

Tree of Life School

*"Wisdom is a tree of life to those to those who embrace her."
Proverbs 3:18*

Worldview and Culture Course Outline

Course Outline

Introduction

This course is meant to be an introduction to the history of Western thought with a focus on the period of time from the Enlightenment to present day. Particular attention is given to the way worldviews manifest themselves within our society. The goal is to equip and challenge the student to both understand and engage the culture within the context of a Christian worldview. It will be immediately apparent that this course uses a variety of source materials: audio, fiction (both novels and short stories), and non-fiction to present the material. While a significant amount of material must be learned and remembered, care has been taken to have the student reflect and apply what is being learned. In the end mere knowledge will simply “puff up”, but a willingness to apply what has been learned will be of great importance to the spiritual development of the student.

This course has been divided into a **140 day schedule**. This will allow the student to follow a **four-day school week** and still complete the course in a normal academic year. The **fifth day** of each week can be used to **catch up on assignments**, do **extra reading**, or simply **take the day off** from the course. If, however, a five-day school week is more desirable, the student is encouraged to pursue this course and will be rewarded by early completion of the material. Care has been taken to provide specific instructions for each day’s work. Therefore, **all work is to be completed in the order presented in the daily schedule**.

Submitting Assignments: All tests, short assignments, and essays may be submitted by mail or e-mail. If you decide to e-mail something to evaluation@treeoflifeathome.com, each assignment should be a separate word processing document that includes your name, the course name, and assignment information. In addition, the document file name and e-mail subject line should follow the form **student name_course name_assignment number**. This is very important to avoid confusion and ensure that we are able to mark and return your assignments in a timely manner.

Your final mark in the course will be based on the following percentages:

- Essay on Worldviews in Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde and Frankenstein	10%
- Test on battle for Our Minds	5%
- Paragraph on Postmodernism	5%
- Assignment on Philippians 4: 8-9	5%
- Paragraph on Common Time Wasters	5%
- Study Guide for The Great Divorce	15%
- Mid-term Test	10%
- Study Guide on Saving Leonardo	35%
- Final Essay	10%

Daily Schedule

DAY 1 – What is a worldview, how do I get one, and once I have it, what do I do with it? These three questions will be considered and answered over the next 140 days you will work through this course. Perhaps you have gone to a beach sometime in your life. If not, it can safely be assumed that you have a concept of what that might be like. Well...imagine for a moment that you are standing on the beach looking out at the ocean. The waves are rolling in, some of them larger than others. Suddenly a huge wave crashes over you. You realise that you are suddenly very wet but you don't know why. That may sound funny to you but this is precisely what many of us experience everyday. Worldviews are like waves rolling in upon the beach of our lives. Some have seemingly no affect upon us at all....they are not really part of our experience. Others get us a bit wet and still others soak us to the bone. If we do not understand what these worldviews are, then when they do touch us, we will be like the guy who is wet but he doesn't realise why. We've been affected and changed and we could have done something to prevent it.

The Bible is full of talk about worldviews and how we are affected by them. Take a moment to read the following passages from your own Bible: I Peter 2: 11-12; Psalm 1; Matthew 12:30; Joshua 24:15; I Kings 18:21; Romans 12: 1-2; James 4:4; Colossians 2:8. What is going on these passages? Are we exempt from any of the directives we see here? If you are not sure, stay tuned because we will deal with these answers in one way or another throughout this course.

The Barna Group is a Christian research group that surveys and analyses data related mostly to how Christians in North America live their lives in comparison to those who do not profess belief. The following information is taken from a study released on September 11, 2006. It centred around the traditional faith experience of that segment of society that is commonly called Twentysomethings

The study shows that many teenagers embrace traditional aspects of faith but often drop that connection sometime during their college years. Whether it be church attendance, bible reading, prayer, volunteer work, donations, or use of Christian media Twentysomethings by and large check out when it comes to interest in spiritual things. It is uncertain whether this phenomena is unique to this age group at this point in history or if it has historical precedent.

While Twentysomethings reject what we might call traditional aspects of Christianity, 78% of them claim to be Christians. Most of those would describe themselves as deeply spiritual. However, they do not display much brand loyalty. The vast majority say that if they cannot find a church that will help them become more like Christ, they will go to some other source. They don't really think that connection to a church is meant to help them in their growth in faith. About 6% of those who claim to be Christians would claim to be evangelical. That is half the rate of those over age 40.

What does all this mean? One spokesperson for Barna said that we are doing a terrible job of ministering to teenagers. We focus our attention on getting teens in the door but do little to deepen their faith beyond simple belief. In short, discipleship is sadly lacking. He says that we need to have less stress on the cool factor of ministry to teens which is geared to bring in higher numbers but to work at issues like commitment, passion, and an intentional pursuit of holiness. The emphasis needs to be on a combination of head knowledge and ministry opportunities.

What does all this mean? This is what we are going to explore. First, let's look at a simple definition of worldview. *A worldview is a set of presuppositions* (assumptions that may be true,

partially true or entirely false) *which we hold* (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) *about the basic makeup of our world*. An example might look something like this...*If I presuppose that God does not exist and that I can create my own standard of what is right and wrong, then I can act anyway I want toward others*. Here we see that someone's worldview definitely affect how they think and act. If we have a number of people living in a single society that have a variety of worldviews, you can clearly see that they will think and act differently. Trouble is sure to follow. Can you see evidence of this in the society in which you live?

What sort of things do you think influence you in defining/forming your worldview? Lots of thing really....possible answers might include: *heredity, culture/nation, education, family, religion/revelation, work, friends, both print and electronic media, and entertainment*. But how does our worldview manifest itself? Basically it *determines our values...influences how we think...and guides how we live*. Pretty essential stuff really and like the giant wave on the beach, you can't avoid it...so it's REALLY IMPORTANT that you know about worldviews (your own and others) and learn how to interact with others if you are going to be faithful to Christ.

What follows is one man's (James Sire) idea of how we can determine what someone's worldview is. He proposes seven questions that will help you decide what a person thinks about things...important things. Following each question a few answers (there are many more) have been proposed to give you an idea of how someone might answer these questions. Don't worry if they look a bit intimidating at first. This stuff doesn't come all together in one day! ☺

Seven questions to ask in order to define a worldview

1. *What is the prime reality?* (What is really real? This could be God or gods, or the simply material universe, or other exotic answers.)
2. *What is the nature of the world around us?* (Is it created or just there? Is it orderly or chaotic? Is it matter or spirit? Can we somehow interact with the world or is it apart from us?)
3. *What is a human being?* (Are we created in the image of God or the gods? Are we highly complex machines? Are we sleeping gods? Are we naked apes?)
4. *What happens to a person at death?* (Do we simply become extinct? Are we changed to a higher state? Are we reincarnated? Do we simply depart this world to a shadowy existence on the other side?)
5. *Why is it possible to know anything at all?* (Have we developed a degree of consciousness or ability to think and be rational over a long period of evolution? Are we made in the image of an all knowing God? Can we possibly know anything for certain?)
6. *How do we know what is right and wrong?* (Is right and wrong a personal choice? Is it based on what most people think is right and wrong? Are we made in the image of God who is good? Can we know what is right and wrong because it feels good? Should we make decisions based on our need to survive and thereby be practical?)
7. *What is the meaning of human history?* (Does history unfold to realise the purposes of God or the gods? Does history unfold to create a paradise on earth? Does history prepare us for a life

with a loving and holy God? Is history a series of cause and effect? Is history random and chaotic? – Hey! It’s a big bad world out there.)

That’s enough for today. Perhaps your head is swimming right now. Put this away and tomorrow you will do a little exercise to see how you would answer these seven questions.

DAY 2 – Using the blank form titled My Worldview found on page 24 and the notes from yesterday’s reading, complete the chart with as much detail as possible (what you personally believe...but don’t flow outside the boxes. ☺ Set the completed chart aside until tomorrow.

DAY 3 & 4 – Complete the form titled My Personal Inventory found on page 25 to 27. You have two days to do this so take your time and consider your answers carefully and honestly. There is no advantage to saying what you think someone else wants you to write. TELL THE TRUTH! Once you are done this form, seal it and your 7 Questions chart completed yesterday in an envelop and put it in a safe place. DON’T LOSE IT! You will need it later in the course.

DAY 4 TO 8 – Read the novel, Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley.

DAY 9 TO 12 – Read the novel, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, by R.L. Stevenson.

DAY 13 – Jeff Baldwin in his excellent worldview book, The Deadliest Monster, shows clearly that there are really only two basic worldviews. One is a worldview that recognises that man was created and fell into sin. In his sin he is constantly at war with himself, pulled on one side to try to be good, but ultimately defeated by evil. We live our lives moving further and further from the God who has created us because of our sin. We have no hope and we will die in despair unless...unless this same God that we sinned against and have hated, redeems us. The other worldview is one where people are born good (there is no need for redemption) and, despite wanting to do what is right, everyone and everything is against us. We eventually do wrong because we have been wronged. We cannot be held responsible. It is the world’s fault...not our own. You have been used to thinking that there are lots of religions in the world with some closer to orthodox Christianity than others. In a sense that is true, but Jesus tells us that you are either for Him or against Him. The cultish man down the road whose beliefs are close to biblical faith is just as lost as the atheist who lives up the road. This is the message of the two novels that you have read over the past two weeks. It is also the message of The Deadliest Monster. If you get a chance to read the book sometime, it will be time well spent. But for now we need to move along. On DAY 14 you will begin your first assignment for this course. Consider the two novels. Which novel represents a Christian worldview and which the other side of the divide? This will be the crux of your assignment.

DAY 14 TO 20 – Assignment: Write a five-paragraph essay supporting Baldwin’s thesis from The Deadliest Monster, that there are really only two basic worldviews. Use examples from Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde to support your points. This essay should have both an introductory and concluding paragraph as well as three body paragraphs. You may cite material from the novels by putting page numbers after quotes or paraphrased examples. You do not need a bibliography. **Mail or e-mail this assignment to us for evaluation today.**

DAY 21 – Listen to Sproul’s lecture titled “The Classical/Biblical Worldview”. As you listen, complete the accompanying worksheet found on page 28 and check your answers with those found on 64.

