2021 Retreat

Outline

Goals:

- Answer and address hidden concerns, doubts and questions
- To lay a foundation for defending our faith
- To instill the idea that for any question, there IS an answer
- To give comfort that they can come to any of their servants with any of their questions judgment-free

Outline

- Sunday night Introductory Topic
  - What is Apologetics?
  - Can we know anything for certain?
  - How is faith involved?
  - What will we learn in this convention?

- Day 1: Does God Exist?
  - Station 1: Creation
    - How does the Creation account match with what we know?
  - Station 2: Science
    - How can we refute the false ideas presented as fact by science?
  - Station 3: Philosophical
    - What is our purpose in life? How does this convey the existence of God?
  - Station 4: Historical
    - What extra-biblical evidence is there for Christianity?

- Day 2: Which God? Proofs for Christianity
  - Station 1: Prophecy
    - How does the Old Testament point to the New?
  - Station 2: Logic
    - It is illogical that Christianity would have survived this long... unless it is true
  - Station 3: Resurrection
    - The Resurrection is the fundamental basis of Christianity... is there any proof for it?
  - Station 4: Miracles
    - Are there any signs in the modern day and time of the truth of Christianity?

Resources

- Timeless Truth in Truthless Times (George Bassilios)
- Evidence for Christianity (Josh McDowell)
- The Historical Jesus (Gary Habermas)
- The Resurrection of the Shroud (Mark Antonacci)
- Intelligent Design 101 (H. Wayne House)
- Case for Christ (Lee Strobel)

Below are some ideas for the above outline... they are just potentials and nothing is set in stone. It is impossible to cover all of the below, but we should cover at least one or two items in every station.

The important thing will be interactive delivery, activities, etc.

Introductory Topic:

- "Pretest": I think it would be good to give them a handout or something that has some of the below questions phrased as yes or no questions. We know that they will say the right answer for all of them. But then after they are done, tell them "Now go through each question you just answered and prove it."
  - "Does God exist?"
  - "Did God create the world?"
  - "Did God create man or did man evolve from animals?"
  - "Did Jesus rise from the dead?"
  - "True or False: Jesus is God"
  - "True or False: The Holy Spirit is God"
- What is Apologetics? When do we use apologetics? What are the categories or levels of apologetics?
  - Christ used apologetics!
  - The disciples taught us to be ready to give an answer (e.g. 1 Peter 3:15)
  - We see examples of defending the faith in Scripture (St Stephen's speech, Elijah)
- Can we know for certain?
- How is faith involved?
- Is probability involved? Difference between possible and probable

Day 1: Does God exist

Goal: At the end of the day, we have arrived at the conclusion, from four different and independent perspectives, that God exists.

Station 1: Creation (Bible)

- In this station, we will read the Creation account in Genesis 1-2

- **Activity**: Everyone goes outside and examines nature from the smallest to the biggest of things, from the different seasons, different materials, patterns, colors. Then sit down and write what order the world was created in based on your observations.
- We can compare the Creation account and especially the order of creation with what science has told us (i.e. light and then water, plants and then animals)
- Also the importance of time - science tells us that millions of years were needed for the world to get to what it is now... does the Bible Support that? Or is it seven 24 hour days
- This Genesis account that was written thousands of years before the first telescopes and microscopes were invented... what are the odds that it got it all right?

Station 2: Science

- What is science? What is the scientific method? What does science look like? Can science form a conclusion about something that's outside the physical realm?
- **Activity**: Do some experiment that collects data of some sort... and then let everyone form a conclusion from that data. Compare conclusions... see how the data is linked to the conclusion?
- How do we argue against science?
  - Challenge the Integrity of the Data
  - Identify a gap between the data and the conclusion
  - Offer an alternate conclusion based on the Data
- Origin of Life:
  - What is Evolution? What does science KNOW? What does science THEORIZE?
  - Challenge the data, identify the gap, offer an alternate conclusion
- Origin of Matter:
  - What is the Big Bang? What does science KNOW? What does science THEORIZE?
  - Challenge the data, identify the gap, offer an alternate conclusion

Station 3: Philosophical (Patristic)

- If God exists, why did He create man?
- What is my purpose in life?
- How does the existence of God give me purpose in life?
- What is free will? How do I know I have free will?
- Why does God allow people to suffer?
- George Bassilious covers this area very well in Timeless Truths
- We don't have to cover all of these points (since time is limited)

Station 4: Historical

- Extrabiblical sources of Christ
- Archaeology, Historical Documents, etc.
- Maybe the Shroud of Turin and Sudarium of Oviedo?
- Biblical Manuscripts (as compared with manuscripts of any other writing in the history of the world)
- https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/youth-writings/the-case-for-jesus-from-a-well-prepared-15-year-old/

Day 2: Which God?

Goal: At the end of the day, we know how to defend our Christian faith against some of the common attacks

Station 1: Prophecies

- As part of Engagement/Activity, we can liken this to fingerprint evidence... maybe some sort of game where they are detectives and they have to find all the fingerprints
- How does the Old Testament point to Christ?
  - Typology
  - Shadows
  - Prophecies
- What are the odds

Station 2: Logical

- There are three ways to spread a message for it to be successful:
  - With Deceit (i.e. in secret) - Mormonism
  - With Power and Compulsion (i.e. forcefully) - Islam
  - Openly, with conviction, tolerating the consequences - Christianity
- It is illogical that Christianity would have survived or flourished:
  - The message was difficult to accept
  - You cannot join the group unless you believe the message
  - The message was spread at a time of no "freedom of speech" or "political correctness"
  - Christianity had many powerful opponents
    - Religious opponents in the Jews
    - Philosophical/Intellectual opponents in the Greeks
    - Political opponents in the Romans
  - Punishment is severe torture, imprisonment or death
  - Started with very few people (just 120 or so)
  - All of the leaders were martyred and killed publicly
    - If it was a lie, why would they die for it?
    - If it's a mass lie... really, no one gave in and said the truth? What did they gain?
  - To join you had to forsake your riches and forsake worldly pleasures

Station 3: The Resurrection

- What are the proofs of the Resurrection?
- What are the arguments against the Resurrection and how do we answer them? (e.g. Mass Hallucination... Jewish argument, etc.)
- “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most

powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely" - Charles Colson

Station 4: Modern-Day Miracles and Saints

- St Mary Zeitoun happened in the late 60s, went on for two years, there are photographs from before the days of Photoshop (some of them taken by Muslims), many people came from around the world to witness it
- Pope Kyrillos and the multitudes that witnessed to his miracles

Day 1 - Station 2: Science

Structure

- Introduction (5min)
- Experiment (10min)
- Material Body (15min) - Different for each level
- *Questions can be asked at any time*

Introduction

- What is Science?
  - Physical, Empirical
  - Hypothesis, Collect Data, Conclusions

- Why would we want to refute?
  - Because Science (Physical) is making claims about the metaphysical: namely, that God does not exist
    - They say: Evolution is where humans came from, therefore God doesn't exist
    - They say: The Big Bang is where matter came from, therefore God doesn't exist

- How to refute scientific theories?
  - Refute the Data itself
  - Identify a gap between the data and the conclusion
  - Offer alternative conclusions using the same data

Experiment

- Refute the Data itself
  - Data:
    - Here is a rock (small rock)
    - Here is another rock (medium rock)
    - Here is another rock (large rock)
    - Here is a fourth rock (very large rock)
    - Here is a fifth rock (soccer ball)
  - Conclusions:
    - Since we found all of these on the ground, they must all be rocks. Therefore, anything that was found on the ground is a rock

- Identify a gap between the data and the conclusion
  - Data:

        - Here is a rock (very small rock)
        - Here is another rock (small rock)
        - Here is another rock (medium rock)
        - Here is another rock (large rock)
        - Here is a fourth rock (very large rock)
    - Conclusions:
        - All rocks start small and then grow over time. So here we have a young rock, an older rock, an even older rock, and a very old rock. - NOT GREAT! There's a missing piece of data… there's no evidence that rocks can grow. The gap between the data and the conclusion is too large.
        - The Rocks must be formed from water since they all have different shapes and water doesn't hold its form. So they used to be water that kept its form. - NOT GREAT! There's no evidence or indication that water can turn into rock! The gap is too large.

- Offer alternative conclusions based on the same data
    - Data:
        - Same as above
    - Conclusions:
        - They all came from the same rock, and broke off at different sizes.
            - This is based on some other things that have already been proven (i.e. that rocks can break - especially when weathered)
            - This can also be reproduced! We can take a big rock and hit it with a hammer and watch it break into smaller rocks of varying sizes
        - They came from different rocks!
            - This is also based on some observations (e.g. different colors of the rocks, collected in different areas, etc.)
            - This can also be reproduced
        - They were all bigger rocks, and three of them got smaller due to weather conditions
            - This can also be reproduced! We can take several large rocks and submerge them in different weather conditions: water, heat, ice, etc. and monitor them over periods of time and watch them decompose
            - This can also be observed in nature
- How does this relate to Evolution?
    - There are two types of evolution:
        - Adaptation (Microevolution)
        - Darwinian Evolution
    - Adaptation is proven science and accepted by us. It has been observed by science. An example of this is our immune system which over time is able to adapt better to different diseases. Someone who gets COVID once, is much less likely to get it again. This is actually an indication of Intelligent Design… the Creator is so Intelligent that His Creation can adapt!
    - Darwinian Evolution is a theory and it is not supported by evidence… the theory that one species can evolve into another species
        - What is the Data?

    - Fossil Records (Pass around the pictures)
    - Similarities among living organisms (Pass around the pictures)
  - What is the Conclusion?
    - That humans evolved from monkeys who evolved from other species, who evolved from a single cell
    - That God does not exist
  - How can we challenge the Data?
    - Some fossils were found that they say are “transitional” fossils - meaning they are between monkey and human. But who’s to say they aren’t monkey? Who’s to say they aren’t human? We challenge this data. There is no indication that they belonged to a human or a monkey or something in between.
    - Both of these birds have wings, and they are similar… but is one’s wings better than the other? Does this mean the one with worse wings will go extinct and the other will flourish?
  - What kind of gaps can we identify from the Data to the Conclusion?
    - That’s exactly what we did with the rocks… Even though there is something that looks like a monkey, and something that looks like a man, and something that kind of looks like both… you can’t say one came from the other
    - Can we observe any change in species?
  - Can we offer alternative solutions?
    - The fact that there is so much variety in something as primitive as a monkey shows that Intelligence of God’s design… and yet, the fact that there is similarity among species, shows that they were created by the same Being

Material Body

Grade 6: Unanswered Questions by Evolution

- Evolution introduces more questions than it answers
  - What happened to all the missing transitional pieces?
  - Where did the first organism come from?
  - Why don’t we see innumerable transitional forms walking among us?
  - Why isn’t nature currently in confusion after millions of years of this process?
- Evolution requires more faith than believing in God

Grade 7-8: Probability

- Let’s shift our focus to mathematics and probability.
- Using these blocks, I’m going to make a human… this is a relatively simple structure! It’s just a few pieces put together in a specific order.
- But it’s only simple to me because I’m intelligent! To someone like Benjy, this is very complex - how do I get this piece to connect to that piece? How do I get them to balance out and stand up?

- Do you think that Benjy could make this?
- Let’s take it one step further… do you think that if I emptied this whole container of blocks on the floor, the blocks would arrange themselves into humans and trees and stuff like that?
  - Of course not!
  - It’s not impossible…. But it’s highly improbable.
- That’s because of something called entropy! Entropy means that the universe gravitates towards chaos - so if I grabbed a pile of sand, and I dropped it, it wouldn’t land as a sand castle! Even though it’s the same sand that could make a sand castle!
- The probability is astronomical.
- Now imagine a complex organism like a human…. Some scientists will tell us that humans were formed by random. A bunch of cells got together and formed the human… but let’s examine one aspect of humans. Speech.
- How do you speak?
  - It starts in the brain. There’s a part in the center of the brain that knows what you want to say, so it sends signals through your nervous system to your lungs. And your lungs expel just enough air to vibrate your vocal chords in just the right way to produce sound for as long as the word is.
  - Of course where did this air come from and how did it get into your lungs is a whole nother story.
  - But you’ve just produced sound. How do you turn that into speech?
    - Your tongue has to move in a certain way to produce each sound… it gently touches the top front of your mouth for L, but it touches it more aggressively for D. And more towards the front for T. S needs to touch while pushing air through.
    - Then your lips have to move in a certain way to produce other sounds… there are 60 muscles that control the way your lips move. If you want to make a M B or P your lips have to close and open at just the right time. If you want F your teeth have to come in front of your bottom lip.
    - And you take all those sounds and put them in a specific way with all the air that’s coming at a specific time and you get a word.
    - This is why St Gregory the Theologian in the Liturgy of St Gregory writes “You have given me the gift of speech”
    - And we do this a million times a day.
    - Did such a complex system happen randomly? What is the probability? Astronomical.
- It is not reasonable to believe that we came about randomly, with all of our complexity. But rather - just like the human made of blocks - we must have had an Intelligent Designer.

Grade 9-10: Science of Evolution

- We can also examine Evolution at the scientific level. In 9th and 10th grade at school, you learned about DNA and what it looks like and the chemical bonds that form it.
- What is DNA?
  - DNA is what stores genetic information about living organisms

    - DNA is a Double Helix that has several nucleotides that bond together.
    - These are base pairs where A (Adenine) bonds to T (Thymine) and G (Guamine) bonds to C (Cytosine).
- How does DNA store information
    - The order of these nucleotides gives us the genetic information.
        - For example ATGCCGTACCGA is a different genetic markup than TACGGGTTAACGCTA
        - AThe order is what matters
    - DNA is replicated by a process called… Replication
    - DNA is turned into proteins by a process called Transcription and Translation
    - Both of these processes depend on the order of the nucleotides
- How does the structure of DNA disprove Evolution
    - The idea of Evolution is that all of this happened by natural forces… but if it's all natural forces, then DNA cannot store information… let's examine all the natural forces on DNA
    - The helix is composed of two sugar-phosphate backbone strands
    - There are four nucleotides (A-T-G-C) that bond to those strands with a Phosphate Bond. This is on the horizontal axis
    - There is a chemical affinity that bonds A-T with a hydrogen bond or C-G with a hydrogen bond. A cannot bind to C or G; T cannot bind to C or G. This is on the horizontal axis.
    - We can do an activity to demonstrate this
        - The sugar backbone is a line along the floor. Each kid is a nucleotide stretching their hands out. The rules are:
            - Girls can only bond with girls
            - Boys can only bond with boys
            - You can only bond if the first letter in your name (first or last) matches the first letter of the other name (first or last)
        - What forces are at play?
            - Gravity attaching each person to the ground
            - Force of gender bonding girls with girls and boys with boys
            - Force of naming bonding
            - What direction are all of these forces?
            - Is there any force in the vertical direction? Is there any force or rule that says the order must be Maria then Danny then Monika then Joe, etc?
            - The same with DNA
    - All of the natural forces happen on the horizontal axis… but the data encoding happens on the vertical axis!
        - If there was a natural force that dictated the vertical axis (i.e. "T has to come after A" or "G has to come after T"), then the sequence is predictable and if it's predictable it stores no information because it will always look the same
- Conclusion:
    - The structure of DNA, itself, proves that natural forces are not the only thing at play in the formation of DNA (and thus, the formation of life).

Appendix

- Why is Evolution taught in school?
  - McClean vs Arkansas Board of Education 1981
    - Defined science as **guided by natural law**
    - Said that natural phenomenon can only be explained in school by **natural law**
    - Scientist results must **be empirically testable**
    - Scientists must hold **their views tentatively**
  - School boards reject the teaching of Creation because it is not “falsifiable” - because it is not explained by “natural law” and it is not “empirically testable”