

# How to Stop the Bad Ideas That Plague Us

## Lessons Learned from the Front Lines of Disease Control

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**Jeff Myers** is an authority on Christian worldview and apologetics who teaches Christians how to understand what they believe, why they believe it and how to defend it against fatal worldviews. Over the last 20 years, Jeff Myers has become one of America's most respected authorities on Christian worldview, apologetics, and youth leadership development. He's the author of several books and the president of Summit Ministries. Dr. Myers lives in Colorado with his family.

We live in a time of war.  
There are no soldiers in this battle.  
There are no landing craft, no bombers  
flying in formation, no artillery emplacements.  
Yet attacks occur every minute of every day.



The battle we're in is a battle of ideas. To be spiritually and mentally strong, we need a healthy worldview that inoculates us against the bad ideas we pick up from the culture around us. In my new book, *The Secret Battle of Ideas About God*, I show how we can win against bad ideas by thinking of them as viruses and by paying attention to the steps doctors take to stop deadly diseases.

### Bad Ideas are Like Viruses

The battles we face are more like germ warfare than like military warfare, because bad ideas are like viruses. A virus is an organism with genetic material coated by a protein. Genetic material is common and ordinarily not harmful. Proteins are necessary for the body to do its work. Separately, they're harmless. When combined, however, they can be deadly.

*Secret Battle* reveals the four steps doctors take to battle against viral outbreaks and shows how these same four steps

can immunize us against bad ideas and replace them with good ideas about love, healing, purpose, peace and hope.

### Four Steps to Stopping Bad Ideas: What We Can Learn from the Battle against Disease

A recent *Time* article frightfully revealed how scientists are scrambling to prevent the next viral outbreak that could kill millions. In the article, Bill Gates says that highly infectious disease is humanity's greatest threat.

Gates is right. Sort of. Deadly diseases have killed millions in the past. But bad ideas can be deadlier. The ideas of Nazism and Marxism resulted in the deaths of hundreds of millions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both ideas started in books—in Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

When faced with potentially catastrophic viral outbreaks, doctors have learned not to sit back and hope for the best. Rather, they take decisive action, using four specific steps to curb a virus's growing impact. I call this the 4 I's—Identify, Isolate, Inform, and Invest.

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### **First, doctors identify the virus' characteristics.**

Doctors can identify viruses by the symptoms they cause: aches and pains, fever and so forth. We can identify the symptoms of bad ideas, too. Among Christians, for example, a terrible "virus" is striking the young. One measure of the virus' reach is how many drop out of church. Up to 75 percent of students who were significantly involved in church in high school no longer attend church as 20-somethings, and only 35 percent return and attend regularly (defined as at least twice a month).

Many think higher education is the problem. It's not. Those who don't attend college after high school are even more likely than college-goers to stop attending church.

As I've worked with tens of thousands of young people, I've seen how easily their minds are taken captive by worldviews such as secularism, which says that God is irrelevant; by postmodernism, which says that the search for truth is fruitless; and by New Spirituality, which teaches that everything is one and that we are all gods.

A recent study by the Barna Group, commissioned by my organization, shows that such worldviews don't just infect the young. We found that among church-going Christians,

- 61% agree with ideas rooted in New Spirituality.
- 54% resonate with postmodernist views.
- 38% are sympathetic to some Muslim teachings.
- 36% accept ideas associated with Marxism.
- 29% believe ideas based on secularism.

The battle of ideas affects us all. We need to identify ideas that stand against Christ so we can take every thought captive in obedience to Him (2 Cor. 10:5).



### **Second, doctors isolate the virus' impact by tracing where it has been and who is at risk.**

Idea viruses hitch rides on someone or something that otherwise seems completely harmless. Just as viruses trick the body because they're coated with proteins, something the body finds beneficial, bad ideas are lies coated in bits of truth. For example:

- "The physical world is all we can see" (Therefore, anything spiritual is merely a creation of the human imagination.)
- "Some rich people are greedy" (Therefore, we are justified in confiscating wealth.)
- "Often, religious people lie" (Therefore, no religious message should be believed.)
- "Forces are at work beyond what we can see" (Therefore, God must be a force, not a person.)

Bad ideas masquerade as something good—or at least harmless. Otherwise, they wouldn't spread. Bad ideas can seem good at first because they give us a feeling of power. We need to be able to isolate what makes them deadly so we're not caught off guard.

### **Third, scientists inform people of how to stop the virus.**

William McGuire, a psychology professor in the 1950s, specialized in showing people how to resist bad ideas. He suggested that you don't just tell people the truth; you also inform them of the 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. Inoculation worked against deadly viruses such as polio and smallpox. McGuire thought it might also help people resist bad ideas.

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To test his theory, McGuire prepared arguments in favor of widely rejected claims, such as “Brushing your teeth is bad for you.” He then organized test groups with varying degrees of preparation to resist those messages.

As you might expect, better-prepared participants were less likely to be caught off guard. But one disturbing finding emerged: just reinforcing what people already knew seemed to make them more susceptible to bad ideas.

The point is that we can't just pretend bad ideas don't exist and hope no one will believe them. It seems counterintuitive, but with so many bad ideas threatening to infect us, we need to know what makes bad ideas bad so we are not as vulnerable to them.

#### **Fourth, scientists invest in those who are sick by helping them survive and recover.**

The final thing you can do to stop bad ideas is help people survive once they've been attacked. With deadly viruses, doctors treat patients with medication to combat infection and with massive doses of fluids and electrolytes to keep

their bodies from going into shock. Prompt intervention buys time for the body to fight for itself, increasing the chance of survival.

In the battle of ideas, we should have compassion on those who've been misled, *loving* them into the truth more than *arguing* them into it. People who have been taken captive by idea viruses won't be stuck in them forever if we're willing to ask questions to get them thinking and to help them develop a hunger for the truth.

### **Jesus is the Cure**

Jesus is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6). In *Secret Battle*, I show that Jesus offers the way to truly think like He thinks, feel what He feels, and live like He did as we go about finding love, healing hurt, discovering meaning, pursuing peace and living with hope.

Because of Jesus, fake worldviews cannot destroy us. His love is unconditional. He has triumphed over evil for our sake. He calls us and gives us a reason to live. He points the way to forgiveness and peace with our enemies. He enables us to live every day knowing that his unmatched power brings hope, both in this life and in the life to come.

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Yes, we are in a secret battle of ideas, but the outcome is assured. Jesus has won. 