

# Engaging Secularists with the Gospel

By Dean Sieberhagen

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Ask several people what “you only live once” means to them. Prepare to share their answers with your group.

### Assignment Two

Have you met anyone who holds to one or more of these beliefs?

- Not concerned with religion or religious matters.
- No church or religious background.
- Truth is relative or whatever you want to believe.
- A belief in human self-sufficiency.
- Personal spirituality without the necessity of organized religion.
- There are many meanings to understanding and knowing what is real in our world.
- Focus is life before death not life after death.

Prepare to share with your group what evidence led you to conclude these beliefs were held.

### Assignment Three

Read the section **It's in the Book**. Enlist a group member to assist you with a demonstration. Based on the insights in the lesson, role-play sharing the gospel with your partner, pretending that partner is a secularist.

## Scripture to Memorize

*So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* 1 Corinthians 2:5

## Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that we can and should engage secularists with the gospel.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

A neighbor has a bumper sticker that says "YOLO". You ask them what that means and they reply, "You only live once." As you continue the conversation, you begin to understand that their focus is on living life to the extremes no matter what. Some of this seems OK and even fun, but then again some of it seems dangerous and foolish. When you question the wisdom of some of the things they mention doing, they just say, "You only live once." Most people seem OK with this way of living.

Do you go along? Do you say anything?

### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week now can share responses from several people when asked what meaning they give to the phrase "you only live once."

### Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week now may describe several people they know (without using names) who seem to have a secular view of reality and some of the evidence for that conclusion.

## Introduction

In the secular world in which we live, people pride themselves on how eloquent and wise they think they are. Many like to think they have an answer for everything, almost like Google. Such people assume that if they do not know something, then their advanced wisdom will allow them to find the answer. Such a perspective is at the core of the person we call a secularist. Such a person is concerned with an exalted view of man. Humans are the center of everything. If secularists make any allowance for the existence of a god, then they assume the god exists to benefit humans.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 2:1–16 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 1. speech . . . wisdom.** In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul looked at the way people think and speak. Speech and wisdom are mentioned repeatedly throughout this passage.

In this passage, Paul contrasted human wisdom with godly wisdom. Understanding these contrasts helps prepare us for sharing the gospel with a secularist. Here is a summary of some of the more important contrasts:

1. "I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom" versus "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom."
2. "The wisdom of men" versus "the power of God."
3. "Words taught by human wisdom" versus "those taught by the Spirit."
4. "Natural man" and "natural wisdom" versus "spiritual."
5. "Revealed and known" versus "hidden and unknown."

## Discussion Question

For each of the five pairs above, which verses are the sources of these phrases?

## On Your Own

For each of the five pairs above, how would insights and thoughts from each help prepare to share the gospel with a secularist? Write your responses below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Keep these thoughts in mind:

1. Clever human words and philosophies are not required (or necessarily even helpful) when sharing the good news. Share your own story of redemption. Your story is powerful!
2. Keep the focus on Jesus. Paul said, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Like Paul, share your story, but make Jesus the central focus of that story.
3. Tell the secularist the gospel is a mystery (see 1 Corinthians 2:7). Because a secularist thinks almost exclusively about the natural world, he can become interested in a topic that is mysterious. Ask the Holy Spirit to open the heart of a secularist to the greatest mystery in the universe.

## Studying the Passage

**Verse 4. my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom.** Clever arguments are not required to introduce secularists to Jesus. The following thoughts might be helpful in your relationships and in your conversations with them.

1. Have confidence. Secularists often seem to be having a good time in life, with no interest in spiritual things. Keep in mind that every lost person has a vague sense that something is missing and not right. The Holy Spirit is absolutely able to create an openness to the gospel in any person.
2. Introduce the idea of a spiritual side to life.
3. Learn about their needs which are related to this life and, if appropriate, help them in these areas. Then use this as an open door to focus on spiritual needs, zeroing in on the problem of sin.
4. When you do reach out to meet practical needs, ensure you do so out of a genuine heart of care and compassion. Most secularists are able to detect if you are being nice just to manipulate the person into listening to the gospel.
5. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." You will not have the answer to everything, and some problems are very complex. Calmly admit you do not know all the answers but that your belief in God is both reasonable and based on evidences. Promise to research answers you do not have at the moment.
6. Use deeply meaningful words such as *hope, joy, forgiveness, love, peace*, etc. These concepts are beyond human explanation and yet as real as objects around us.
7. Be willing to be a good friend. Life crises will come to secularists that they cannot explain. They will come to you if they know you care.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now present a role play with a partner, with that partner pretending to be an entirely secular person. After the role play, the group can discuss ways the conversation illustrated concepts from this lesson.

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

### **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

Engaging secularists with the gospel can appear almost too difficult. They seem so focused on having a good time in this life and seem to have no interest in spiritual things. Despite this appearance, however, they are people who have real spiritual needs.

Granted, for the moment they may be blind to their spiritual needs, and the truth of the gospel may be hidden from them. But Jesus is up to this challenge. A faithful witness, moving and speaking in the power of the Spirit, can break through the blindness of a secular mind-set.

God loves secularists and wants to reach them with the gospel. Disciples can have a prayerful confidence that, as we share using God's wisdom, their eyes will be opened, and they will respond to the good news. We can offer real (not manipulative) care and friendship. We can share our own testimony and the reason for our faith, even if we do not have all the answers. We can live lives that demonstrate love, joy, peace, hope and the forgiveness human wisdom cannot explain.

### **Follow up Question**

*What are several of the most important issues to keep in mind while sharing the gospel with a secularist?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.