

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD

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SESSION 1

INVISIBLE WARFARE

The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Lives

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

**DISCUSSING CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 OF
*THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD***

You live in the crosshairs of a secret battle of ideas. The enemy's objective is to win this battle for your mind. Satan knows your life will reflect the ideas you adopt. In fact, it's likely this battle has already affected you, though you may not realize it.

Bad ideas are floating around us like infectious diseases. These ideas sicken us and, worse, make us contagious. We can spread idea viruses without even realizing that we ourselves have fallen victim to them.

We would never intentionally expose ourselves to a viral infection. Yet when it comes to destructive ideas, it's as if we refuse a flu shot and then invite crowds of people to gather round and sneeze on us.

We expose ourselves to idea viruses because these deeply flawed worldviews promise to deliver the things we desire, such as peace of mind or some form of spiritual power or protection against setbacks in life. Counterfeit worldviews mix a measure of truth in with the lies, making it difficult to identify the destruction that will inevitably follow.

At first a virus does its work without being noticed. It's only later, when we experience symptoms of infection, that we realize a virus has been active. This applies to our physical health as well as the ideas we adopt and live by.

The American system of government, for example, is known for upholding the principle of the rule of law. These foundational ideas, established in 1789, helped produce a strong, prosperous country known for stability and freedom. But not everyone embraces this way of thinking and living. In many parts of the world, the governing power changes as a result of a coup or revolution rather than through legally sanctioned elections. Much of the world's population lives under totalitarian systems, where only the ruler's decrees are binding.

Societies are organized around ideas, and ideas have consequences. Many of these ideas infect the minds of those who embrace them, such as the nineteen men from another part of the world who brutally attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, killing nearly three thousand people. After learning more about the ideas that inspire acts of radical Islamic terror, we can assume the 9/11 attackers were convinced they were doing the right thing. But in reality, they were following a deceptive worldview that justifies slaughter in the name of Allah.

Today, terror attacks continue with alarming regularity. A way of thinking that was previously unknown to most Americans now looms as one of the greatest threats to the safety and stability of the world.

REFLECT

What does the secret battle of ideas mean to you? I've said, "Life is about ideas. Ideas have consequences." What does this mean to you? Think about a time that an idea you were influenced by had a distinct consequence, good or bad.

IDEA VIRUSES ARE NOT A RECENT DEVELOPMENT

The secret battle of ideas about God is not new. In ancient times, God told his people not to intermarry with the people from surrounding pagan nations because he knew the Gentiles would infect the Hebrews with false beliefs and lead them away from the one true God (see Deut. 7:3–4). Little has changed today. All around us are people who advance ideas that have the effect of blinding us to the way of God.

Two thousand years ago, Paul made clear in Ephesians 6:12 that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,

against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” As we begin to identify the impact of the secret battle of ideas, we are faced with inescapable questions.

In chapter 1 of *The Secret Battle of Ideas about God* (pages 15–18), I tell the story of Rick Rescorla, a military veteran and the chief of security for Morgan Stanley at the World Trade Center. Rescorla lived according to a handful of unwavering beliefs that led him to sacrifice his life for the people he saved in the south tower during the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

These words of Jesus fittingly describe people like Rick Rescorla: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Rescorla’s commitment to saving lives, no matter the personal cost, stood in stark contrast to the idea that motivated the actions of the terrorists that day.

REFLECT

How can we accurately recognize what is going on in the war of ideas? How can we tell the difference between an idea virus that leads to destruction and the solution a Christ-centered worldview provides?

WHICH WORLDVIEW INFLUENCES YOU?

The Secret Battle of Ideas about God looks at the five most widespread and influential idea viruses (see fuller discussion on pages 29–31 of the book). These counterfeit worldviews are

- **Secularism**, which claims that we can use human intelligence to control life and make it turn out the way we want.
- **Marxism**, which declares that life is about capital, and the true path to peace and equality is through violent overthrow of all existing social structures (government, economic systems, family, and religion).
- **Postmodernism**, which insists that objective (capital-T) truth doesn't exist, only the subjective (lowercase-t) truths we create for ourselves.
- **New spirituality**, which asserts that a higher consciousness or god force is at the core of reality.
- **Islam**, which teaches that everyone is born Muslim (in submission to Allah) and must conform to Islamic truth or be conquered through *jihad* (the struggle against anything opposed to Allah and Islam).

Each of these worldviews tells us something about God, right and wrong, life, the soul, society and government, law, money, and history. They often adopt disguises to keep their motives and

strategies hidden. That's why they can powerfully influence people without their awareness.

We often hear that ideas are neutral, neither good nor bad but simply a different way of looking at something. This view treats ideas as if they're nothing more than topics for conversation. But in practice, ideas guide the way we live with thoughts and suggestions that purport to answer our deepest questions about life. The ideas we rely on to answer these questions reveal what we believe about God, and the answers we consider most valid shape our relationships with him.

A worldview is the collection of ideas that form our answers to these questions. Our worldviews monitor ideas we're exposed to and isolate any that appear to be destructive. But worldviews can also be porous, allowing destructive ideas to infiltrate our minds without our knowledge that it's happening.

REFLECT

Read Romans 12:2 and think about the steps Paul discussed for forming your worldview. How does this important teaching from Scripture apply to the secret battle of ideas?

We catch ideas from a variety of sources—church, the culture, family, and friends. To live whole, satisfying lives, we need to catch good ideas and reject bad ones. This isn't as easy as it sounds, however. Everywhere we turn, it seems, we encounter ideas from our culture that combine to sway us in one direction or another.

Idea viruses bombard us daily and can multiply out of control. We find them on billboards, in Facebook posts, on television, in songs and movies, on the Internet, in the classroom, in relationships, and more. With so many ideas vying for our attention and loyalty, which ones do we trust?

The key to victory in this battle of ideas is developing a worldview that accurately identifies and isolates the bad ideas from the good ones. The thoughts we habitually chisel into the granite of daily life reinforce our worldviews and eventually become who we are. A healthy worldview based on Christ-centered ideas gives us something to live by and live for.

REFLECT

As discussed in the book, everyone is asking big questions about life. The battle of ideas rages around these questions. Identify the core life issue that is most pressing for you at the moment. Does your worldview give a satisfying answer to this question?

Rick Rescorla spent a lifetime cultivating the heroic ideas of standing strong and never leaving anyone behind. These ideas were so central to his worldview that he didn't hesitate when faced with sacrificing his life to save thousands on 9/11. Rescorla acted immediately to save as many people as he could because his worldview lay at the heart of who he was. In the end, he led nearly twenty-seven hundred employees to safety before he died.

GOOD IDEAS WILL WIN

Knowing how viruses work can prepare us to counter the attacks of bad ideas. We can't avoid asking the core questions about life that come with being human, and we'll always be driven to seek answers. But we need a reliable guide.

We can learn to trust what God has revealed about himself, the world, and humanity. Trusting his truth changes lives and ultimately the world. Ideas have consequences, and true ideas give life.

In chapter 1 of *The Secret Battle of Ideas about God* (pages 19–20), I listed five declarations of freedom based on a Christian worldview that help clarify a proper view *of* the world and *for* the world:

- I am loved. (Deep, unconditional love exists, and I can have it.)
- My suffering will be overcome. (Hurt will not win. Indeed, it already has lost.)
- I have an incredible calling. (My life has meaning. I bear God's image.)

- I am meant for community. (I can overcome conflict and live at peace with those around me.)
- There is hope for the world. (I am not doomed. What is right and just and true will win.)

Bad ideas seek to convince us that love isn't real, suffering is meaningless, our lives have no purpose, we are alone, and despair is unavoidable. Only a strong, truth-based worldview can keep idea viruses at bay.

REFLECT

Choose one of the five declarations of freedom and reflect on what you believe personally about the statement. How does your personal belief differ from the declaration as stated? How do you know that what you believe is true? Discuss this with the group.

STOPPING BAD IDEAS BEFORE THEY SPREAD OUT OF CONTROL

In chapter 2 of *The Secret Battle of Ideas about God* (page 26), I told the story of critical-care physician Rob Fowler, who traveled

to Guinea to offer his help during the Ebola outbreak in 2014. When he arrived at the hospital, he found that a rumor about doctors killing patients had frightened the sick away. Many Guineans died because of this rumor.

Bad ideas often sound plausible, which is why they spread so quickly—and why we don't automatically reject them. Ideas that explicitly promote fear, disappointment, despair, or defeat don't usually trick us. But by coating lies with a layer of truth, bad ideas make themselves believable. Counterfeit worldviews are packaged and presented to look and sound like the real thing. But when we buy them, we don't get what we paid for.

Thinking of bad ideas as viruses can help us see how ideas work. It can also help us stop bad ideas from attacking us and those we love.

Young people today are walking away from their faith in record numbers as they fall prey to the counterfeit worldviews of secularism, new spirituality, postmodernism, Marxism, and Islam. These worldviews make bold truth claims, but they fail to provide adequate answers to our deepest questions about love, healing, meaning, peace, and hope.

We need to become aware of these counterfeit ideas and arm ourselves to effectively combat them. Simply agreeing that these worldviews are false won't prepare us for battle. Once we're armed with truth, however, we can help others identify and fight off the idea viruses that have infected them. Let's look at a method—called the Four I's—that we can use to stop the spread of bad ideas.

1. Identify symptoms of a bad idea. Doctors can identify viruses by the symptoms they cause: aches and pains, fever, and so forth. Christians must be able to discern good ideas from idea viruses. A helpful tool is the Summit method of inquiry: What do you mean? How did you arrive at that conclusion? Do you think that's the whole story? How do you know that what you believe is true? What happens if you're wrong?

2. Isolate the bad from the good. After identifying bad ideas, we have to look at how they spread so we can stop them. Bad ideas masquerade as something good—or at least harmless. Otherwise, they wouldn't spread. You probably wouldn't be tricked by an idea that explicitly promotes fear, disappointment, despair, or defeat. Because they give some truth but not the whole truth, bad ideas are like counterfeits. Counterfeit worldviews look and sound like the real thing. Their labels say they are genuine. But when you buy them, you don't get what you pay for.

3. Inform others about bad ideas. Don't only tell people the truth but also inform them about lies that stand against the truth. You give them a little of the disease so they can build an immunity to it. It's called inoculation. And inoculation seemed to work against deadly viruses such as polio and smallpox.

4. Invest in those controlled by bad ideas. The final thing you can do to stop bad ideas is help people survive once they've been attacked. You can't "uninfect" someone. But you can help him fight it off himself by offering encouragement. Love and administer truth in doses appropriate to what the person can handle.

When helping others, remember that the truth must be administered with love and encouragement. We need to be sensitive to what each person can handle. Try to open up conversations by asking these questions:

- “Would you be willing to tell me what you’re thinking?”
- “Have you considered ...?”
- “May I share something I’ve learned that has helped me a lot?”

REFLECT

How can we practically use the Four I’s to protect ourselves against idea viruses? How can we use this method to help others resist the ideas that may influence them?

THE ONLY WORLDVIEW THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

We combat idea viruses with the *only* antidote: the Christian worldview. This worldview says that life is about Jesus Christ, who was involved in creation at the very beginning (see John 1:1–2). The Creator God, the Lord of the universe, is a personal God who communicates with the people he created. The Word of God (Jesus) even chose to take on human flesh and live among us (see v. 14).

Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christianity. He has shown us not only who he is but what he wants for us and from us. Other worldviews may offer interesting insights, but they ultimately leave us unfulfilled. Only in Jesus can we find answers to life's toughest questions. Unlike a sports league, the five counterfeit worldviews play by different rules and objectives, but the Christian worldview shows us the path to the good life. Jesus claimed to be *the way*, *the truth*, and *the life*. He offers eternal salvation to anyone who trusts in him, but that isn't all. He doesn't just offer us a way to avoid eternal death; he also offers us a way to think like he thinks and feel what he feels. He shows us the way to truly *live*.

As we've seen, ideas have consequences. Adolf Hitler was convinced the Aryan race was superior to all others, and that non-Aryans had to be executed. The nineteen terrorists who attacked the United States on 9/11 were convinced that jihad must be waged to bring infidels into submission to Allah. Wrong ideas often lead to death and destruction. Learning to catch good ideas, however, is the way to the good life we long for.

REFLECT

Think about the five declarations of freedom based on the Christian worldview. Do you believe in the Christian worldview and these declarations which serve as answers for the five major life questions? Think about some of the ways other worldviews answer the questions. Do you live your life with the secure understanding of these declarations of freedom? If not, which ones do you question?

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