

MAMA
BEAR

Apologetics

HILLARY MORGAN FERRER
GENERAL EDITOR



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Contents

Foreword by Nancy Pearcey	11
Protecting Your Kids the Mama Bear Way	15
Part 1: Rise Up, Mama Bears	
1. Calling All Mama Bears— <i>My kid has a cheerio shoved up his nose. Why am I reading this book?</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Julie Loos	21
2. How to Be a Mama Bear— <i>Is this code for being the weirdest mom on the playground?</i> Hillary Short	35
3. The Discerning Mama Bear— <i>The refined art of “chew and spit”</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer	47
4. Linguistic Theft— <i>Redefining words to get your way and avoid reality</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer	63
Part 2: Lies You’ve Probably Heard but Didn’t Know What They Were Called	
5. God Helps Those Who Help Themselves— <i>Self-Helpism</i> Teasi Cannon	81
6. My Brain Is Trustworthy . . . According to My Brain— <i>Naturalism</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer	99
7. I’d Believe in God If There Were Any Shred of Evidence— <i>Skepticism</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Rebekah Valerius	117

8.	The Truth Is, There Is No Truth— <i>Postmodernism</i> Rebekah Valerius and Hillary Morgan Ferrer	133
9.	You're Wrong to Tell Me that I'm Wrong!— <i>Moral Relativism</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Rebekah Valerius	149
10.	Follow Your Heart—It Never Lies!— <i>Emotionalism</i> Teasi Cannon, Hillary Morgan Ferrer, and Hillary Short	167
11.	Just Worship Something— <i>Pluralism</i> Cathryn S. Buse	185
12.	I'm Not Religious; I'm Spiritual!— <i>New Spirituality</i> Alisa Childers	199
13.	Communism Failed Because Nobody Did It Right — <i>Marxism</i> Hillary Morgan Ferrer	215
14.	The Future Is Female— <i>Feminism</i> Rebekah Valerius, Alisa Childers, and Hillary Morgan Ferrer	235
15.	Christianity Needs a Makeover— <i>Progressive Christianity</i> Alisa Childers	253

Final Words of Encouragement

16.	How to Take All This Information and #RoarLikeAMother— <i>The Mama Bears</i>	267
	Reading Resources for Each Chapter	271
	Notes	275

Protecting Your Kids the Mama Bear Way

Several years ago, my husband and I were asked to be helpers at an apologetics class at my parents' church. It was here that we met a woman named Jody. One day, Jody stood up to give her story. She had raised two sons in the church. They attended Awana, youth group, and church every week. One of them even asked to be rebaptized after his first year in college. *That'll clinch it!* she thought. After her son got his first job post-college, her world was turned upside down. On a weekend visit, he declared that he no longer believed in God. He was following in the footsteps of his atheist boss, who had convinced him that "Jesus was just like Santa Claus and the tooth fairy." *What more could I have possibly done?* she wondered.

Jody then told the class how she handled the situation. On the inside she was freaking out. (Who wouldn't be?) On the outside, however, she listened to her son, asked him questions, and tried to see what had caused such a seismic shift in his life. She asked him to tell her his main objections and questions. When he left to return home, Jody—a fitness instructor—dove into the unfamiliar world of academia and Christian scholarship, frantically searching for evidences that would refute her son's objections. She didn't ask for this task. She didn't want it. But her baby's eternal destiny was in the balance! What else could a Mama Bear do? She saw the philosophical bulldozer crushing her son, and she jumped in with both hands—as all Mama Bears do—wanting to lift it off of him, even though it meant studying *apologetics* of all things.

Shocked that the church had not prepared her (or her son) for culture's antagonism toward Christianity, Jody spent the next several years

attempting to help answer her son's questions and walking with other parents who had experienced the same thing with their children.

After hearing her story, a tiny seed was planted in my mind which, after several years, blossomed into both the ministry Mama Bear Apologetics and the book you're reading right now.

I would like to say that Jody's story is unique, but it is not. Kids are being introduced to challenges to Christianity at younger and younger ages (see chapter 1). In response, we can either focus on the questions themselves, *or* we can take a closer look at the worldly philosophies *behind* the questions. I compare the "just answer the questions" method to a game of whack-a-mole. Do you remember that game at the fair? Little stuffed moles would pop up unexpectedly from different holes while the player tried to bop them on the head for points. While answering the tough questions of the faith is important, doing so is a lot like playing whack-a-mole. As soon as you deal with one, another pops up.

What if we could prime our children to think biblically *before* they are presented with the questions that challenge the faith? Thinking biblically isn't merely about knowing Bible verses (though that's a great place to start!). No, thinking biblically is about taking what we know from the Bible and understanding how the principles presented in it apply to everyday situations. That's the kind of biblical thinkers we want our kids to become!

Think of ideas as being like seeds. Whether or not a seed grows is determined by the kind of soil it is placed in (and whether or not we water it). We want to nurture our children's intellectual soil so that *when* (not *if*!) bad ideas are planted there, *they won't grow*. We don't want our children to feel like they have to choose between God and science because we have already made an effort to till their intellectual soil so they know that science and faith are not at odds, and never were (chapter 6). We don't want our kids to look to the government as their savior because they know that the battle has already been won by *Christ*, and He alone is their Savior (chapter 13). We want them to know what constitutes trustworthy

evidence so that they can never claim that “there is no evidence for God” (chapter 7). We want them to understand that truth is exclusive—it excludes falsehood (chapter 11).

These principles are foundational to everything Scripture teaches. Allow the foundation to erode, and we leave our kids prey to doubt and worldly thinking. After all, how can our little bears accept the *truth* of Christ unless they already know that *truth itself* exists and is not up for interpretation (chapter 8)? Or how will they know to reach out to Jesus for help if they are taught that all they need to do is look inside—that everything they need resides within (chapter 5)?

Culture’s lies are like weeds that want to take over the garden of our children’s minds. The lies need to be stopped, and they stop with you, Mama Bear! Afraid that apologetics isn’t your cup of tea? That’s totally fine. Don’t read this book for yourself. Read it if for no other reason than *you need to know what the world is telling your kids the eight-plus hours a day that they are away from you*. Read it so that you can recognize the lies and help your little bears to recognize them too.

We have structured this book to be informative, not condemning. We are not out to point fingers at every belief we dislike. Rather, our goal is to raise up an army of *discerning* Mama Bears who can take an idea, identify the good aspects, distinguish them from the bad aspects, and accept the good while rejecting the bad (chapter 3). Our job as Mama Bears is to protect our children no matter where the threats may come from. Protection may mean sheltering our kids for a time, but that’s a short-term solution. We need to prepare our children so they aren’t left unprotected for the future. *The greatest protection we can give our kids is to equip them to face the cultural lies head-on while remaining gracious, loving, and winsome*. It is not enough to simply tell them *which* ideas are raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). We must train them to understand *why* those ideas are flawed. We want to train them to use their critical thinking skills during every lecture, every movie, every song, and—yes—even every sermon!

We don't want our children to see everything around them as black and white, because, frankly, we don't live in a comic-book world. We want them to realize that biblical truths and cultural lies can appear anywhere at any time. We don't want our children to live in fear, but with discernment. We want our kids to be able to see Christ in art, movies, science, history, music—in all things because He is Lord over all. Yet we don't want them to assume that everything they encounter in art, movies, science, history, or music is speaking His truth.

With enough practice, our children won't even have to think about the way they receive or reject the various ideas or views espoused in our world. It's like breathing. We don't inhale 100% oxygen. We inhale a combination of oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and atmosphere. Our bodies were designed to take in the oxygen and exhale everything else. If we as Mama Bears do our jobs well, and we hope this book will help you on that journey, then our little bears will be able to interact with this culture with grace, love, and critical thinking—inhaling the spiritual oxygen and exhaling everything else—in a way that is as natural as breathing. This skill doesn't come overnight, and we need it to teach ourselves first.

So get ready, Mama Bears! It's time to learn about culture's lies and #RoarLikeAMother.

Calling All Mama Bears

*My kid has a cheerio shoved up his nose.
Why am I reading this book?*

HILLARY MORGAN FERRER AND JULIE LOOS

I rather enjoy the phone conversations I have with my mom friends—especially those who are moms of young children. Where else can I hear someone yell nonsensical statements like “Don’t put the chicken on the trampoline!”?

I did a survey asking our Mama Bears for the weirdest statements they’d ever had to utter as a mom. There were quite a few responses regarding things that should *not* be licked (for example, eyeballs, cars, an elephant’s butt...). My favorite response was “We do *not* put wise men in the toilet!” As a mom, I’m sure there are plenty of phrases you never thought would leave your mouth. Let’s be honest: Who has to clarify that “poop is not paint”? Moms, that’s who.

Mom life is a special calling and *not* for the faint of heart. Most moms will tell you that it is the hardest *and* the best job in the world. On one hand, there is no alone time for about the first eight years, and you don’t get to call in sick. On the other hand, what other job allows you to snuggle with your clients while they show you how big of a spit bubble they can make?

Moms are like managers, except they don’t just *manage* people; they

create them. As a mother, you have the honor of training, molding, and educating your offspring from birth until (hopefully) they become functioning members of society. William Ross Wallace rightly described motherhood in his nineteenth-century poem titled “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World.” In other words, if children are our future, it is moms (and dads) who are in a position to help determine what kind of future that will be.

As parents—as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and guardians—one of our most important jobs is preparing kids for the real world. Our children are growing up in a society that is vastly different than the one in which we grew up. I loved memorizing Bible verses as a child, but I didn’t have to deal with the culture telling me that the Bible was full of contradictions or that it was just a book of fairy tales. The trustworthiness of Scripture was *presumed*. That is not the case anymore. We can no longer rely on Western culture to reinforce our Christian beliefs, and we cannot ignore the fact that youth are leaving the church in droves. What many parents don’t know is that some of the reasons for their departure are totally preventable.

Why Do We Care About Apologetics?

Julie and I (Hillary) have had very different experiences when it comes to apologetics. Julie discovered the importance of apologetics after having children, whereas I discovered its importance as a child. I like to share my story because I think it is important for parents to have a long-term vision of what apologetics training can do for their kids. Many apologists’ stories are filled with regret that they didn’t get their training sooner. I am among those whose hindsight is not filled with regret, but rather full of appreciation for the training I received as a youngster.

I was a churchgoing kid who loved Jesus and wanted to be a missionary. I remember wanting to become a nun and being bummed when my mom informed me that only Catholics could do that. During my growing-up years, if Mom and Dad said it, I believed it. They said Christianity was true, so I didn’t question it.

Had the Internet been around when I was a kid, my story might have ended *very* differently. I was a question-asker. Even my kindergarten “report card” has a handwritten note from my teacher that says, “Asks a lot of questions.” Fast-forward to when my parents met one of my favorite grad school professors. The *first* thing he said to them? “She asks a lot of really good questions!” So I come by this trait honestly. It’s been there since I could talk.

Growing up, the only people to whom I could direct my spiritual questions were Mom, Dad, Pastor Tim, and a handful of Sunday school teachers. Given access to the Internet, I might have looked up “God” on Google and been introduced to not only the Judeo-Christian God, but also the god(s) of Islam, Baha’i, and Zoroastrianism. If your kids are anything like me, they might have then searched “Which God is the real God?” Last I checked, at the top of the list was the Wikipedia entry for God. Entry number two was “Is God Real?” on Mormon.org. If your kids go a little further down the screen, they will be told by a HuffPost article that “Approaching God, or rejecting the very idea (atheism), ought to be a *personal matter*, something like happiness as defined in the Declaration of Independence: *a pursuit by each in their own way*”¹ (emphasis mine). Postmodernism agrees. Naturalism agrees, and so do emotionalism and moral relativism. A lot of the popular worldviews in this book agree with that statement.

So if our kids have mom, dad, and Pastor Whoever saying one thing, and Wikipedia, HuffPost, and their school friends and teachers saying another, which worldview do you think will ultimately win out? You could cross your fingers and hope that your kids stick with what you’ve taught them and don’t succumb to other ways of thinking, but I don’t recommend that approach.

What Apologetics Did for My Faith

As mentioned earlier, I was among the few who experienced apologetics at a young age—and I hope your children have that privilege as well. I was introduced to apologetics by my pastor when I was 12. He

was a former atheist who came to Christ the same way as Lee Strobel, the author of *The Case for Christ*: by trying to disprove Christianity, and then discovering that he couldn't because it was actually true. As a responsible pastor, he taught a few series on defending the Christian faith. The first was on the "liar, lunatic, Lord" trilemma, in which he showed that Jesus being Lord was the most reasonable conclusion out of the three. The next was on the historical evidences for New Testament reliability. Finally, he examined the biblical and historical accounts of the resurrection by refuting every alternate theory ever proposed by a skeptic, showing how the resurrection, as reported in the Gospels, was the most plausible explanation.

Those three series still serve as the foundation for my Christian faith. I've had plenty of opportunities to be angry at God (my mom's cancer, my cancer, my sister's terminal cancer and recent death, my depression, childlessness, you name it). Many who have gone through similar hardships have simply concluded that God must not exist. However, rejecting Christianity as untrue has never been an option for me. To reject the existence of God would be the most irrational conclusion I could come to, and I refuse to be irrational!

Sure, there are days when I don't *feel* God's presence or *feel* peaceful. But no matter what I *feel*, I can't *unknow* what I know. My faith is not based on feelings. It is based on the immovable, absolute truth of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The evidences for Christianity and God's unmistakable thumbprint upon creation are my beacons of sanity amidst the tumultuous sea of uncertain emotions. Sometimes my emotions agree with truth and I feel loved, peaceful, and close to God. Sometimes my emotions disagree with truth and I don't feel those things. Either way, I am thankful that my faith does not rely on the shifting sands of my emotions because on some days, my emotions are all over the place.

Peaceful emotions, closeness, and mountaintop experiences are important to our relationship with God, but they are more like the decor inside a house. Decor helps make a house a home, and we *should* enjoy our home in Christ! But it's the foundation that enables a home to stand firm. Yet

how often do you hear of someone who takes great pleasure in a foundation? That's not the purpose of a foundation—its job is to create the *stability* by which we can enjoy all the other things that come with having a home. The only time people notice foundations is when there's something wrong with them. In our culture, we have massive foundational issues, and the ideological cracks can be seen everywhere.

We know that we are to build on the foundational rock of Christ (Matthew 7), but I have noticed a growing trend of people confusing their feelings *about* Jesus for Jesus Himself. There is a fundamental difference between teaching our kids to base their spiritual foundation on the *experience* of Jesus and basing it *on* Jesus. They need something that doesn't change, which is the immovable, absolute truth of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Experiences and emotion? Those change over time and in unpredictable ways.

How to Get People Excited About Apologetics

Most people do not gravitate toward the topic of apologetics. Interest is usually preceded by an “Aha!” moment when they realize *why* they need to have reasons for their faith. I'm hoping this book will be your “Aha!” moment.

These lightbulb moments can occur when a person either experiences or witnesses a crisis of faith that leaves them asking “Why *am* I a Christian?” Sometimes it is when they are challenged by a person of another religion. One of the more mobilizing experiences is when a person witnesses firsthand the spiritual slaughter that is taking place on college and university campuses.

My husband and I once attended a church led by a pastor who didn't understand why apologetics was necessary. To him, it was a cool hobby that John and I had, not something to which all Christians are called. In his sermons he would say that “love is all we need” to preach the gospel, and he encouraged the congregation to “stop all that theologizing and just love Jesus.”

John decided to invite our pastor to his debate at the local university. By the end of the night, our pastor was on “Team Apologetics”! What caused him to change his mind in a single evening? While there, he saw a standing-room-only crowd full of Christians, atheists, skeptics, and seekers. These people weren’t just outliers; they were the kind of individuals we see all around us every day. As John answered audience questions, our pastor came to realize how many Christian students were being spiritually rerouted in college. He saw the stronghold of secular thought and how youth who had grown up in church were being seduced away—until they encountered John’s rebuttals, possibly the first intellectual rebuttals they had ever heard from a Christian.

Apologetics may not seem important until you witness firsthand the consequences of bad ideas.

You could almost see the lightbulb going on in our pastor’s mind. Seeing this reminded me of that scene from *Gone with the Wind* where the camera pans out over the endless field of wounded soldiers and the audience is confronted with the magnitude of Civil War casualties. From that night on, our pastor was our biggest cheerleader. Conclusion: It is easy to miss the importance of apologetics if you haven’t witnessed the sheer number of victims being held captive to bad philosophy (see Colossians 2:8). Apologetics may not seem important until you witness firsthand the consequences of bad ideas.

As you look at your children trying to remove the Cheerio, or Lego, or whatever they have shoved up their nose, you may be asking, “Why am I reading this book?” The answer is simple: *because you are a Mama Bear*. When you saw the words *Mama Bear* on the cover, something inside you said, “That’s me.” Nobody had to explain to you what a Mama Bear was. The moment you first held your child, you knew that if anyone or anything ever threatened him or her, you would do whatever it took to deal with that threat. That’s what Mama Bears do. We will talk more in the next chapter about what it means to be a Mama Bear, but first, like that

scene in *Gone with the Wind*, we want to give you a snapshot of *why* we are writing this book, and it all begins with what research calls “the youth exodus.” It may not be pretty, but if we do our jobs well, you will come away from this chapter ready to become a Mama Bear Apologist who says, “Mess with my kids, and I will demolish your arguments!”

So What Is the Youth Exodus?

Julie here! You know those never-ending piles of laundry? Yes, the one waiting to be separated and the other one waiting to be folded? They are about as immense as the amount of research done on the issue commonly referred to in apologetics circles as “the youth exodus.” It’s probably the largest exodus since Moses, but this one has no assurances that the wanderers will return to the “promised land.”

The youth exodus refers to the percentage of Christian youth who stop attending church. This includes those who go on to declare themselves atheists, agnostics, or more recently, “none” (that is, of no religious affiliation). This exodus has been widely researched, documented, and discussed, but in many Christian circles it’s also widely *ignored*. And while there are some varying opinions (and what can look like contradictory statistics), the bottom line is it’s real, it’s bad, and it’s now becoming more rampant among young people prior to entering college, which used to be the exit ramp.

The reasons for this exodus are varied, nuanced, and somewhat complicated. Unfortunately, there’s no one “tumor” we can treat and thereby cure the disease. Instead, there are tentacles of cancer growing all throughout our youth’s spiritual experiences. Apologetics is not the only solution, but it is a large part of the solution, and one that is ignored far too often.

Come On—How Big Is the Problem Really?

Most studies indicate between 45%–48% percent of youth leave church after their freshman year in college and never return.² The percentages vary based on denomination, but the problem is the same. David Kinnaman found that after age 15, almost 60% of young Christians had disconnected from their church.³ More than half (54%) of high school students attend

church. But once they hit college, the problem gets worse. *Frequent* attendance drops from 44% in high school to 25% in college; *nonattendance* goes up from 20% in high school to 38% in college.⁴ In a 2006 Barna study, 61% of twenty-somethings who had attended church as teens were no longer spiritually engaged.⁵ One study showed that 70% of teens who attended youth group stopped attending church within two years of their high school graduation!⁶

For many years, most people assumed that the problem originated in college (probably because that's when we see the church attendance numbers take their most drastic drop). However, we must take into account that college is when kids no longer have good ol' mom and dad waking them up and driving them to Sunday school. *So while college is and remains a contributing factor, these numbers are an external manifestation of an internal disconnection that started years earlier.* The ticket was already purchased. College was just their first opportunity to use it.

What Exactly Have They Left?

That's a good question with sort of a complicated answer. Leaving the faith and leaving the church are not necessarily the same thing. Whether they are saying goodbye to church attendance, separating from orthodox doctrine, or saying hello to atheism, they are still leaving, and no form of leaving is good. From Millennials to Gen Z, while some leave with their feet (due to life events and changes), many leave with their hearts and minds due to emotional, behavioral, or intellectual reasons. When youth describe their religion, you'll hear statements like "I'm spiritual, but not religious," or "I am no longer affiliated with any certain religion or denomination." (Pew Research Center calls these "the nones.") And then of course there are those who either renounce all belief in God (atheist) or are no longer sure that they *can* know whether He exists (agnostic).

Some are leaving organized religion. Others are leaving biblical authority. They want to create a religious buffet to suit their own tastes.⁷ Many have left the biblical definition of who God is. They have redefined Him to be somewhat like a big genie in the sky who wants them to be nice to

others, will help them when they are in trouble, and wants them to be happy. This is called Therapeutic Moralistic Deism.⁸ Those who have left the more orthodox views of theology have adopted beliefs that are closer to historical heresies. They may call themselves Christian, but their views don't support that label.⁹

For example, in three independent surveys conducted by Josh McDowell, the Barna Group, and researcher Mike Nappa, it was discovered that among self-proclaimed "Christian" teens,

- 41% were uncertain whether Jesus was physically resurrected.¹⁰
- 63% didn't believe Jesus to be the son of the one true God.¹¹
- 44% believed the Bible to be just one of many authoritative voices about Jesus.¹²
- 33% believed that Jesus is not the only way to heaven.¹³
- only 5% studied the Bible daily (down from 8 percent in 1991).¹⁴
- a growing majority believe the Holy Spirit is only a symbol of God's presence or power rather than a person of the Trinity.¹⁵
- 60% are uncertain, unsettled, or confused about whether the Bible can be trusted.¹⁶
- 70% express persistent, measurable doubts that what the Bible says about Jesus is true.¹⁷

An Increasingly Hostile World

In the 12 years since I (Julie) began studying apologetics, my eldest son has gone from prepubescent middle-schooler to college graduate. During that time, the cultural hostility exhibited toward Christianity has increased as exponentially as his shoe size. Because this accelerated trend has been going on for some time now, the first generations of the youth exodus (Gen X and Millennials) are now the ones hiring, teaching, and influencing the younger generation (currently that's Gen Z). We are also now seeing—gulp—the first generation of these "religious exiles" parenting their own brood. This has huge implications for society because we are

now post-truth, post-Christian, void of gospel influence, and waiting to see which way the “spiritual but not religious” will finally fall.

Myths About the Youth Exodus

You know how you have to fight to get that precious alone time in the bathroom (I see that chocolate bar tucked away in your book—high five!) but your children just—will—not—leave—you—alone!? In a similar way, Satan will work through peer pressure and cultural chaos to pursue your kids, and won't leave them alone. Our proverbial locks on the doors no longer work as well as they used to. The enemy is constantly picking at them. We can't lighten your laundry load (so sorry!), but we can help address some of the myths surrounding the youth exodus. The truth is, when it comes to this trend, there is some stinkin' thinkin' going on. Ain't no place for that in your mind!

Myth #1: They All Walk Away but Then Come Back

For years, the common reasoning in Christian circles has been “All kids rebel. It's part of growing up. Let them sow their wild oats.” And then the ace of spades gets thrown down: “You know what the Bible says: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). In other words, *we've depended on our Christian kids to be boomerangs.*

What's wrong with this thinking?

1. *We shouldn't “expect” that our kids might walk away just because others say it is “inevitable.”* God has entrusted the stewardship of our children's faith to us, and we are to do all within our power to train them. Yes, what our children decide to do (especially as they get older) is ultimately their choice. But we need to strive for a clear conscience in our spiritual guidance of them, knowing that we did all we could to clearly communicate the truthfulness and validity of the Christian faith.
2. *Not all kids rebel.* I didn't walk away. My kids haven't. Hillary didn't.

I know many others who haven't. When it comes to parenting, don't roll over and play dead just because someone says a certain outcome is inevitable.

3. *The statistics regarding the youth exodus change over time.* Research has shown a general trend of young adults returning to church after they get married and have kids of their own. That trend drastically slowed starting with Gen Xers, who are now raising kids in a less religious world than that of their childhood.¹⁸ A Lifeway study found that out of the 70% of teens who left church during their college years, only about half of them eventually returned.¹⁹ For those of you (like me) who are a bit slow at math, this means that with each successive generation, we are essentially losing about 35% of our church population. As Steve Cable noted in his book *Cultural Captives*, "If America continues on its current trend, the number of 18-29-year-old Americans who state, 'My religious preference is none or a non-Christian religion' will grow to over 50% of the population by the year 2030."²⁰

Christianity has gradually become less socially accepted, which means that not only are we losing the nonboomerang youth exodus adults, but also the nonbelieving adults who never had faith yet, in the past, would explore it for the sake of their kids. Bottom line, you can no longer count on the boomerang effect. It's more like the sail-away effect.

So if Gen X is not returning to church like the generations before, and if the older Millennials are even less religious than Gen X, then what will happen to Gen Z (the largest current generation)?²¹ It is the first truly post-Christian generation, with less than half attending church.²²

Myth #2: Because My Kids Go to Awana/Youth Group/ Christian School/Homeschool, They'll Be Okay

Then there's the myth of the Christian "insurance plan." "My child has been in church since he was in my belly." "I piped in the Word of God

via books on tape, so she could hear it in utero.” “They’ve been to Awana, youth group, church camp, Christian school, and homeschool.”

Check. Check. Double check. Good for you. Good for them. Seriously. And don’t stop what you’re doing (okay, maybe except for the books on tape). These things are great, but they are not guarantees. Desiring to probe the reasons for youth exodus, Ken Ham commissioned America’s Research Group to do a study. In a stunning finding, the research revealed that Sunday school was actually *detrimental* to spiritual health! Kids who grew up in a Sunday school environment were *more* likely to have a secular worldview than those who didn’t.²³ Wait...what?! I mean...HOW?!

Surprisingly enough, coloring pictures of animals in a boat and acting out “stories” on a felt board doesn’t actually teach kids that what you are saying is *true*. It turns out they believe exactly what we tell them: that these are Bible *stories*.

For the most part, we are not teaching doctrine or skills that can help our children think critically from a biblical perspective about what they are learning in school. And as they get older, most church youth groups focus on entertaining kids (to retain attendance), not training them to become disciples. Apologist Frank Turek has astutely noted that “what we win them *with* we win them *to*.”²⁴ Ed Stetzer has remarked that “too many youth groups are holding tanks with pizza.”²⁵ The sad truth is that in many cases, we’ve won our kids to fun, friends, and pizza, but not necessarily to *Christ*.

Myth #3: They Won’t Need Apologetics Training Until College

Steve Cable points out in *Cultural Captives* that “the culture itself has become just as corrosive as the college.”²⁶ It used to be that a quick course in apologetics during their senior year of high school would give our kids the necessary spiritual booster shot before college. No longer. The infestation of anti-Christian teaching is trending younger and younger. Moms, truly: Elementary age is not too young to begin. In fact, some research indicates that up to 46% of youth have spiritually “checked out” by the end of middle school. They may attend church just to please their parents, but their Christian faith is in name only.²⁷ The American Research Group study noted,

We've always been trying to prepare our kids for college (and I still think that's a critical thing to do, of course), but it turns out that only 11 percent of those who have left the Church did so during the college years. Almost 90 percent of them were lost in middle school and high school. By the time they got to college they were already gone! About 40 percent are leaving the Church during elementary and middle school years!²⁸

Let those numbers sink in for a moment. *Forty percent* are mentally leaving the church in *elementary and middle school*. Let's consider how early formative experiences typically occur: Morals are set by age 9; most salvation experiences happen by age 13; most worldviews are established by age 13.^{29,30} If the way our kids choose their favorite sports team is any indication, they have "chosen sides" by third grade—that's typically eight years old. This means that from mid-elementary age onward, we need to be on our toes.

Okay, Okay, I Get It! But What Can I Do?

We must start our worldview training at a young age, teaching theology and apologetics. Because we aren't the only ones who are training children. Atheists now have their own alternative summer camp options—like "Camp Quest." The LGBT+ advocates are introducing propaganda in public schools as early as kindergarten. Maybe starting in utero is not such a bad idea after all!

The good news is that concerned Christians are answering the call for developing resources and curriculum designed to help teach children as early as the preschool years. For example, Melissa Cain Travis has her Young Defenders picture book series. Elizabeth Urbanowicz has just released her Foundations curriculum for third- through fifth-grade children. Deep Roots Bible curriculum is currently available for first through fourth grades (with more scheduled to be published). Tom Griffin has materials for those in fifth through eighth grades. (See our complete resource list at www.mamabearapologetics.com/resources.)

The parents and pastors who are introducing theology, apologetics, and worldview training to younger children are often amazed by the questions they ask and their ability to think through various issues. In fact, Kevin Duffy of Ratio Christi College Prep (RCCP) has found that churches that use the RCCP training materials have reported attrition levels falling from 75% to as low as 13%, helping to reverse the youth exodus in at least a few churches. We can all be encouraged by this kind of news! Our children are sponges. The question is, what are they going to soak up?

The youth exodus is real. Now that you are aware, alert, and no longer susceptible to the common myths about it, you are ready to discover what it means to be a Mama Bear and learn how to start counteracting the popular cultural lies that are coming for your cubs. By the time you're done with this book, we pray that you are hungry for apologetics and equipped to teach your cubs how to swallow the sweet honey of God's truth.

Discussion Questions

1. **Icebreaker:** What have you said to your kids that you never thought you would have to say? (Any elephant-booty licker parents in the room?)
2. **Main theme:** *Youth Exodus*—Do you know another parent who has experienced their child walking away from the faith? Which statistic shocked you the most?
3. **Self-evaluation:** Have you ever found yourself saying or thinking any of the myths about the youth exodus? How has your perspective changed? Did any of the myths hit close to home?
4. **Brainstorm:** What are some tough questions you've heard your child ask about the faith that you could start researching?
5. **Release the bear:** Check out the resources on the Mama Bear Apologetics website. What is *one* resource that you can start implementing into your weekly routine? (After reading *Mama Bear Apologetics: Empowering Your Kids to Challenge Cultural Lies*, of course!)