

Immunizing Students From Bad Ideas

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Many Christian parents worry about how best to pass faith onto their children. Tragically, statistics suggest they are right to worry. In 2020, the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University found that **just 2% of millennials**, a generation now well into adulthood, have a biblical worldview. That is the lowest of any generation since surveys on the topic began. According to a [Lifeway Research report](#), two-thirds of those who attend church as teenagers will drop out of church as adults.

A significant aspect of the battle for the hearts and minds of the next generation has to do with ideas. Helping students think correctly about life and the world, God and themselves, would be hard enough if they weren't also facing such strong cultural headwinds. Simply put, many young people today leave the faith because **they lack the necessary immunity from the bad ideas of our culture.** Christian parents must **not only present truth** to their kids; they must find **ways to immunize** them against lies.

[Dr. William McGuire](#), a Yale psychology professor in the 1950s, suggested that bad ideas behave like viruses. Specifically, he thought that the **more exposure** one has to bad ideas in a **controlled setting**, the less likely they are to fall for those ideas later. McGuire performed several experiments in which he tried to convince subjects of a lie, that brushing teeth is bad for them. Unsurprisingly, those given **no preparation** for what they were about to hear were more easily convinced of the lie than those warned against a specific bad argument they would hear.

However, the **subgroups that were the easiest and the hardest** to dupe were surprising. The group **most vulnerable** to falsehoods was **not the one with zero** preparation, but the **one who had merely had the truth reinforced.** In other words, the subjects most easily deceived were told things like, "You know brushing your teeth is good for you, right? You've been taught this since you were little. Trust us." When they subsequently heard arguments they never had before, this group **felt sheltered and even deceived.**

The **least vulnerable** group were those who had **not only been warned against a bad argument** they would hear, but they were also **taught how to respond**. They were **also warned** they could face additional bad arguments and needed to be aware and vigilant.

One thing we can learn from McGuire's experiment is that the method many Christian parents and churches use to pass on the faith—**reinforcement without taking counter ideas seriously**—is the one most vulnerable to failure. In fact, it can leave young people **more vulnerable to lies, especially in high-pressure environments**. It also means that we don't have to give kids all the answers, but they do need to be aware and **ready to think for themselves**. This requires we give them a framework, or a *pattern*, of responding to bad ideas thoughtfully and confidently.

This is what [Dr. Jeff Myers](#) and the team at Summit Ministries has been doing with students for decades. **Not only do they know how to immunize students against bad ideas** by taking them seriously and preparing them to defend their faith, but Summit also helps students apply the truth claims of Christianity to every **area of their life**.

The results of Summit training are both measurable and impressive. [An independent 2020 survey of Summit alumni](#) showed that, *before* attending a student conference, just 40% felt able to defend their faith against challenges. After attending, that number skyrocketed to 90%. Before Summit, 87% claimed a strong commitment to Christianity. Afterward, 96% did. And, almost 97% of Summit alumni indicate they are currently attending a church that holds to the truth of the Bible.

[Chuck Colson once called Summit Ministries “the gold standard”](#) for training young adults in Christian worldview. I agree. In fact, I've personally witnessed the transformation that God brings through a Summit ministries two-week student conference. Held at Covenant College in Georgia and at the Summit headquarters in Manitou Springs, Colorado, young people are given a Christian worldview about topics like abortion, doubt and deconstruction, evolution, gender identity, God's existence, sexuality, and more.

If you know a student who needs to attend a Summit conference this summer, visit summit.org/breakpoint, and use code BREAKPOINT24 to receive \$200 off.

The numbers speak for themselves. Passing on a Christian worldview to our kids requires much more than just telling them the truth. It requires us to help them love the truth and gain spiritual immunity against infectious bad ideas.

This *Breakpoint* was co-authored by Shane Morris. For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to breakpoint.org.