examine a biblical Christian understanding of the terms and how to see the Christian truth through these muddied waters.

Now that the students could understand that this research was intellectually assessing the data and the correspondence theory best philosophically and biblically understands that truth, this next session was to dive into the worldview of relativism. The session set out by first defining specific terms that will be discussed in this session.<sup>222</sup> The idea was for everyone to be on the same page when discussing important terms concerning relativism.

This session was designed for beginning at ground level. Before the students were taught how to define relativism, the goal was first to have them understand the overarching reach of this worldview. Not only did they need to see it as a view of how Christians know something, but they needed to see it as an interpretation and a lens through which people see all of reality. It is not just a little belief that can be defined away, but for those who hold to a non-biblical understanding of relativism, this understanding permeates all of reality. The goal was to establish the weight this worldview bears on people. This was intended for the students to think they were participating in important knowledge and not just something flippant. The researcher hoped this would light a fire in them, knowing the researcher trusts and believes that they, too, can play a part in something of this magnitude.

After this, the students were taught about two major non-biblical relativistic worldviews. The first was moral relativism, and the second was constructivism. They were taught about each

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<sup>221</sup> The researcher believes one can be a Christian subjective relativist depending on how one defines the terms. A Christian can believe that moral truths are located in God's mind relative to His divine commands and still be biblically accurate. The goal is to reject the relativistic worldviews that are not biblically accurate, not just to reject the idea of relativism. For more information, see the literature review of this paper.

<sup>222</sup> These terms were objective, subjective, relative, indexed, absolute, and transcendent. To see the definitions of terms, see Appendix H.

of these worldviews and then taught reasons why to reject both philosophically. Once again, the intent was to establish credibility with the students to handle the data intellectually.

Given the definitions, the researcher sought to have the students understand that they do not have to be afraid of the idea of something being relative. The goal was to teach the students not just what to believe but to see how the biblical worldview can be used as a lens to interpret information. Christians are looking for a biblical understanding of reality. The above worldviews of relativism were rejected, but even still, there is an aim through one's understanding. These aims are certain beliefs, such as morality that is true of reality for everyone, truth should transcend one's personal subjective opinions, a desire for non-arbitrary aims for oneself that are designed for good, and wanting to agree that things are true independent of humans.

This led to the last section of the session, where the students examined the biblical data concerning how to understand the terms from the beginning of the session to these discussed aims for their lives. The intent was to display the credibility of Scripture once again concerning these areas. The Bible can speak to relativism and confirm the ends of a philosophical endeavor.

Session Three will examine both the new and old philosophies of tolerance that are pervasive in the world today. This lesson aims to demonstrate the biblical understanding of tolerance as it relates to dealing with those in the world with a non-biblical relativistic worldview. It will examine the Bible to demonstrate that there is a biblical view of tolerance, and its best helps Christians understand the truth within a relativistic world.

The literature review helped the researcher realize what must be taught in the final session. What was of interest is that in the theoretical foundations, a few research projects showed that even though the students understood the idea of relativism, it was found that

relativism was held as a first-order ethical belief and was a consequence of their beliefs in and understanding of ethical tolerance.<sup>223</sup> The concern was that even if the students intellectually understood how to reject non-biblical views of relativism, would this affect how they dealt with others in their everyday lives? Given that roughly 44 percent of Gen Z state that it is not okay to challenge what someone else believes to be true,<sup>224</sup> what needed to be dealt with was the social and political pressures they may face so that they would be willing to face what they now intellectually know to be true. Understanding biblical tolerance in the face of how the world understands tolerance needs to be addressed.

The beginning of this lesson sought to teach the students how tolerance has changed in the past few decades.<sup>225</sup> D. A. Carson calls these the “old’ vs “new” understanding of tolerance.<sup>226</sup>

The old view recognizes that all have different beliefs, yet all can converse about them and not necessarily have to agree with each other. This understanding pointed towards conversations to persuade the other party that their view was incorrect. The new view of tolerance demands that everyone sees every person's view as equally valid. This new view of tolerance assumes relativism at its heart. The question that was asked was which view one ought to hold.

After understanding both views, the intent was to show how the "new" view of tolerance has some serious philosophical flaws. The goal was to fill the students with knowledge so that when they approached this in their lives, they did not have to back down and could reason

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<sup>223</sup> Ihara, “Moral Skepticism and Tolerance,” 193-8.

<sup>224</sup> Barna and Impact Studies, *Gen Z*, vol 2, 56.

<sup>225</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 6.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

philosophically and biblically with others on why they would not live as if the new understanding of tolerance should be held.

### Exit Interview Questions

If any students decide to drop out of the curriculum, the researcher will ask the students to participate in an exit interview. This interview aims to help the researcher understand why the student dropped out of the curriculum. This interview will help the researcher grasp how to improve the overall way the curriculum is taught for the future. Since the curriculum is designed for the students, this exit information will play a large part in the future designed curriculum.

The exit interview will consist of five questions. It will first seek to understand if the topic is interesting or relative to the student's personal life. The hope is that the curriculum will be useful in each student's everyday life. If it was not, the student will be asked to provide any ways that the curriculum could have been presented in order for the student to take an interest in it. It is also possible that the curriculum was not the reason the student dropped out of the research, so the aim is to ask the student if any outside factors caused him or her to step away. These factors need to be known and, if possible, accounted for in future research.

### Confidentiality

In order to eliminate biases and to keep the student's information confidential, each student will be given a number. Since the researcher has personal knowledge of these students, the goal is to refrain from allowing any favor given when grading their final questionnaires. In order to achieve this plan, the first time the students take the questionnaire, they will be given a two-digit number located on the top of the questionnaire. This will be their number for the remainder of the research.

At the start of the fourth week, the researcher will distribute a binder with a journal. These items will have numbers on the front. The students will then have to match their assigned numbers with the binder and journal. Any time they are to hand anything in, they will do so with this number attached.

The hope is that at the end of the seven weeks, the students who participated in the program will be able to better understand, recognize, and respond to relativistic worldviews seen in their everyday lives.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This chapter will facilitate the research results. The researcher hopes that providing an apologetic curriculum will stimulate the student's knowledge and drive them to continue desiring and using apologetics as a tool for learning. The researcher also hopes to find improved results in the student's understanding and knowledge of the topic of relativism posterior to taking the designed curriculum on relativism.

The researcher hoped for at least a 50 percent increase overall in the student's end questionnaires score. A 50 percent increase seems a reasonable goal for the kind of research program they attended. By no means does the researcher believe that each student will know as much as the researcher by the end of the program.

The researcher also expects reasonably that each student will not lose their binder and supplies and that every student shows up each week for the teaching portion of the research project. The researcher aims to convince Eastern Hills Church, given the outcome of the research, to continue programs like this project on other apologetic topics.

### **Understanding the Scoring Scale**

There are many difficulties in measuring the success of this curriculum. This section will detail the researcher's attempt to avoid and limit these difficulties. The first difficulty that the researcher wanted to avoid was that of luck. The researcher opted for a paragraph response for each questionnaire question to avoid this. Having the participants write out their answers to the

questions guaranteed the students did not get lucky as compared to a multiple-choice answer sheet.

The second difficulty is measuring the depth of knowledge the students gained during the curriculum. For those applying apologetics when speaking to those who have questions, one of the important things to keep in mind is the quality of the answer the questioner receives. The researcher has witnessed Christians attempting to use apologetics in their witness opportunities. Often, these attempts were surface-level and displayed a lack of depth in knowledge. After this curriculum, the student participants can give an apologetic depth and breadth when discussing relativism with others. Having the students answer in this format is aimed at this result.

The third difficulty was providing equal measurements in the quality of answers when the questionnaires were graded. In order to combat this difficulty, the researcher has given in-depth descriptions of the different levels of quality scoring. The researcher aimed to stick to this measuring scale as strictly as possible, using the best judgment possible. The researcher was confident that the quality scale was used well and that the final results were fairly reached.

The fourth difficulty was stopping the students from sharing answers or cheating on the end questionnaire. The researcher set up a few parameters for the final questionnaire to combat this difficulty. First, open notes were not allowed for the end questionnaire. The goal was that the students achieve a depth of knowledge of the topic, not just the ability to copy the researcher's notes. Second, the students during the end questionnaire were separated and dispersed around the room and separated at the tables. During this end questionnaire, the researcher was present to intercede if students tried to speak to each other during this portion. Lastly, when the students finished, they were told to sit in their place till the allotted time for the questionnaire was over.



This stopped unnecessary conversations about the questionnaire so that the students still taking it would not hear any thoughts or answers from other participants.

### The Participants

The participants were male and female students from the Eastern Hills Church high school ministry program, representing all high school grades. The researcher had a total of twenty student participants. The male participant's grade level makeup is as follows:

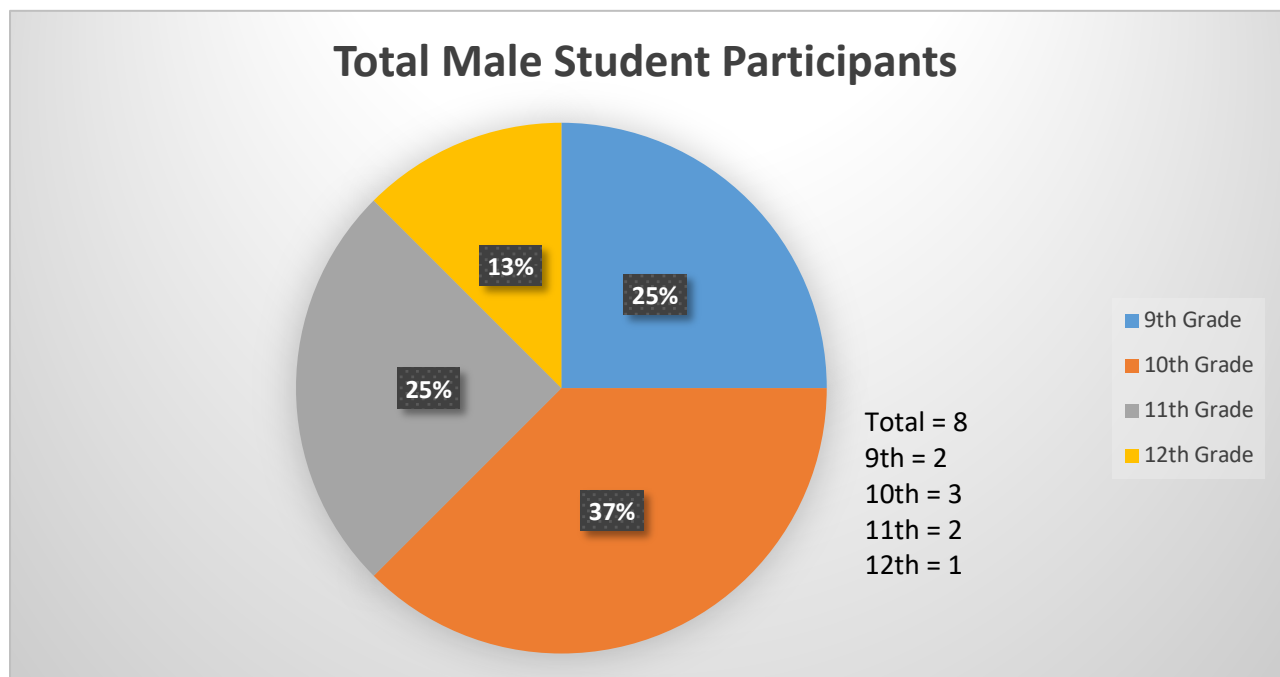


Figure 4.1: Total Male Student Participants

Eight total male student participants were from all four levels of the high school ministry.

The female participant's grade level makeup is as follows:

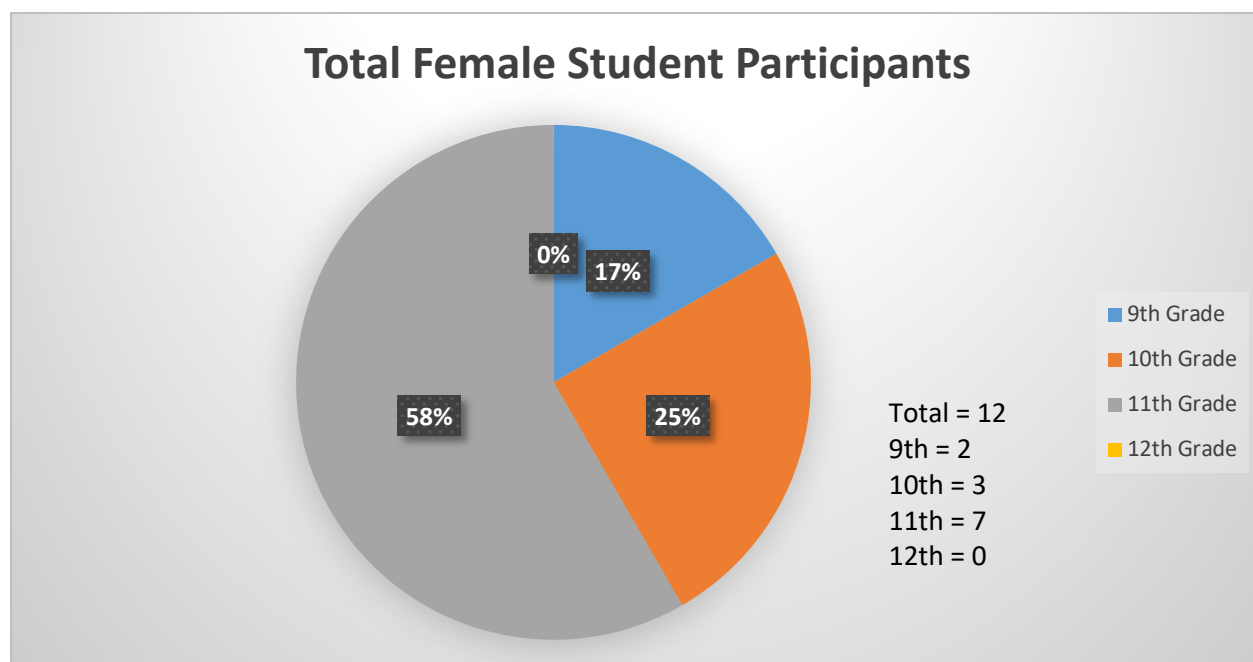


Figure 4.2: Total Female Student Participants

The researcher was not surprised that more females signed up, given that more females attended the weekly high school gathering at Eastern Hills Church. Given the kind of research and the depth of research, the researcher was pleased with the number of students that volunteered to participate. The original hope of twenty students participating to start the research was successfully met.

### Dropout Rate

The researcher was pleasantly surprised that no students dropped out during the research. The researcher did run into a situation with two students where the parents did not allow their children to participate, yet the students themselves wanted to participate. The two students were siblings, living in the same house with both parents. Upon receiving this information, the researcher first reached out to both students. The intent was to ask why their parents would not allow them to participate and if they would feel comfortable if the researcher reached out to their

parents on their behalf. The students both felt uncomfortable with the researcher trying to reach out to their parents on their behalf, yet they were fully willing to discuss why the parents came to this conclusion. The male sibling, who is in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, stated that his parents did not want their kids to be tested by anyone who would keep records with their names attached. He claimed they were very much like Christian "conspiracy theorists," who strongly distrust many things. The sister stated that she believed her parents were nervous about any public records getting a hold of their kid's information. The researcher informed them that none of these worries were true and that if they wanted to ask their parents again about participating, the researcher would be glad to have a conversation with their parents. The following week they came back, and the result was the same. It was unfortunate that the older generation's fears hindered the younger generation from diving into the knowledge they desired to know. The researcher was pleased with the end result of the total number of participants involved.

### Introductory Questionnaire Results

The measuring process included a pre-questionnaire prior to teaching the curriculum on relativism. After the curriculum, an identical questionnaire would be given to see if the students retained and learned any new apologetic information on relativism. The researcher was shocked at the lack of any knowledge of these students regarding the topic of relativism. The charts of both the male and female statistics are below.

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Total Points Scored Per Grade Level	18	34	20	12
Total Points Available Per Grade Level	80	120	80	40

% Score Overall	22.5%	28%	25%	30%
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Table 4.1: Male Total % of Points Scored Over Entire Introductory Questionnaire

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Total Points Scored Per Grade Level	29	35	74	0
Total Points Available Per Grade Level	80	120	280	0
% Score Overall	36%	29%	26%	N/A

Table 4.2: Female Total % of Points Scored Over Entire Introductory Questionnaire

The goal was to determine the total percentage score for each grade, given the total amount of points available per grade. Each student was given eight questions, with a max quality score of five per question. This gives each student a chance to receive a total amount of forty points per questionnaire. For example, since the ninth-grade boys had only two students participate, the total points that the ninth-grade boys could achieve was eighty. Their combined total score out of those eighty total points will return their questionnaire percent score overall.

The results among the male grade levels were relatively similar, with the twelfth-grade boy student receiving the highest percent overall score of 30 percent. This leads the researcher to conclude that all grade levels are either being taught and not retaining the information or that none are being taught this topic. The truth was found in the common answers given on the introductory questionnaire among all the male participants.

For example, question one asks the students to define relativism and to give some information about their understanding of the topic. There was a wide range of incorrect answers. Some answers stated, "I don't know," one answer stated, "How things appear to be," and another answer suggested, "what is relative in the world today." Only one male student from tenth grade came somewhat close to the idea when he said, "something about everyone having their own

truth." Another example of this lack of knowledge through all grades is seen in question four. Question four asks the students to define what truth is. One student answered, "Facts," while two other students answered, "whatever God says" and "God's word." Though the answers were not what the researcher was looking for, they show a simple "church-like" answer to these theological and philosophical questions.

The female student participant's introductory scores were close to being as low as the male participants. What is of interest is that the ninth-grade female participants overall scored the highest among the students. Nevertheless, the low percent overall scores show that the female participants, throughout all grade levels, had little to no knowledge base prior to the training. Many of their answers were similar to that of the male participants. Take question one again, which asks the students about their understanding of relativism. Over half of the female participants stated, "They don't know," while one wrote, "knowing the real truth." One student thought it was the "idea that trust in someone can change," while only two students suggested it is a "truth based on your personal beliefs." Even with the female student participants, there is a severe lack of understanding of relativism. These results for male and female student participants reveal the problem presented by the researchers' thesis. Not only have the students not been taught a curriculum on relativism, but the result of the introductory questionnaires shows that the participants have little to no understanding of a current topic and trend of their generation's worldview.

The following section will reveal the results of the relativism curriculum in which the students participated. The goal is to show that both male and female participants have the desire and capacity to understand the depth and breadth of such curriculum, as well as the desire and capacity to retain the information content of the relativism curriculum.

### End Questionnaire Results

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Total Points Scored Per Grade Level	49	75	59	25
Total Points Available Per Grade Level	80	120	80	40
% Score Overall	61%	62.5%	74%	62.5%

Table 4.3: Male Total % of Points Scored Over Entire End Questionnaire

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
% Increase	171%	123%	196%	108%

Table 4.4: Male Total % Increase of both Questionnaires

Table 4.1 shows the overall percentage score of the male student participants, while Table 4.4 show the overall percent increase between the two questionnaires. The results are extremely impressive. Each grade level increased no less than over 100% increase from their overall percentage scores from the introductory questionnaire. What is of particular note is the eleventh-grade boys. Not only did they have the second-lowest introductory overall percentage, but they also achieved the highest overall score and the highest percent increase over the entire curriculum. What should be noted, though, is the overall percentage score at the end. Though the male participants increased tremendously, given the typical passing rate of 65 percent in your average high school, only one grade level technically passed. This could have been different if a different kind of quality scale was given and, what the researcher suspects, more time teaching the subject. Suppose these male student participants were taught this topic in a continuous curriculum. In that case, the researcher suspects that this overall percentage score and overall percentage increase would only continue to be higher. The information content of the topic of

relativism is so deep and wide that a handful of teaching sessions cannot come close to covering everything. This should not diminish the results for both the researcher and the students. The fact that male participants not only grew in knowledge but also retained the information shows that teaching this kind of curriculum at this level to this generation shows promising results.

The quality of the male participant's answers deserves to be mentioned. For example, both questions, one and two, have been answered with satisfaction. Question one asked the students to define relativism. As stated in the sections above, the answers to this question on the introductory questionnaire deserved little quality points. After the curriculum, the student's answers were coherent and on topic. A few examples show this to be true. One of the students answering the first question after the curriculum wrote, "The theory that defines truth as relative to a specific context." Another student stated that relativism is "The belief that truth is relative to a context. To each individual and their opinions, or the context of culture." This is vastly better than claiming they did not know or had something to do with family relations. Question four asked the students to define what truth is. Once again, the answers after the curriculum were night and day from that of the introductory questionnaire. One student answered, "The complete and perfect match between what I say and think, and the way life actually is in reality." Another student answered, "Truth is what we understand and how it relates to reality. How we best correspond both." One other example demonstrates the success of the curriculum. Question five, asks the students to state the difference between subjectivity and objectivity. One student, who on the first questionnaire wrote, "I don't know," on the second questionnaire, responded, "Subjectivity is mind-dependence, it does rely on your own thoughts and opinions. Objectivity is mind-independent and doesn't rely on your personal thoughts/opinions." The percentage increase demonstrates the quality of the exit questionnaire.

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Total Points Scored Per Grade Level	45	70	134	0
Total Points Available Per Grade Level	80	120	280	0
% Score Overall	56%	58%	48%	N/A

Table 4.5: Female Total % of Points Scored Over Entire End Questionnaire

Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
% Increase	56%	100%	85%	N/A

Table 4.6: Female Total % Increase of both Questionnaires

Table 4.2 shows the overall percentage score of the female student participants, while Table 4.6 shows the overall percent increase between the two questionnaires. Like the male participants, the female participants also increased their percentage scores. The ninth-grade females showed the lowest percentage increase overall, yet they still roughly doubled their original percentage score of the introductory questionnaire. The tenth-grade female participants increased the most, with a 100 percent increase, doubling their original score. Once again, like the male participants, the overall passing percentages were not great, but there was an impressive improvement. The researcher believes this could continue to increase if more time was allotted for this topic in the future.

The quality of responses, though not as improved as the male students overall, show that the female participants also learned and retained the information of the curriculum. Questions one and four will be used as the primary examples. For question one, one of the female students in the introductory questionnaire answered, "I don't know," on the end questionnaire answered that relativism is "The belief that truth can be derived from self-truth and a subjective



viewpoint." This answer shows an increase in understanding not only what relativism is but also an understanding of another question on the questionnaire; question five. Some other answers given for question one were, "The belief that all things are all relative to a certain context such as culture, religion, or other things," as well as, "relativism is the thought/ theory that truth can be based on something subjective – culture, emotions, etc."

Question four also shows the quality of improvement within the female student participants. One student answered that truth is "a property of a sentence, and how we are to understand is that which best corresponds to the way reality is." Another student answered that truth is "that which is in accordance with reality." The researcher's example of two puzzle pieces,<sup>227</sup> was used to show that they understood the researcher's question. The researcher was encouraged, knowing that the students in the future will be able to bring examples to their minds when discussing and speaking to these types of questions and beliefs.

Two examples help display this curriculum's effects on the students' worldview. One female student asked the researcher about lying during the question-and-answer portion after the first teaching session. She always knew she should tell the truth, but given the example of two puzzle pieces, she now could see why lying would be wrong. She remarked that lying makes people believe that the two puzzle pieces go together when they really do not. This would hurt how they see and understand the picture on the puzzle box. The researcher remarked that God is the one who made the image on the puzzle box, and Christians ought to desire that everyone be successful in creating the box's image. She never truly understood why a lie could cause such damage until she used the puzzle piece analogy.

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<sup>227</sup> This example helped the students picture in their minds the idea of correspondence. This idea portrayed that what one says and believes should match and connect with the way reality is. The puzzle pieces should connect correctly to make the picture on the front of the box.

During the second session's question-and-answer, one female student acknowledged that she often responds to her parents with "because it's my truth." After the lesson on relativism, she stated that all her parents needed to do was respond the same way. It clicked with her that if her parents were to say the same things back to her, then why would she think she was any more right than her parents? She mentioned that this phrase has become so common with her and her friends that she never even thought twice about it. She just used it to end the conversation because that is what she often saw it used for.

### **Questions Received**

The section will discuss the kinds of questions the researcher received during each curriculum session. Two examples will be given from each session. The questions will be paraphrased due to the length of the question, the researcher's paraphrased notes, or the need for the researcher to help the student find what they were trying to say. None of the information content was lost due to the researcher's paraphrased notetaking of the student's questions.

### **Session One**

Session One sought to teach the students about truth. It first examines the statistics of their generation. If the students were to affect their generation in the best way possible, it is helpful to understand whom they are attempting to impact. The students then learned different theories of truth and why they should reject certain versions of truth. They then learned what the Bible understood truth to be and which theory of truth they should then hold onto.

Question one was in relation to the future problem of the pragmatic theory of truth.<sup>228</sup> The nature of the question was that though in some way people may look back and realize people have gotten things wrong, what if people look back and still think people are right? Does this eliminate the objection? Answer: the pragmatic theory helps state what makes things morally right or wrong. What is in question are things that morality can relate to. Christians have to ask themselves, are they looking back at moral examples or just some wrong choice made that speaks nothing of morality? For example, a doctor may learn more about a condition in his field and realize he diagnosed someone wrong twenty years ago, but that does not mean that what he did was morally wrong. The objection states that one's desire for right and wrong morally can then change over time, so to say people truly know then what is right or wrong is something this theory cannot do. It is subjective to the culture's time frame.

The second example pertained to the Old Testament's usage of faithfulness with the truth. The student asked how faith in God relates to the puzzle piece example<sup>229</sup> of how truth needs to correspond to reality. Faith belongs to things one cannot see or truly touch. Answer: Faith is better understood as trust in something based on previous knowledge. One can trust in God because of all the things one knows about who He is and all He has done. Still, this gets the point of faithfulness concerning the truth that the researcher is describing here mixed up. The idea of faithfulness here that the Old Testament speaks of is that of reliability. People become reliable because they match up with the way the world is and have a good track record.

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<sup>228</sup> This theory aims to ground truth in that which is beneficial. It is not that it is true that something may be useful; it is that a thing's utility is that which makes something true. For more information, see the slides in Appendix I.

<sup>229</sup> This example helped the students picture in their minds the idea of correspondence. This idea portrayed that what one says and believes should match and connect with the way reality is. The puzzle pieces should connect correctly to create the picture on the front of the box.

## Session Two

Session Two sought to teach the students the history and views on relativism. It sought to reject unbiblical versions and then sought to teach the students what the Bible teaches regarding this topic.

The first example question relates to the theory of constructivism. The student was confused about why this view did not, in some cases, make sense. They thought that people construct knowledge to come to learn things. People add layers and layers until they conclude that something is true. Is this not correct? Answer: The student is correct in how people come to know many things but not correct in the understanding of constructivism. The researcher brought back up the slide to go over the theory. The student's understanding of learning agrees with the researchers in that people need to look at the way things are and grow in knowledge, which is different from this view. This view states that facts come into existence when humans decide and construct the facts. The student's questions show they believed facts already exist to discover; constructivism does not think this is the case. An example of dinosaur bones was used. Do humans discover the fact that dinosaurs existed before humans, or when scientists find the bones, the fact that dinosaurs existed prior was not true or existed until one said it was true and existed? Every student agreed that dinosaurs' existence before humans was a fact; it would still have been true if humans did not exist. Many students laughed at this. One student remarked that there could not be people who believe this.

The second question pertained to the term arbitrary. The students wanted to know what arbitrary meant. Answer: Something that is random. One could also say, in some sense, designed. People are looking for moral things that are not just random but aimed at the greatest good.

### Session Three

Session Three set out to teach the students the idea and definitions of tolerance. Given the research, the concept has a major effect on how their generation acts within the mission field for Christ. It sought to teach how the term tolerance has changed over the years and which definition is biblical. It also sought to show the students how Christ responded to others with different views than He and showed how certain definitions could not fit the biblical text. The definition the students land on plays an integral part in understanding relativism and its theories.

The first question pertained to the slide on equal validity. The student wanted to know why Christians should treat others with equal value. Answer: Christians value people equally because all people are made in God's image, but equal validity means that all beliefs and worldviews are equally true and valid. Christians cannot, therefore, tell someone they are wrong and you are right, which this view ends up doing. Christians cannot live in a world where they believe every belief or worldview someone has is true. This would bring all of the problems discussed in this section.

The second question pertained to the statistic of Gen Z becoming less willing to go into the mission field. The student asked the researcher's opinions on how this percentage can improve. Answer: The researcher gave two responses to this student's question. First, the church needs to do better with its youth. The researcher believes that the church does not see the youth generation as important as they are and that the church underestimates the youth's ability to learn, grow, and have an impact on the society around them. If the view of the church changed in this regard, then what and how it would teach its youth would dramatically change. This change would increase the youth's knowledge and improve the completeness of the youth's Christian worldview. Second, some of the blame has to be on the youth themselves. People live in a

complex world, but the truth of Christianity will see people through. The youth cannot be scared of what others may think of them, and they must be willing to have their friends and the world dislike them, for Christ's sake. This is often a hard thing to hear. The researcher suggested that the amount of time on social media may correlate to Christian youths' fear when sticking up for what they believe. The amount of "cancel culture" on social media can be seen in the students' generation. Every student acknowledged that they had heard of and understood the term "cancel culture." The researcher suggested that if the students find the church not stepping up for their generation's sake, this may mean they have to do it themselves, and in the long run, it will be worth every bit. If the Christian faith is true, they will find that reality matches it.

### **Focus Group Questions**

At the end of the curriculum, the student participants entered a focus group for the researcher to ask specific questions about the research project. This portion will highlight seven of these questions and the student's answers in response.<sup>230</sup>

Question four asked, has this curriculum made you change your thoughts pertaining to how you go about your typical day? A few answers were given to take note of. One student stated that this curriculum has made him look harder at what his friends and family were saying. By this, he meant that instead of just accepting everything he has been told, he started to ask himself why they would believe these things. Another student said that he started to think harder about why he was doing things he was doing and where his own wants made him do certain actions. The researcher asked if this made him want to look harder at where he placed his moral choices to ensure they were in whom God called him to be, and he answered in the affirmative.

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<sup>230</sup> To see all the questions pertaining to the focus group questionnaire, see Appendix C.

Question five asked, does this research increase your desire for more apologetic curriculums? One female student appreciated that the curriculum did not just tell her what to believe but gave reasons why she should believe certain views. She stated that in the church, it is "here is the answer" rather than offering why it is the answer. She said she would like the youth ministry to do more of that. One student stated that his friends are not believers, and he is often scared to talk with them because he is afraid that he will not have answers and look "stupid." He would like to learn how to answer questions that his friends may ask him so that he is prepared to give them a response.

Additionally, this same student stated that he often asks his parents this question, and they do not often know. He stated that his parents have often said, "because it's in the Bible." The researcher asked the student why he did not like that response. The student stated that he knew this response to be true, but his friends would not accept it because they do not believe in the Bible. Even at this young age, students understand that many answers do not seem suitable for their peers.

Question six states, what other curriculum topics would you want to see? Out of all the questions asked of the students during this focus group, this question received the most answers and discussion. The researcher wrote down the topics the students wanted to be taught: old earth vs. new earth, evolution, homosexuality, how to interpret the book of Genesis, how to understand the book of Revelation, God's existence, can one show the resurrection is true, and how the Bible came to be. The number of answers and willingness to answer the other questions showed the researcher two crucial insights. First, it appeared to the researcher that though the students believed in these things, they did not know the topics. This has the possibility of being

very dangerous as someone may offer up a defeater<sup>231</sup> to their belief, even if the defeater is incorrect, the student may be persuaded to loosen their belief. The fact that the students were ingrained with these beliefs, despite knowing, shows that they have been entrenched in them from a very young age. Second, this shows the researcher a lack of breadth and depth in teaching the youth in the church. The range of topics and the lack of knowledge of these topics, and their desire to know more are ingredients apologetic curriculums are looking for. The students seem hungry for more and looking for solid food instead of milk (Heb 5:12).

Question eleven asks, what did the students think of the topic before the curriculum? What do you think of the curriculum's topic afterward? Universally, the students had not heard of the term relativism prior to this curriculum. One female student stated that she knew of the idea of morality being in God, but any more information about that she could not offer. By a show of hands, every student heard the phrase "my truth" and thought that was a normal and acceptable response when conversing with people. "This is just what people say," remarked one student, and you just go with it. After this curriculum, they understood why the idea of "my truth" does not fully work. One male student suggested to the other students to ask their friends, "why is it true?" Another male student thought it funny to bring up an article his parents were discussing about a student suing the school for not putting a litter box in the bathroom since the student thought they were a cat. Though this caused a stir of laughter and disbelief, the researcher asked the students how they would respond. One male student said that their biology just is not a cat. Therefore, this boy's belief in being a cat is not true because it does not match the way things are. The researcher was impressed with the student's response to the situation.

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<sup>231</sup> A defeater is a belief that would undercut another belief.



Question eighteen asks if the slides were helpful in the presentation. The students thought the handout slides and the slides on the screen helped them follow along better. One female student said she mostly followed along on the screen since the font was hard for her to see. This was helpful for the researcher to learn that slides were useful for the main screen presentation, but for the handout notes, a regular bullet form section would have been of greater use. The researcher asked if the students had looked back on the slides during the week. Only a few students did so, and when asked why, two students said they were showing their parents what they were learning. The researcher asked if they would go back to their slides to look over them. One male student stated that he would if he needed reasons to offer his friends during a discussion on the topic. The other students all seemed to agree with his statement.

Question nineteen asks why none of the students dropped out of the project. Two answers were given to this question. One male student stated that he liked the curriculum topic and that he has seen these concepts lately in his friend groups, and he wanted to have some additional thoughts on what he sees happening. Many other students appeared to agree with this. Another male student stated that he signed up, so of course, he would finish. It was only a few weeks, and he would stick with his agreement. One female student also said she agreed with him.

Question eight asked if there were any suggestions or comments, they would like to make and give to the researcher. Only one student suggested that more topics in this manner would be nice. This type of question was not something the students felt comfortable answering. The researcher supposes this may be because the students would have been either intimidated or uncomfortable giving the adult researcher suggestions.

Given the results, the curriculum was successful because the students grew in understanding and knowledge of relativism. Not only did the students increase statistically in

this knowledge, but the results showed that using apologetics as a tool was beneficial and successful when teaching high school students. The results showed that these students could understand and retain information on the topic of relativism, which gives the researcher confidence that they can grow in knowledge on other difficult topics.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Given the current trend within Eastern Hills Church, the researcher believes the church has historically underestimated the high school student's ability to learn and comprehend topics such as relativism. The local church must assemble a youth army for Christ rather than entertain the children.<sup>232</sup>

The researcher speculates that this program will help the church understand that the students can handle and learn from apologetics programs. This should hopefully push and move the current state of the church to begin using apologetics as a tool. The researcher also hopes to find, given the details of this research, more apologetics curriculums being established church-wide. The researcher anticipates that for those students who volunteered for the research project, their confidence will increase in sharing their Christian faith. Apologetics gives faith the confidence to go and make more disciples in everyday life.

The next step is to continue as a volunteer in more teaching roles. If this curriculum is successful, the researcher hopes to create additional apologetics curriculums on different topics for the church. In the end, the researcher hopes to see the other local church bodies desire the same results for their high school students.

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<sup>232</sup> Tim McKnight, *Engaging Generation Z: Raising the Bar for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2021), 65.

### Interpreting the findings

Dr. McKnight asks, “what if parents and youth pastors decided to set a new standard, where the youth ministry was built on biblical teaching and everything else revolved around it?”<sup>233</sup> McKnight suggests “setting the bar”<sup>234</sup> much higher within youth ministries, where teaching doctrine and engaging the youth in why their beliefs are true are the most critical factors for the spiritual health of the youth in the church. The researcher's summary of findings is exhibited by the heart behind this quote. After the curriculum, the researcher has found that the students at Eastern Hills Church: a) desire to use apologetics to learn other topics of interest, b) exhibited the ability to learn topics such as relativism, c) agree with the researcher that relativism has indeed affected how they think since they see it within their everyday lives.

The students desired to use apologetics to learn other topics of interest. The focus group questions put this on full display. The question, which asked the students if there were other topics they would be interested to learn, was the question that received the most answers.<sup>235</sup> The students realized there were intellectual answers pertaining to other various topics and questions they continued to face from themselves and others. The answer of "because it's in the Bible" was not sufficient for them. The students seemed interested and hopeful that they could learn and have answers to these other topics. Going through the curriculum on relativism lit a fire underneath them for more.

One of the questions this research was seeking to discover was if the students of Eastern Hills Church could learn the topic of relativism and retain the information taught to them over this handful of weeks. The researcher found that the students had little to no knowledge of the

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<sup>233</sup> McKnight, *Engaging Generation Z*, 107.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>235</sup> See question six later in this thesis for more information.

topic going into the curriculum. The researcher was also encouraged by the percent rate of increase in both the male and female students. Granted, given the low introductory questionnaire performances for male and female students, it is easy to see how these final percentages could increase and end up high. However, the researcher still did not expect that large percentage increase.

This leads the researcher to the fourth finding. The students agree with the researcher that relativism has permeated not only their lives but the lives of their friends and families. As noted in chapter four, the answer of "it's my truth" that they often hear and use seemed normal. They never truly understood the assumptions or the logical conclusions this type of belief led to until after going through the curriculum. They did not truly understand how relativistic worldviews affect and play a role in their mission work for Christ within their generation. They can now see and comprehend how pervasive a relativistic worldview has become in their everyday lives. The students now have tools and resources in order to combat it.

The researcher's findings were positive and beneficial. The students not only learned much about relativism but also saw how apologetics was used to train them on this topic. The desire to learn more topics using apologetics points to the success of this research's curriculum on relativism.

### **Further Study**

After finishing the study, recommendations are offered for future research on the problem presented at the church. This recommendation seeks out the best methods for these students to learn and retain knowledge on relativism. The researcher believes that these future findings will affect other apologetic topics the students may soon be taught.

The first recommendation for future research is to offer a more extended, more robust teaching curriculum. The research demonstrated the student's ability to learn the topic within three weeks. Given a more extended curriculum, maybe an entire semester, the students would have more time to learn and understand more nuances on the topic. This would hopefully lead to a more impressive quality scoring on future questionnaires. The researcher is unaware of the amount of student interest in the topic, and a longer future research curriculum would help arrive at these questions.

Another area of future research would be to measure the length of the student's retention of a curriculum on relativism. This research demonstrated that the students could at least retain information regarding relativism over a handful of weeks. What is of interest is how far out this retention would reach. The hope in any curriculum is that the knowledge gained affects the students for the rest of their lives and that the information learned is not just captured to pass a test. The researcher suggests that to achieve this future research, the students go through another repeated curriculum on the topic of relativism, with the expectation that a few months down the road, they will have to take another questionnaire on the topic. This future questionnaire would help measure the percent increase or decrease in the quality of responses to the knowledge they gained on the topic. Future research could also test how many rounds of a relativist curriculum the students would have participated in to have knowledge that lasts. As with learning any information, the more one soaks oneself in the material, the more likely the knowledge stays accessible to the mind.

Another suggestion for future research is the participation of the parents or guardians of the students participating in the research. The researcher cannot help but assume that if the parents were aware of the current statistics of their children's generation, they would be more apt

to have their kids go through a relativist curriculum. This suggested future research stemmed from the two parents who would not allow their students to participate in the study. If the parents have specific fears about their children, their children's need to know about relativism may overshadow those fears. This could also help further research measure if the parents affect the total number of students who agree to be involved in the curriculum. Having the parents know the importance of the topic of relativism would help discover if their knowing correlates to more student participation.

In order to achieve this, future research could measure a set of students whose parents themselves have not gone through the curriculum with a set of students whose parents have gone through the curriculum. The increase and retention of knowledge of relativism may correlate with the parent's involvement in the curriculum. If the parents were involved, would the solution to the problem be more successful?

Other areas for future research would be the effects of dedicated small groups discussing the specific curriculum session that week on the knowledge increase of the student participants. After each session, the researcher found plenty of time for questions and dialogue. The question would be if the problem facing this church's youth group could be best resolved with additional small groups dedicated to discussing the weekly session. The researcher has been involved with high school youth group ministries in the local Buffalo area for over a decade and understands the importance of dedicated small group time. Would more time after each curriculum lesson, located in an environment the students are conformable with, affect their knowledge of relativism? This future project requires facilitating the training of each small group leader to best run these small groups or having the researcher run a specific small group and measure the effectiveness of the students in the researcher's small group versus the other small groups. The

researcher would then assume that the student participants would have more questions on the topic than they asked in the question-and-answer session after each curriculum session.

Lastly, future research could discover if separating the male and the female students during these sessions increases their knowledge on relativism. This future suggestion assumes that since the participants are high school students, oftentimes, the opposite gender causes distractions during the weekly services. This future research would help measure the curriculum's success given this separation. If this separation helped solve this problem and increased the student's knowledge of relativism, then the additional time it takes to teach them separately would be worth the effort.

Even though this research project successfully showed that an apologetic curriculum in relativism did increase the student's knowledge of the topic, it is not the end of the conversation. Raising the youth to be strong in the Lord takes time and effort, and these suggestions aim at achieving this to a higher degree.

### **Application of Study in Other Settings**

One question gleaned from the research results was how the success of this research applies to other local church settings. By this, the question asks, do the results have any implication for the local church? How broad are these implications? The researcher believes the findings of this research have significant implications within the local church settings. The two categories of implications are other local high school youth ministries and the implication to the local church as a whole.

Given the successful results of this research, the researcher finds implications within the other high school youth ministries within the Buffalo area. The high school students at Eastern Hills Church are surrounded by and often rub shoulders with the other high school youth at other



churches. These interactions occur in their schools, sports, and other non-church activities. It seems safe to assume that what the Eastern Hills Church students experience with relativistic worldviews, these other youth students may as well, given that they have these interactions in common. If this is the case, not training these other high school students by increasing their knowledge and understanding of relativism could considerably hurt them in the long run. A second consideration is the support system needed by the students of Eastern Hills Church students by their other Christian peers in everyday life scenarios. Christians belong to the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–27). The student participants also are a part of this body. Having fellow members of the body that one relates with and deals with daily helps encourage and support each other in their spiritual walks. This being the case, having a curriculum on relativism in every local church's high school ministry would bring solidarity as a body together in truth and faith when dealing with the world's relativism surrounding their generation.

The second implication applies to the church in general. This implication suggests a reexamination of other church ministries. Suppose the local church ministry has underestimated this generation's ability to learn and understand a topic such as relativism. In that case, this begs the question, has this underestimation been applied to more divisions of ministries within the church? This research does not try to address this question, but it does shed light that the local church has miscalculated how and what they teach their youth. This study should cause a pause and increase a willingness to investigate if this underestimation across their other church ministries has occurred. This research should increase their willingness to incorporate an apologetic curriculum about relativism for teaching their youth.

### **Assessing the Curriculum**

The curriculum that students participated in was created and taught by the researcher. It is important to take a step back and examine the curriculum after it has been taught. This section assesses the curriculum in hindsight. It will discuss the aspects that need to be improved and the successful aspects.

Though no curriculum is without its flaws, no curriculum is also without its good aspects. The researcher found three items that stood out as successful and that the researcher would keep while continuing to make improvements to the curriculum. The first aspect is the depth and breadth of the curriculum. The research has shown that the students at Eastern Hills Church could learn and comprehend the lessons well enough to increase their knowledge of relativism. The researcher assumed that the students would be able to understand the topic even though they were not being taught it prior. What the researcher did not know was what depth and breadth the students could handle. What was encouraging was not only the student's desire to ask questions to clarify the information taught but also their desire to learn more topics using apologetics. It was clear afterward that the students could handle this level of teaching, and it would not be in the student's best interest to adjust in the opposite direction.

The second aspect was the format of each lecture. By format, the researcher means the teaching structure and then using the remainder of time for open questions at the end of each session. This format allowed the students to ask for clarity and also allowed the researcher to understand better how the students interpreted the information taught to them. Some of the questions received from the students helped the researcher better elaborate on the examples used during the curriculum to make sure the information made sense to the students.

The third aspect is that of the curriculum outline. An organized structure that flows well is important to any curriculum. The created curriculum structure was successful and organized well to get the students to grow in their knowledge of relativism. It flowed from first understanding what truth is, to understanding the truth concerning relativism, to how this relativistic view of truth, which is prominent in their generation, affects how they think, live, and act on their heavenly calling. The flow of these topics was coherent and smooth. It was a structure that the researcher believes will continue to be successful.

There were still some aspects of the curriculum that the researcher would change in the future. The first aspect that would be adjusted would be incorporating the volunteer student leaders in the training. The goal would be to teach the adult leaders alongside the student participants. If any of the students had questions, they would be able to help tackle them or equipped to reach out to the researcher who created the curriculum to help resolve the students' questions.

The second aspect the researcher would change about the curriculum would be to work with the church to provide a greater range of tangible sources that the students could take and use if they were to continue their studies of relativism. The students were provided a list of sources from the researcher, but to have the sources present and accessible by the church would be something beneficial to both the students and the student leaders. The researcher knows the church lacks abundant finances for its high school youth ministry. However, in the future, more planning could be involved in figuring out how to make teaching sources on relativism, as well as other topics, accessible to the students.

## Reflections

This last section will be the researcher's reflections on the research project. It will contain a crucial area of suggested research, suggestions for the preparation for those in the future looking to continue the study, and the researcher's hope for Eastern Hills Church.

## Additional Studies

A student of knowledge is always aware of their need for continuous study. As time continues, more knowledge is brought to the table, and research fields continue to grow. The topic of relativism shows this to be true. Given the researcher's time spent researching and preparing the curriculum, this next section will discuss an area of research that the researcher plans to continue and suggest that Christians be aware of concerning the topic of relativism.

The research on relativism in relation to abstract objects is a field that Christians should concentrate on. Abstract objects,<sup>236</sup> play a crucial part in the conversation of relativistic morality in relation to needing God to ground objective morality. They also play a major role in the orthodox understanding of God's aseity.<sup>237</sup> This is far worse than people realize. Craig writes,

It gets arguably even worse. For as we saw in our discussion of philosophico-theological objections to Platonism, on Platonism, God's essential properties or nature, what Brian Leftow calls deity, serve to explain why God is God. Leftow's objection to a realist view of deity is all the more powerful if the absolute creationist resorts to the position that God's properties are uncreated. For then God's nature is causally independent of him, and he depends for his godhood on his exemplifying the relevant properties. This makes God dependent upon his independently existing nature for his existence as God.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See Craig, *God and Abstract Objects*, 7. Abstract objects, in short, are incorporeal, necessarily existing, and casually impotent platonic objects. These objects, such as propositions, are argued as beings that ground our objective morality. Therefore, any need for God in the Christian worldview can be plausibly rejected. For more information on this, see Dr. Eric Wielenberg's "Godless normative realism" view.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 3. Craig writes, "minimally speaking, God exists *a se* if and only if he exists independently of everything else."

<sup>238</sup> Craig, *God Over All*, 67.

Regarding relativism, God would stand in an exemplification relationship to these properties. Meaning, that God's good nature, which Christians look towards for their objective morality to give a relativist an answer, would then not come from the necessity of God's nature but from how God's nature stands with these abstract goods. If these objects exist, a non-theist does not have to throw the baby out with the bathwater but can use them and their ground.<sup>239</sup>

The researcher has seen this idea start to rear its head more in certain Christian and non-Christian circles in the local Buffalo area. This needs to be a further area of research and a future curriculum topic.

### Preparation Suggestions for Future Studies

The researcher was unaware of how long it would take to grease the wheels and get approval at the local church. This is not to say that the church put unnecessary roadblocks in the researcher's path, but the number of meetings, emails, phone calls, and time with the students was more than anticipated. With that said, there are a few suggestions for those planning to research at this level.

First, have the game plan set and ready to present. Those who work within the church often have their week's calendars fill up quickly. What is not beneficial is not being prepared and then having to wait a few weeks in order to have another face-to-face meeting to discuss your research plan. Go into these arranged meetings prepared so your research will stay on time and not be delayed.

Second, it was extremely helpful that the researcher was already friendly and known by the students. This prior relationship helped the student's desire and approval to participate in the

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<sup>239</sup> The researcher has done substantial research on this topic and would argue that these objects do not exist. The researcher also thought this topic, for the time being, may be too much for the students at Eastern Hills Church; seeing that the students have not even heard of relativism. The depth of this topic when preparing the curriculum was judged to be taught at another time if the church so desires.

research. To achieve this, the researcher suggests that those who want to do future research volunteer with their local church ministry. This may even stem from the researcher deciding to help continuously with the youth ministry. Another suggestion is to ask your local youth pastor to let you tell your "grace story" to the students before or as you announce your plan to do the research. This will bring a personal connection to help open the students' hearts and minds toward your research. The students want to know why they should participate, and if they see the researcher's heart is geared toward their best end, they are often more open.

The third suggestion for the preparation of future research would be to go into the research being open and ready for further use of your study. The researcher should not have the mindset that when the research is done, they are done with their material or the church. If the research is successful, the hope is that the church wants to use the material in other areas of their ministry. This may require more time and effort on the researcher's behalf, but in the end, the goal is that everyone in your local area is best prepared for their Christian walk. The research should be flexible enough to transfer into other church arenas. For example, the relativist curriculum given to the high school students at Eastern Hills Church would not be too difficult to adjust and prepare for their college ministry.

### Hope for the Church

Thankfulness is what comes to mind when thinking about this research project. Not only those who personally supported the researcher but thankfulness to Eastern Hills Church for allowing this project. Eastern Hills Church has excellent potential concerning its youth ministry, and one should not be surprised to see them be successful in the future.

First, the hope for the church is that they see the results of this project and notice their youth students' ability to handle and think hard about deep topics. They need more than a few

songs and surface-level stories about their faith. They are not only the upcoming foundation of the local church, but they are facing intense worldview assaults from the world at all levels. This is not the time to shrink back in fear but to put on the armor of God and go to battle. The youth is a part of this battle, and leaders ought not to shrink back from the kind of armor they are able and desire to wear.

Another hope for the church is to start seeing more warrants for using apologetics across their ministry. They should note that their youth ministry students can learn apologetic tools and desire to tackle apologetic topics soon. If their students can handle apologetics, the adults can also comprehend it. Apologetics has been used throughout church history and needs to be given its proper due.

Lastly, the hope is that Eastern Hills Church continues to be used as a platform for future research. They were welcoming and appreciative, and this heart position hopefully continues. Further research projects with the church can only help them understand their ministry and those who are a part of it. It will also continue to offer suggestions for their improvement so that their discipleship work can be used to even greater degrees for the glory of God.

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## APPENDIX A

## TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is relativism?
2. Give biblical reasons and specific verses as to why we should accept or reject relativism.
3. Give logical reasons as to why we should accept or reject relativism.
4. What is truth?
5. What is the difference between subjectivity and objectivity?
6. What are the main categories in this culture we find that relativism influences? In which ways does it influence people?
7. How does God's existence affect our moral decisions? How does this pertain to discussions on relativism?
8. According to your answer above, how does this affect the way you live and speak to others in your everyday life when relativism presents itself?

## APPENDIX B

## EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Was the topic not useful or interesting?
- 2) Could there have been anything different about the curriculum that would have made you want to stay?
- 3) Are there additional outside factors or pressures that made you want to leave? Could the curriculum have changed this in any way?
- 4) Was the topic not significant to you?
- 5) Are there any additional reasons that made you decide to drop out of the research?

## APPENDIX C

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What did you think of the research topic?
- 2) Would you volunteer to go through another curriculum like this?
- 3) Do you see any relevance of this topic to your everyday life?
- 4) Has this made you change your thoughts pertaining to how you go about your typical day?
- 5) Does this research increase your desire for more apologetic curriculums?
- 6) What other curriculum topics would you want to see?
- 7) Was it worth missing out on the typical service for three weeks?
- 8) Are there any other suggestions or comments you would like to make?
- 9) Have you had any discussions with friends or family regarding what you have learned?
- 10) Does going through this project increase your desire or willingness to share the gospel of Jesus more?
- 11) What did you think of the topic prior to the curriculum? What do you think of the curriculum's topic after?
- 12) Are there any areas regarding relativism that you wished were discussed?
- 13) Are there any areas regarding relativism you wished were discussed more? Less?
- 14) Was each lesson too long? Too short?
- 15) Do you feel you are able to sufficiently discuss this topic with others?
- 16) Did the schedule of the curriculum work well?
- 17) Are there any other supplies that you would have needed?
- 18) Were the slides for each presentation helpful?
- 19) Why did you not drop out of the research?
- 20) Did you find yourself during the week thinking on the topic?
- 21) Did you go back to your binders to look at the notes you took during each week?

## APPENDIX D

**PARENT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of the Project:** Teaching an Apologetic Curriculum on Apologetics

**Principal Investigator:** Ryan Willert, M.A. Theology, Liberty University School of Divinity

<b>Invitation to be part of a project Study</b>
---

\_\_\_\_\_ is invited to participate in a project study. Participants must be in grades 9-12. Participants must attend the high school youth ministry at Eastern Hills Church. Participants must also be willing to participate in each section of this research. Participants must profess belief in Jesus as their risen Lord and savior. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research project.

<b>What is the study about and why are we doing it?</b>
---

The purpose of the study is to teach an apologetics curriculum on relativism. Your child falls within the category of Gen Z. The project will show that relativism is a worldview that is heavily held within this generation. Gen Z may not even know that they are holding to this worldview. The goal of this project is to see what they know about relativism and train them in this worldview. The ultimate goal is to show that an apologetic curriculum on relativism will train those in this generation to combat this worldview in their everyday lives. This will allow the participants to understand truth for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

<b>What will participants be asked to do in this study?</b>
---

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I will ask them to do the following tasks:

1. The first task, be willing to participate over a 5-week period for this research
2. The second task, on the first week, arrive at the ministry location at 5:45 pm. From 5:50-6:30 pm, participants will take the test questionnaire. This will allow the researcher to measure the starting point each student is at with their understanding of relativism.
3. Third task, weeks 2-4, be willing to actively participate in the curriculum. This will be located in an upper classroom of the church. It will take place from 6:30-8 pm. This means each participant will be willing to use these three weeks of ministry and dedicate them to this research.
4. The fourth task, on the fifth week, show up at 5:45 pm at the ministry location. This is to retake the same questionnaire to measure the success of the curriculum. This period will end at 6:30 pm
5. The fifth task, be willing to participate in a 30-minute focus group at the end of the 5-week participation period. This will be held from 8-8:30 pm.



### **How could participants or others benefit from this study?**

**Direct Benefits:** The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are growing in knowledge to understand worldviews and being able to defend the Christian faith. The participants will be able to recognize when relativism has influenced beliefs in their everyday lives. This project will also allow the students to know and therefore take an inward reflection on their own lives.

Benefits to society include students who are more prepared to go share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the participants grow in understanding and wisdom as a result of this research, this should then impact their little daily decisions. These decisions have real effects on the world surrounding them.

### **What risks might participants experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your child would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Project records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The research will be confidential and will not disclose participant identities or how named or identifiable individuals responded. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of number codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. No recordings of focus groups or classroom conversations will be taken. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

### **How will participants be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, the researcher will provide snacks and refreshments for the participants. It is up to each student to be aware if they have any food allergies. Liberty University, Eastern Hills church and Ryan Willert will not be held legally liable if students voluntarily participate in any of these refreshments and or snacks.

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or their current or future relations with Liberty University or of any other cooperating institution(s). If you decide to allow your child to participate. They are free to withdraw at any time. If they do withdraw an exit interview will be requested. Your child is free to deny participating in the exit interview.

### What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or your child decides to withdraw, please inform the researcher that your child wishes to discontinue their participation. Your child's responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Ryan Willert. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Brian Sandifer, at [REDACTED].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.*

---

Printed Child's/Student's Name

---

Parent's Signature

Date

---

Minor's Signature

Date

## APPENDIX E

### Child Assent to Participate in a Project Study

***What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?***

The name of the study is Teaching an Apologetic Curriculum on Relativism, and the person doing the study is Ryan Willert.

***Why is Ryan Willert doing this study?***

Ryan Willert wants to know if high school students at Eastern Hill Church can grow in their Christian beliefs by being taught an apologetics curriculum on relativism.

***Why am I being asked to be in this study?***

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a part of the high school youth group at Eastern Hills Church and are voluntarily willing to participate.

***If I decide to be in the study, what will happen and how long will it take?***

If you decide to be in this study, you will be volunteering for a 5-week research project. Weeks 1 and 5 will require early arrival and completion of a participant questionnaire. This questionnaire will be for testing purposes. Weeks 2-4 will require you to give up your typical weekly ministry schedule to participate in the researcher's classroom teaching. This teaching will incorporate a presentation and then time for open conversations and questions.

***Do I have to be in this study?***

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can also change your mind later. It's up to you.

***What if I have a question?***

You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

---

Signature of Child/Witness

Date

Ryan Willert

[Redacted Signature]  
Brian Sandifer

[Redacted Signature]  
Liberty University Institutional Review Board  
1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515  
irb@liberty.edu

## APPENDIX F

## RECRUITMENT VERBAL SCRIPT

Hello,

As a graduate student in the School of Liberty University School of Divinity, I am conducting a research project as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my project is to test an apologetics curriculum on relativism and if you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be in grades 9-12 and attend Eastern Hill youth ministry. Participants, if willing, will be asked to go through a five-week research program. This program will include 2 weeks of answering questionnaires and focus groups and 3 weeks of in-class training. It should take approximately 5 weeks to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate? Great, could I get your email address so I can send you more information? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of your desire to participate. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me next week. After you have read the consent form, please complete and return the form back to me. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX G

## STUDENT/PARENT INFORMATION FORM

This form will be used in case Ryan Willert needs to contact either student or parent(s). This information will be kept private. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and will not be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student email: \_\_\_\_\_

Student phone number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Parents(s) email: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) phone number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H

## CURRICULUM SESSION SLIDES

# SESSION 1

## Purpose of Lesson

- 1) UNDERSTAND WHO GEN Z IS
- 2) UNDERSTAND WHAT TRUTH IS

## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

- Born between 1999 and 2015
- Between 69 and 70 million children and teens, the largest American generation yet
- This generation makes up roughly 25.9% of the US population and accounts for 40% of all consumers
- Most engaged with social media, with average reports of up to 16 or more hours a week spent, with 91% of them going to bed with their mobile devices.
- Religion as a form of identity is found in under fifty percent of the generation.
- Very tired generation and tiredness is their most common negative emotion.
- Roughly 41% feel some sort of pressure or anxiety

## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

### **Religious Beliefs**

- 37% of this generation think it is impossible to know for sure if God is real, compared to 32% of all adults
- Those who are most interested in going to church fall from roughly 60% of youth from ages zero to five to roughly 40% from ages fifteen to sixteen
- 41% of Gen Z think the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful full life, compared to 61% of elders
- 78% of Gen Z believe in God, yet roughly only 41% attend weekly religious services of any kind
- Roughly 16% of Generation Z desire to be more spiritually mature as an accomplishment by the age of thirty



## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

### **Beliefs About Church**

- Among young Americans who don't belong to the church, some interesting phrases are used to describe what they believe about the church: anti-homosexual (91%), judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), and old-fashioned (78%)
- More than half (57%) say that either church involvement is either "not too" or "not at all" important, with only 20% stating that it is "very important"
- Around 22% or about 1 in 5 in Gen Z attending church weekly, and 28% stating they have not attended church at all in the past year
- Among practicing Christians, the top two categories of reasons for attending are to learn about God (73%) and to grow and understand more of their faith (68%)

## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

### **Beliefs About The Bible**

- When asked about how they would define the Bible, Generation Z with 22% thought it was the word of God and can be taken literally, 34% believed it to be inspired and not necessarily taken literally, and 31% fell into the range of stating that it's not inspired and not God's word but contains good advice through stories
- Only 41% believe it contains everything a person needs for a meaningful life
- This could also help us understand why roughly 18% read their Bibles more than four times a week, and 28% only once a week

*"Perhaps the most defining mark of the members of Generation Z, in terms of their spiritual lives, is their spiritual illiteracy." White, Meet Generation Z: Understanding and reaching The New Post-Christian World, 131.*

## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

### **Beliefs About Truth**

- A large portion of these teens (34%), believing something to be true, makes that thing be true
- More than half of all Americans, teens (58%) and adults (62%), think many religions can lead to the same place
- The Barna Group states that 46%, or “nearly half of teens, on par with Millennials, state “I need factual evidence to support my belief.”
- It is no wonder how moral relativism is the majority opinion of this generation, with 44% stating that it is not okay to challenge what someone else believes to be true
- This is almost on par with that of Millennials (47%)

## **WHO IS GEN Z?**

### **What do we have?**

- Largest generation
- High consumption of goods
- A downward trend of being religious
- Tired
- Anxious
- Almost half do not believe we can even know if God can exist
- A decline in church attendance
- A decline in trust in the church
- Increasing trust in science
- Increase of work in Science related fields
- Increase in religious pluralism
- Relativistic (though millennials are still the worst)

### WHAT IS TRUTH?

Truth is a property of the proposition that stands behind words that are used. The desire is that the propositions one believes and holds to fits like a perfect puzzle piece to that of reality

**The coherence theory of truth** — that claims are true if they follow logically and coherently from a set of axioms.

**The consensus theory of truth** — that what is true is what everyone agrees to be true.

**The pragmatic theory of truth** — that what is true is what is useful to you, or beneficial for you.

**The correspondence theory of truth** — that whatever corresponds to reality is true.

### The coherence theory of truth

#### Problems

- 1) Specification Objection – Two propositions can be logically true yet contradict each other.
- 2) Transcendence Objection - Unable to account for the fact that some propositions are true which cohere with no set of beliefs
- 3) The Logic Objection - Any talk about coherence presupposes the truth of the laws of logic.

### The pragmatic theory of truth

#### Problems

- 1) Conflation Problem – Conflates truth with utility. Something can not match reality yet still be true given its utility
- 2) Justification problem – We all don't agree on what makes some use justified, so then how can we agree if something has this level of utility?
- 3) Future problem – Hindsight is 20/20, so what we thought was helpful may in fact be incorrect and therefore what we thought was true was not

### The Bible and Truth (OT)

#### Correspondence

- Old Testament the term truth appears 120 times, and the majority reflect the use of the Hebrew word *'emet*
- The root meaning connotes “support” and “stability” and is connected to both “truth”, and “faithfulness”.

#### Faithfulness

- First, the term *'emet* is referred to as an attribute of God. Nehemiah declares the Lord has acted faithfully, while everyone else has done wrong (Neh 9:33).
- Second, what is said of God can be applied to humans (Ps 145:18).
- Third, faithfulness or reliability can be extended to objects who don't have the capacity for decision-making (Jos 2:12; Jer 14:13; Prov 11:18)

#### Conformity

- The foundational issue is that *'emet* represents that which is conformed to reality in contrast to anything that would be erroneous or deceitful
- In Ps. 15:2, telling the truth is that which is contrasted to slandering and giving a false malicious report  
This is why the term *'emet* can be used in reference to God's ways be that which will acts (Ps25:5; 26:3; 43:3). This also stands in stark contrast to that which is a delusion (1 Kg 22:22-23; 2 Chron 18:21-22; Jer 20:7).

“The Hebrew Bible shows no indication that truth is interpreted by individual belief or mere social custom.” - Douglas Groothuis



### The Bible and Truth (NT)

#### Correspondence

- The concept of truth is also found in the New Testament writers. In the New Testament the words “grace and truth” are often combined. This is reminiscent of the Hebrew phrase “mercy and truth”.
- The term truth and its cognates occur frequently in the New Testament, in fact, 183 times.

#### Conformity

- Paul uses the noun *Aletheia* to distinguish truth from that which holds falsehood
- There is a difference between that which happened factually in reality versus a dream or vision (Acts 12:9), between empty pretense and correct motivation (Phil 1:18), and the chance of not being saved based on belief in specific truth claims the Bible is making about how reality works (1 Tim 2:4).

#### Douglas Groothuis

- Truth is revealed by God, objective truth exists and is knowable (Rom 3:3-4)
- Christian truth is absolute in nature (Jn 14:6)
- Truth is universal (Acts 4:12),
- Truth of God is eternally engaging and momentous, not trendy or superficial (Is 40:8)
- Truth is exclusive, specific, and antithetical (Mt 7:13),
- Truth is systematic and unified,
- Truth is an end, not a means to any other end. Ultimately, truth in the biblical sense is associated with the nature of the triune God (2 Tim 3:16), “as a perfection of His being.”

## OPEN CONVERSATION

# **SESSION 2**

## **Purpose of Lesson**

- 1) Understand Relativism
- 2) Reject Unbiblical relativism

## Terms

**Objective** – Mind-independent: Independent of thought, belief, opinions

**Subjective** – Mind-dependant: Dependant of thought, belief, opinions

**Relative** – Category of context-dependency. It is “the idea that beliefs are only true relative to a particular frame of reference or perspective.”

**Absolute** – Regardless of the circumstance

**Transcendent** – Surpassing some bound or limit

**Indexed** – Referenced to something

## Understand Relativism

### Brief History

- German Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), during the eighteenth-century enlightenment, sought human reason as the finder of truth. He believed that our minds interpret our senses, and the result was called knowledge. This Kantian belief structure took objective truth out of the question and brought truth claims into the realm of purely subjective and located it on the individual level. The world could not be known apart from the concepts and terms that we use to grasp it.
- Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), understood truth as something that must be chosen and must be acted out. He was called the “father of existentialism”, and his Philosophy “attributed to him stresses personal choice and identity as the basis for life.” If truth is something that each culture person must define for themselves, we wind up in purely subjective terms.
- Another contributor to relativistic thought is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). He followed in the footsteps of Kant and also argued for the inability of reality itself to be reflected by our language. Since everything then is on the individual level, we ought then not to impose our beliefs on others.
- Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914), believed truth is something cultures can decide and agree upon. This truth should be what is most pragmatic and best for most people within this culture.

### Understand Relativism

#### What is it?

- Relativism is both an epistemological theory that applies to knowledge of reality, a metaphysical theory denying real changelessness of reality, and an ethical theory denying true understanding of the objective and or transcendent moral principles.
- Totalistic relativism is “whether the cultural and psychological variables determine, predispose, or occasion certain metaphysical beliefs.” The distinct person in the end is reduced to events, relations, and influences around them.
- Limited relativism in a sense is similar but recognizes that there is meaningful human existence, even if it's not objective.

### Understand Relativism

#### Two Common Kinds

**Moral Relativism** – No objective morality. Morality is indexed to subjective frames (cultures, individuals, nature)

Cultural and Individual (2 forms)

**Cultural relativism** - The belief that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the culture.

**Individual relativism** - The belief that the individual person determines moral values.



### Understand Relativism

#### Two Common Kinds

**Constructivism** - Most influential is fact-constructivism, where necessarily it is true that facts obtain only because humans have constructed them in such a way that describes and reflects our interests and needs. Only till humans entered the scene did things truly obtain to be actual facts since it is humans that construct.

### Understand Relativism

#### Baby with the bathwater?

- Often, Christian are afraid of the term “Relativism”
- Relative morality is unable to locate actions in a moral space without a reference frame.
- The Christian worldview desires to index morality to God's nature instead of culture or the self.
- Some hold to what is called a divine command theory of ethics - this theory, if true, holds that we “can plausibly explain the nature of moral obligations or duties by identifying them, with God's commands.”
- This is certainly okay since God's nature is perfect and non-relativistic and God is unable to violate his nature.
- One can plausibly hold to a non-relativist nature of God, yet still think their moral obligations or duties are relative to something.

**Rejecting Un-Biblical Versions**

**Moral: Cultural and Individual**

**Cultural**

- 1) Those who hold to this position are unable embrace moral reformers consistently. By this he means since culture is the decisive factor of that which is moral, then by definition the moral reformer is the one who is mistaken, because he or she is condemning the moral code of a given society.
- 2) Those who hold this position can't critique other cultures as immoral.
- 3) Tolerance as a virtue can't be promoted by cultural relativists

**Rejecting Un-Biblical Versions**

**Moral: Cultural and Individual**

**Individual**

- 1) Relativists cannot consistently raise the problem of evil. Evil would be all different ideas to all different sorts of people. Those who pronounce evil as universal truth and concept, therefore, assume this individualistic view to be incorrect.
- 2) Cannot consistently claim to have improved their morals. Progress is often a word heard around these sorts of circles, but the idea of progress assumes some sort of standard they are moving towards, but the individual is indexed as what the standard should be.
- 3) Those who hold this view can't consistently accept praise or offer blame.

**Rejecting Un-Biblical Versions**  
**Constructivism**

- 1) This is self-refuting - If these claims are true then their description would be a way reality is! If this is the way reality is, then we have an objective truth about reality independent of us
- 2) Moral Problem - Can destroy present evidence to bring about a different truthy
- 3) Problem of causation - The world did not begin with us humans; many facts about it were obtained before we did. The problem of causation: If things antedate us, how then can their existence depend on us? How can we create our own past?
- 4) Problem of competence: Items such as atoms conceptually need to exist prior to us, they are fundamental to the world, how can they depend on us, we solely depend on them
- 5) Problem of competence: Items such as atoms conceptually need to exist prior to us, they are fundamental to the world, how can they depend on us, we solely depend on them
- 6) Problem of disagreement: it is hard to see how there could fail to be possible circumstances in which we might have chosen to construct a different fact incompatible with it.

**What are we looking for?**

- Beliefs that are true of reality for everyone
- Transcends our subjective opinions
- Perfectly good in nature
- Not arbitrary
- Good intent for us all
- True independent of us existing

## **OPEN CONVERSATION**

# **SESSION 3**

## **Purpose of Lesson**

- 1) Understanding Tolerance
- 2) Biblical Tolerance



## Understanding Tolerance

### Old vs. New Philosophies

#### Old:

The term “toleration”—from the Latin *tolerare*: to put up with, countenance or suffer—generally refers to the conditional acceptance of or non-interference with beliefs, actions, or practices that one considers to be wrong but still “tolerable,” such that they should not be prohibited or constrained

**Websters unabridged:** 1) To allow; permit; not interfere with 2) to recognize and respect without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing 3) To put up with; to bear

**Few assumptions:** 1) There is objective truth.

2) The various parties think that they know what the truth of the matter is.

3) They hold that the best chance of uncovering the truth of the matter, or the best chance of persuading most people with reason and not with coercion (This demands that their opponents must not be silenced or crushed).

## Understanding Tolerance

### Old vs. New Philosophies

#### New:

Encarta's - Acceptance of different views

1. This shift from accepting the existence of different views to accepting different views, From recognizing other people's right to have different beliefs or practices to accepting the differing views of other people, is starting in form, but massive in substance.
2. Believe that this other view is as true as yours.

**Equal Validity** - This term represents how many different ways of seeing the world are all equally valid  
- Truth is out there, but it is not exclusively known; everyone has their own truth

**Intolerance:** No longer a refusal to allow contrary opinions to say their piece in public.  
- Questioning or contradicting the idea that all opinions are equal in value and that all worldviews have equal worth and that all stances are equally valid.

**Strategic tolerance** - become intolerant or coercive others to believe your view of tolerance.

### Understanding Tolerance

#### Old vs. New Philosophies

##### New:

**Problem:** If one evaluates all values and beliefs as positions worth respect, one may reasonably ask if this includes Nazism, Stalinism, child sacrifice, KKK, and rape.

**Problem:** If truth is relative, this is self-refuting. That is your truth and not mine, why are you forcing it on me?

**Problem:** This is mere external conformity, not true regeneration

**Problem:** When fear and blackmail are used to coerce people to define tolerance in the 'new' way.

\*\*\*Tolerance must be worked out within a framework of a larger system of thought\*\*\*\*

?? Which larger system??? This is where discussion and argumentation must be laid out

**Problem:** Causes less work in the missions field for Christ.

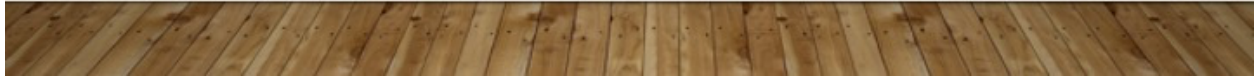
- Gen Z: 44% stated that it is not okay to challenge what someone else believes to be true.

### Understanding Tolerance

#### Bible and Tolerance

- 1) Not all beliefs are equally valid – 1 Jn 4:1 (Test out what others are saying because not everything is true)
- 2) Strategic Intolerance – Eph 4:2,32 (Be kind and forgive. The goal is to win others not with blackmail, but knowledge and truth)
- 3) There is objective truth – Jn 14:6
- 4) Correct judgment is good – 2 Tim 4:1-2
- 5) Value the person not necessarily the belief - Gen 1:27
- 6) Called intellectually to respond to false beliefs – 2 Cor 10:5-6
- 7) Missions work is deemed very important because beliefs can be wrong – Matt 28:19

## **OPEN CONVERSATION**





# APPENDIX I

## SPRINGER NATURE LICENSE

Feb 16, 2023

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Institution name	Liberty University
Expected presentation date	Mar 2023
Portions	Figure 4.1, on page 122, within chapter 4 on absolute creationism.
Requestor Location	Liberty University
	Attn: Liberty University

## APPENDIX J

## IRB APPROVAL LETTER



June 16, 2022

Ryan Willert  
Brian Sandifer

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-1156 Teaching High School Students an Apologetic Curriculum on Relativism

Dear Ryan Willert and Brian Sandifer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining

whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**