

How to Stay Christian in College Discussion Guide For Parents and Youth

How to use this guide

This guide is intended to be just that—a *guide*, rather than a substitute, for reading the chapters. It should guide you in two respects. First, it provides some of the key points from each chapter for you to review. As with any book, you will only retain so much information from your reading, and hopefully the key bullet points will help you remember some of the more significant points. Second, the best way to master the material is for both parents and youth to read a chapter, and then discuss it. The guide provides you with some discussion prompts. The prompts are meant to benefit your interaction on the chapters. If you find they do not, feel free to disregard them. However, in any case, I do challenge parents and youth to discuss the material from each chapter previous to the Sunday School meeting during which that chapter will be covered.

Chapter One: College as Another World

Key Points

- In many colleges, Christian students will find both what they believe and their way of living under attack.
- The sources of unbelief are different than we might have expected. Persons living lives of sin have reason to want it to be that case that God does not exist. They cling to intellectual reasons they think suggest that God does not exist in order to justify their bad behavior.
- There are other practical challenges that compound the problems Christian students face, such as loneliness and the tension between being thrown into an adult world before full maturity has taken place.
- Although college life can be challenging, when properly conceived, it can be a time when the youth further develops into the sort of person God has created him or her to be.
- Importantly, youth must remember that God has created us to practice spiritual growth within community. No Christian should be alone, especially in college, but should be a part of the community of believers—God's church. This community is a vital means of support, encouragement, and positive peer pressure for the college student.

Discussion Prompts

- Read Romans 1:18-20 and 2:15. What do these tell us about the sources of unbelief in God? Why is this truth important for us to keep in mind? How might it help the college student to understand his or her surroundings as well as serve as a caution to them?

- What is your vision for your time at college? How do you think about what you hope to accomplish? Paul says, “It is God’s will for your life that you should be sanctified.” How might your college experience be a time when you grow in Christian virtue?
- Reread and discuss Budziszewski’s four tips for coping in college culture that he gives on pages 27-28.

Chapter Two: What God Thinks of the World

Key Points

- This chapter gives a serious presentation of the basics of the Christian faith. Budziszewski reminds us that entering the Kingdom like a child means having a child’s trust, rather than a child’s level of understanding.
- God created the world *ex nihilo*, which literally means “out of nothing.” He did not create because he had need or lacked anything. God is perfect and lacks nothing. The love out of which God created the world is a pure gift-love, whereas our love is sometimes gift-love, but often need-love.
- God created humans in his image, which means that we are supposed to mirror his glory.
- God created us capable of turning away from him. The bad news is that we have done just this. Our moral rebellion is called *sin*. We are incapable of treating our own sin problem, and so we stand in judgment.
- Evil is not a thing. It is, rather, a privation of goodness.
- God has to pay the penalty of sin for us. It is the kind of debt that we are incapable of rendering good. God has both paid the debt and made possible our transformation into the life of faith in him.

Discussion Prompts

- Budziszewski says it is important that we emphasize both God’s holiness and his love. Why is it important for us to be mindful of both of these divine characteristics? What misconceptions of God might we foster if we fail properly to emphasize both God’s holiness and his love?
- What does it mean that humans are created in God’s image? Why is this doctrine important? What impact might it have on pressing social issues of our day?
- How is human creative activity (e.g., the creation of a work of art) different from God’s creative activity? Could a human create an entirely new primary color? Why or why not?
- Budziszewski says evil is not a thing at all, but is an absence of goodness. Do you agree with his assessment? Why might what we think about the nature of evil be important to our theology?

Chapter Three: What the World Thinks of Itself

Key Points

- Since Adam and Eve first sinned, people have come up with false gods and false ideas about reality in order to justify their rebellion against God. It is not difficult to know that God exists (Romans 1:18-21), but people make it difficult because of their moral rebellion.
- *Naturalism* is the view that the physical world is all that exists. Most college professors are naturalists. They believe that supernaturalism is a relic of past superstition and must be abandoned.
- The core disagreement between naturalists and supernaturalists is over whether the universe is intended or accidental.
- *Postmodernism* is the view that there is no universal truth about the universe. Each culture defines its own truth about religion, morality, and the rest of reality. The postmodernist denies not only universal truth, but also any meaning to our human existence.
- *Do-it-yourself spirituality* is the view that everyone makes up his or her own beliefs about reality, and that the best way to do this is by gathering attractive ideas from various sources.

Discussion Prompts

- Budziszewski says that many campus debates are partly about the search for truth and partly intellectual games. What does he mean by this?
- Read and discuss the quote from Richard Lewontin on page 53. What insight does this quote give into the alleged evidence versus the real evidence in support of naturalism? If the evidence poorly supports naturalism, why do you think naturalists refuse to consider God's divine activity as an explanation for the universe?
- What aspects of the world are best explained supernaturally? There are lots (and lots and lots) of examples. Think of a few to share.
- Postmodernists deny that life has any meaning. Where do you see this view reflected in our popular culture? Can you think of any TV shows that seem to celebrate the ultimate meaninglessness of our lives? Check out this clip:
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lOG3rD5CrQ&feature=related>Is this simply comedy, or does it make light of a serious matter (abortion) in a way that subtly suggests that ethics is without objective meaning?
- Sadly, even some Christians succumb to do-it-yourself spirituality. Review and discuss the characteristics of this movement. Be prepared to discuss.
- Oprah is a contemporary practitioner of do-it-yourself spirituality. Check out and discuss the info from the following links, one to a series Oprah did on spirituality and another to a Josh McDowell interview where he discusses her approach to spiritual matters:
 - <http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Your-Spiritual-Journey/1>

- <http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-josh-mcdowell-dave-sterrett-on-oprahs-spirituality-43477/>

Chapter Four: Talking with NonChristian Friends

Key Points

- This chapter is about the challenges of sharing your faith in college.
- There are three basic types of questions unbelieving students might have.
 - First, students may ask *plain questions*. These are basic questions about the Christian faith. Students asking these sorts of questions are not expressing objections to the faith, but genuine curiosity.
 - Second, students may present *objections* to Christianity. These express deeper qualms a person may have with the faith.
 - Third, people may ask questions that ought not to be treated simply as questions, but as ways of hiding from the truth. These are *smoke screens*.
- Budziszewski also discusses the challenge of living around those with decidedly different lifestyles. He says that, at some level, Christian students must accept that their relationships with nonChristians will be limited, because they share less in common.

Discussion Prompts

- In what sense has sharing one's faith become easier over time? In what sense has it become more difficult? Consult p. 62 of the book, but it might also be fruitful for parents and youth to share experiences and make generational observations.
- Consider the examples Budziszewski gives of the three types of questions (plain questions, objections, smoke screens) unbelievers may ask. What sort of preparation on the part of Christian students do these questions suggest? How is the preparation required to be able to answer each type of question a bit different?
- Budziszewski suggests that we should avoid Christian jargon (i.e., "churchy words") in answering questions for unbelievers. Give some examples of the kinds of Christian jargon Budziszewski might have in mind and try to come up with plain language definitions of them.
 - Here's an example to get you started. 'Sin' might be defined as moral rebellion.
- Read and discuss the section, "Who Influences Whom," on page 77.

Chapter Five: Myths About the Search for Knowledge

Key Points

- This chapter is about the search for knowledge about the world. It is about how we come to know things about the big questions in life.
- Budziszewski identifies three classes of myths that students will encounter on a college campus. These are *general*, *skeptical*, and *relativist* myths.
- Students must remember that it is not arrogant to assert that one has the truth. Arrogance has to do with our attitude towards those with whom we disagree.
- The search for knowledge is not about the search itself (as some would say). Rather, it is about arriving at the truth.
- Faith is not a hindrance to the search for truth. Rather, since all reasoning depends upon faith. Faith is essential to our finding the truth.
- The claim that there is no such thing as truth is incoherent. The claim that there is no truth asserts something the speaker claims is true about the world.
- It is no more difficult to find the truth about the big questions in life than it is the small ones. In fact, it may be easier to discover the truth about the big questions because God has given us help (see Romans 2:14-15).
- Some claim that truth is whatever is sincerely believed. The problem with this is that no one can, simply by believing, will the world to be a certain way.
- Some claim that truth is whatever individuals in a culture agree upon. The problem with this is that agreement, by itself, cannot make the world to be a certain way.
- Some claim that truth is whatever works for a person. The problem with this is that something may work well and still be terribly wrong.

Discussion Prompts

- Much of the chapter is about truth. What is truth from a Christian perspective? What are some false views about truth that Budziszewski discusses? Have you encountered any others? What Bible verses come to mind that might teach us something about the nature of truth?
- Budziszewski says that faith is essential to our search for knowledge. Why does he say this? How would you define faith?
- Read the quote from John Bunyan on page 98. What is the point of this passage? How does Budziszewski relate it to the rest of the chapter?
- Here is a three-part conversation between Brett Kunkle, from the apologetics group *Stand to Reason*, and a college student at UC Berkeley. Watch the videos and discuss how themes from the chapter come up in the exchange.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xln0-nZI7jc&feature=related>

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBSRb2YxoXc&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0A6XM8JKCA&feature=related>

Chapter Six: Myths About Love and Sex

Key Points

- In this chapter Budziszewski organizes myths about love and sex into three categories: *general myths*, *girl myths*, and *guy myths*. He spends the most time on the guy myths, since, sorry men, guys are more difficult to convince in this particular area. I have restated all the myths below, as well as summarized the problem for each myth (i.e., what it is that makes each myth a *myth*).
- Here are the general myths he highlights:
 - Love is a feeling, and sex is the only adult way to express it.
 - Problem: Love is not a feeling, but is a commitment to the good of another person. Also, The adult expression of the romantic sort of love between a man and a woman is marriage.
 - Sex is like everything else; in order to make wise choices about it you have to experience it.
 - Problem: We can make wise choices about lots of things in life without ever having experienced them (e.g., recreational drug use). In order to understand sex, one must abstain from it until marriage.
 - Without sex, you'll never know if you are compatible with someone; without living together, you'll never know whether a marriage will work.
 - Problem: Sex before marriage often wrecks relationships. And, couples who live together before marriage are statistically more likely to get divorced.
- Here are the girl myths he highlights:
 - Sex outside of marriage is romantic.
 - Problem: The only time it is romantic to be completely vulnerable with a man is when you are completely safe. You are only completely safe when you know the man is committed to your good. That case is marriage.
 - Sex outside of marriage holds relationships together.
 - Problem: Sex outside of marriage tends to make matters worse, not better.
 - Sex outside of marriage is a sign of commitment.
 - Problem: Marriage is the only way you are truly committed to the good of another.
- Here are the guy myths he highlights:
 - Sex is a physical need, and physical needs can't be wrong.
 - Problem: This confuses needs and wants. Sex is only a want.
 - Sex is for pleasure, and pleasure can't be wrong.

- Problem: There are all kinds of things that people do for pleasure that are wrong. Furthermore, if you seek pleasure simply for its own sake, you will never attain it. Pleasure can only be attained as a by-product of seeking the good of another. And, when it comes to sex, this case is marriage.
- Sex in marriage is boring because there isn't any variety.
 - Problem: The person who thinks this has in mind a superficial variety that sex that actually destroys one's capacity for intimacy. Real variety is experiencing the all the depths of a person's personality, which can only happen within a marriage commitment.

Discussion Prompts

- Carefully review pages 109-111. Why does Budziszewski say that God created two different sexes? What does he say is the significance of our longing for one another?
- Which myths to you think are the most pervasive and most capture the minds of young people? Would you add anything by way of response to these myths?

Chapter Seven: Myths About Politics

Key Points

- Politics deals with basic questions of right and wrong. God has a lot to say about issues of right and wrong. So, Budziszewski argues that it is important for students to think about their political views and to be aware of myths that they will encounter in college. In fact, in his experience, the students most likely to succumb to political myths are those who have given little or no thought to politics.
- Budziszewski divides political myths into three types: *general*, *liberal*, and *conservative*. He includes these myths on pages 114-120. Make sure you review these in preparation for our group discussion.
- We must always be mindful that, while we are citizens of a particular country, our deepest cause is to represent the King, who is the one true God. Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20 that "our citizenship is in heaven." So, while we may have good reasons for embracing many of the political positions we take, our allegiance is first and foremost to God and his commands.

Discussion Prompts

- Budziszewski says that politics deals with matters of right and wrong. Some Christians claim to be politically pro-abortion, but morally anti-abortion. Is this a coherent position to take? Is it consistent with a biblical view of the world? More generally, what ought to be the relationship between what is

- legal and what is moral? For example, suppose you think homosexuality is morally wrong. Should the law reflect your moral belief? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you have any political views that are in tension with God's law? If so, which ones? How might giving priority to God's rule and his law influence the way we think about politics?

Chapter Eight: Coping in Campus Social Life

Key Points

- Budziszewski contrasts two ways of thinking about our social life. On the Christian view, which he calls *the sacrificial view*, we ought live our lives in community with others as an opportunity to imitate God's love for us. On what we might call *the self-centered view*, our social relations merely exist to give us something we desire, such as money, sex, or power. On this view, our relationships are really, in the end, all about us.
- Budziszewski says friendship is an opportunity to shares God's love. He says it is "a personal relationship based on trust between two people who know each other well and do some kind of good for each other."
- However, there are various reasons why friendships sometimes end. Among these are that we may undergo lifestyle changes, we may come to value different things, we may discover that a certain friendship hinders our moral development, or we may discover something new and unexpected about a friend's character that alters the relationship.
- Choosing the right friends in the first place can minimize the risk of broken friendships. Sometimes a friendship must be allowed to end. However, we must always extend neighborly love to those persons.
- Budziszewski also discusses several questions about dating and marriage:
 - First, he asks, "Who can I date?" His answer is that you can date anyone it would be okay to marry, and you cannot date anyone it would not be okay to marry. Dating is about finding someone suitable for marriage. Nothing else.
 - Second, he asks, "Who can I marry?" His answer is that you have to marry a Christian; you have to marry a person who will make a good spouse; and you have to marry a person who will make a good parent.
 - Third, he asks, "What can I do?" His answer is that you can do anything on a date that's pure and pleasing to God, and that you must be realistic about temptations.
 - Finally, he asks, "How far can I go?" He answers that you cannot have sex; you cannot do anything resembling sex; and you cannot do anything that excites you for sex.
- Budziszewski also urges students to avoid joining any club or activity that corrupts you, weakens your faith, or leads to unnecessary temptations.

Discussion Prompts

- Explain in your own words the difference between the sacrificial and self-centered views of our social relationships.
- One day in college, a friend asked me (Ryan) what I liked about Erin (this was before Erin and I started dating). I told him that, among other things, I thought she would make an excellent mother someday. My friend thought this was a bizarre answer, and managed to stir up laughter in the room at my expense. In light of this chapter, was my friend: (a) a guy with a good sense of the comedic moment; or (b) a shortsighted guy who needed to learn a thing or two about choosing a spouse? (Note: This question is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but I do think there is a serious discussion somewhere in there 😊)
- Budziszewski says we must marry someone who will make a good spouse. What qualities would you look for in a future spouse? What passages from the Bible should guide us in thinking about these qualities?
- Budziszewski says that having children, provided that both spouses are physically able, is required. It is one of the central purposes of marriage. This strikes many modern ears as old-fashioned and backward. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Why or why not?
- If you are currently or have been in a dating relationship, have you set boundaries for time spent alone, so as to avoid temptation? Have you thought about your future plans for avoiding temptation with members of the opposite sex?