



How this study works

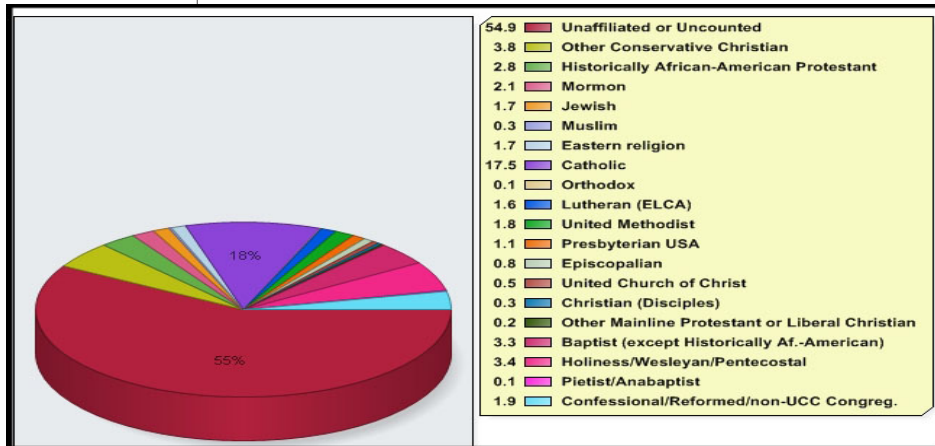
But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: - 1 Peter 3:15

Our Challenges

Our first challenge. In our ongoing effort to better understand the lost, God's people have often discussed two groups of those who differ from us. The first group begins from a worldwide perspective and focuses heavily on world religion. The second group focuses on cults. While that name is generally adequate, its use has led to much controversy and even lawsuits directed toward those who do not want their names sullied as part of such a listing.

This study is not directly focused on either of the above groups. Rather, it focuses on groups which we are most likely to encounter in our area, specifically, Colorado, U.S.A. While the mixture of groups we find in the Colorado region is reasonably representative of most areas in the U.S., Bible teachers from other areas, would want to expand, add, or remove entries more specific to their area. Again, the goal of this study is to help us focus on gaining a better understanding of those whom we are most likely to meet in everyday life.

Our second challenge. Belief systems of Americans do not correspond in any way to specific religious bodies. For example, 55% of Coloradans are unaffiliated or uncounted. Among those who have been counted, 44% are "Protestant." That does not mean that Colorado is 44% Protestant! One demographic chart dealing only with organized groups looks like this:



Religious demographics chart (Colorado)

<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/Statebystate/COLORADO.htm>

After several hours of mixing, matching, and indexing various demographic sources, we have come up with a reasonable estimation of who the folks are who live around us and what they are most likely to believe. We purpose to study the following groups, based, as best as we could, on their representation in our population. Feel free to debate the statistics, but keep in mind, we are including folks in both affiliated and non affiliated groupings.

1. Christian Liberal Protestant
2. Conservative "Protestant" *Not a part of this study.*
3. *Religiously Unaffiliated - Nature Respecters
4. Religiously Unaffiliated - Atheists
5. Christian Roman Catholic & Orthodoxy
6. LDS or Mormons
7. Seventh Day Adventist
8. Muslim
9. Buddhist & various sects.
10. Hindu & various sects.

** Because these folks often do not declare affiliations they are often ignored. They include large groups of both indigenous and non indigenous “nature re-specters.” These are folks whose “spiritual experience” is tied almost entirely to the creation itself. At the other extreme are the atheists. According to a recent PEWS survey, 55% of Coloradans believe in God, 31% doubt His existence some of the time, and 14% are atheists. See: <http://www.5280.com/magazine/2012/04/religious-experience?page=full>*

Our final challenge. The word for the day is *practicality*. We want to provide a study which is detailed enough to make us useful when witnessing to others, but simple enough for all to understand. In order to accomplish this, your material is provided in two sections.

SECTION I - UNDERSTANDING THEM

Entries are entitled **Five Things You Need to Know About:** [Group name supplied here.] It contains simple descriptions of various belief systems in understandable terms.

SECTION II - HELPING THEM UNDERSTAND US

Entries are entitled **Five Truths You Need to Understand About:** [Bible truth supplied here.] It is designed to be a quick reference guide for dealing with what the Bible teaches on various subjects and tips for communicating the gospel.

Instead of *repeating* the same biblical truths as they relate to each group, we have simply included a summary of all the major Bible truths we need to understand. By doing this we are simplifying our work. For example, if liberal protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses

both reject the deity of Christ, both lessons will include our reference to the deity of Christ in the second section.

At the heading over each group we study you will discover the icons which will point you to the necessary area of study. We'll establish our pattern during our very first study.

Please keep our all important goal in mind. We want to learn how to approach, develop a rapport, and engage those who need Christ in a loving and thoughtful way.

Study format:

There are no exercises, tests, or similar activities included in this study. We cannot include our supplementary media with our printed material, but we are always happy to refer readers to good sources. Discussion is always welcome, and there will be a *short* review during the first few minutes of each study.

Studies are designed to cover material from *both* sections I and II.

In addition to providing help and tips for talking with your neighbor, Section II will provide the basic Bible information we need.

The icons at the top of each chapter in section I help us get the “big picture” about that particular belief system. These icons only flag the things for which the group is ***most noted***. Watch for the icons linked to the entries in Section II for ease of use.

General Categories for Discussion in Section II

These are samples of the icons which are explained in Section II.



The Bible's inspiration and authority rejected. Explaining why we believe God's Word is inspired and what we mean by inspiration is one of our most important tasks. And, right after inspiration comes, interpretation. Learning how to express these foundational truths is one of our most important tasks.



The substitutionary work of Christ rejected. While a high percentage of Americans call themselves Christian, a shocking number have no interest in the doctrine of substitution. False religionists hate it, true believers embrace it with their whole hearts.



The triunity of God and the deity of Jesus Christ rejected. It is in the nature of man to reject the nature of God and what we cannot understand. It is good to learn how to explain these truths to those who are serious about understanding what the Bible says.



Creation based religion. Helping people understand the starting points of their religion helps them understand what makes biblical Christianity unique. Biblical Christians begin reasoning from a Creator who is entirely separate from His creation. Without a single exception, all other worshipers see their deities as part of the creation and ultimately see us all as being connected.



Multiple authorities. Again, without exception, every religious system on the face of the planet since Eden combines the blending of authorities (be they inspired texts or inspired leaders) in order to supplant or replace the Word of God. Learning how to understand and talk with folks who embrace multiple authorities is essential to witness in our times.



Works based religion. It is in the nature of every man to commend himself. The Bible teaches us that God has commended Himself to us and that we can do nothing to commend ourselves to Him or gain His favor. Our greatest joy comes from helping those unfamiliar with the Bible to come to the understanding that salvation is a gift of grace.



Atheism or agnosticism. While the Bible begins and ends with the premise that God exists, it also provides a wide range of evidences for those who have chosen to reject the knowledge of God. It also teaches us how to approach these folks.