

Leveraging the Truth About The Da Vinci Code

Introduction:

What's the big deal about Dan Brown's book, "The Da Vinci Code"?

Why should the church worry about a movie coming out on May 19th entitled, "The Da Vinci Code"?

Why all this stir among both the Catholic Churches and the Protestant Churches?

Why are the Christians threatened to boycott the theaters?

Let me read to you an e-mail that was sent to one of our Nazarene pastors in Denver, Colorado that responds to the Da Vinci Code:

"...nobody has ever taken into account the other "gospel" that were found in the same site (with the Dead Sea Scrolls). The problem a lot of church officials have ... is with a book called the Gospel of Mary. The book says that Jesus and Mary were married and that Jesus wanted Mary to continue His ministry not Peter ... But the Catholic Church was run by men who thought that women were inferior and so the ... oppression of women was started by the church ... so all of those books were considered contra-ban ... I have a real hard time believing everything a book has to say when I have never been "allowed" to see the rest of the books that should have been put into the Bible ... If you ... persecute all

those who oppose your religion, eventually enough people will be brought around to think like you want them to ... History unfortunately is written by the victor not by both sides of the struggle."

Some of the questions that need to be answered concerning Dan Brown's fictional book: "The Da Vinci Code" needs to be answered:

- 1) Where does this man's theology come from?
- 2) Why are so many people paying attention to it?

The Los Angeles Times wrote, "This book seriously challenges many traditional Christian beliefs, if not alters them."

When The Da Vinci Code was published, more than 40 million copies were sold.

And I contend, if this book has had this kind of influence, think about the impact the movie will have when it is released on May 19th.

For several weeks, I have been contemplating how to approach this serious situation in our church. So for the next 4 weeks, I am going to respond to Dan Brown's teaching from theologians who have studied it and from my own personal research.

Today we are going to "Seek the Real Truth about Jesus' Divinity.

Next week, on Mother's Day, we will "Seek the Real Truth about the Bible's view of Women, especially those in their relationship with Christ.

On Week three, we will "Seek the Real Truth about the Bible's Reliability."

And Finally, after the movie has been out for over a week, we'll "Seek the Real Truth about What's Right and Wrong with "The Da Vinci Code."

I don't tell you this to draw attention to myself, but I have eight years in Biblical studies in Bible College and Seminary and my degrees are a Bachelor of Sacred Literature and a Master's in Biblical Theology and Philosophy.

So I do have some credentials to approach this and try to rightly give a study to you.

In the next several weeks, many people are going to be asking us believers what we think about this movie called, "The Da Vinci Code".

What are we going to say to them? How are we going to respond?

Will we be able to see this time as an evangelistic tool to reach our loved ones and neighbors with the truth coming from the Word of God?

Many of you will know the name Lee Strobel, I want to quote him here:

"I went to Europe along with Garry Poole to personally investigate the allegations against Christianity contained in Dan Brown's novel The Da Vinci Code, which is going to premiere as a movie on May 19. One of the most interesting things we encountered was two polar opposite attitudes toward the book by two different churches.

The first church is historic Westminster Abby in London, which is the scene of a climactic scene in the book. Director Ron Howard asked permission to film the movie inside the Abby, but the officials there turned him down cold. They said the novel is filled with "factual errors" and is "theologically unsound" and therefore they weren't going to open their doors for the film.

And a lot of Christians in America are reacting the same way – let's protest the film, let's ignore it and hope it goes away, let's boycott it and maybe picket it.

Friends, I can totally understand that attitude, because my initial reaction to reading the book was anger and indignation.

After all, the novel says that everything we've been told about Jesus is wrong; that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and they had a child named Sarah; that the four Gospels in the New Testament are unreliable; and, most seriously, that Jesus was a mere human being who never claimed to be God, but who was deified in the fourth century by the Roman Emperor Constantine for his own nefarious purposes."

Now let me interject here – these are outrageous accusations that cut to the core of Christianity. And I feel that we must join the rest of Christendom in scrutinizing this and showing believer the

falsehood of it all.

And yet because Dan Brown cleverly blends fact with fiction, many people think these allegations are true.

One out of every three Canadians who have read the book actually believes there are descendants of Jesus walking among us today.

According to pollster George Barna, over half of American readers – 53 percent – said the book has been helpful in their “personal spiritual growth and understanding.” Now people – think about this!

This is why we who preach the Word of God must address this.

One Da Vinci Code reader said to a pastor: “I will never again set foot into a church, because now I know the real story.”

So there’s good reason to be upset that people are buying the book’s premise that Christianity is a fraud.

Let me continue on with Lee Strobel:

“The second church Garry and I visited was Lincoln Cathedral, which is a two-hour train ride north of London. After being turned away from Westminster Abby, Ron Howard went there in the hopes he could transform the interior of this ancient church into a replica of the Abby for his movie.

Cathedral officials were just as critical of Brown’s book as the Abby officials were. They called it “speculative and far-fetched” and even heretical in places. But then they said something very interesting: “The book claims that the church has suppressed important facts about Jesus. The way to counter this accusation is to be open about the facts and welcome vigorous debate.”

They decided to let Howard inside to film. Whether that was the right choice or not is debatable, but I do agree with their basic point, which is that dialogue and engagement are much more productive than protesting and picketing.”

I want you to consider with me what happened in Acts 17 when the Apostle Paul traveled to Athens –

Athens was once the center of classical antiquity and home of such famous philosophers as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

By this point, Athens was resting on its past, but it was still an intellectual capital, sort of like a major university town today.

In my experience, I would liken it to United Theological Seminary, in Dayton, Ohio, where I had an interested experience with the “Intellectuals” of Scripture.

But Athens was a city dedicated to idol worship.

In fact, Athens had more statues of gods and goddesses than all the other cities of the day combined.

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So in walks the Apostle Paul.

Was he repulsed by what he saw? Absolutely!

Verse 16 says he was *“greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.”*

I bet you anything that part of him didn't want to just picket and protest – he probably wanted to smash a few statues before lunch!

Yet he knew he was facing a choice: He could either lash out or he could reach out.

The Question for us is this: What will we do? Will we lash out or reach out?

Paul could either attack the idolaters of Athens or he could attract them – but he couldn't do both at the same time.

So Paul decided to engage with them.

Verse 17 says: *“So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.”*

Whoever he encountered, wherever he encountered them – Paul initiated spiritual conversations.

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In fact, he was taken to the Areopagus to face the intellectual elites of Athens – and in verse 22 he actually congratulates them for being spiritual. He says,

“Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.”

In effect, he was building a bridge by saying, “Hey we have something in common. You're religious and so am I. Let's build on that.”

With that as a starting point, he delivered a brilliant discourse, giving them persuasive reasons for believing in Jesus Christ, who proved He's the Son of God by returning from the dead.

He proved the Divinity of Jesus, that Christ was truly the Divine, Son of God.

In fact, Paul clearly knew their stuff – he had read their book and seen their movie, so to speak – and he quoted from confidence from their own sources.

And how did people react?

Verse 32 says, *“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’”*

And verse 34 adds, ***“A few men became followers of Paul and believed.”***

Friends, Christianity is facing a huge challenge with The Da Vinci Code.

There are over 40 million copies in print; when the paperback was released recently, they sold 500,000 copies the first week alone.

The movie is simply going to amplify the impact and bring Dan Brown’s allegations to a whole new audience.

And we have the same choice Paul faced in the first century: **we can lash out or we can reach out** – and based on the Paul’s approach, I think our decision is clear.

Why couldn’t we use this as an evangelistic tool to build bridges like Paul did by celebrating that many people are becoming spiritually curious because of the book and movie?

Why can’t we seize this opportunity to engage them in conversations that could change their lives and eternities?

Now – as a church and believers we could lash out and protest and stand in lines at the theaters and miss the opportunity to help change some people for Jesus.

You know what? A few are going to sneer at us.

Some are going to want to go deeper into extended conversations and dialogue.

And in the end, it’s my prayer that many will find forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ and Lord and Savior.

In fact, wouldn’t it be ironic that this novel that presents a false Jesus would spark a trend of spiritual seeking that would bring countless people to faith in the real Jesus?

But it will only happen if all of us believers get on the page of being willing to debate that Jesus is the Son of God and He is Divine.

In Colossians 1:15-16 it reads, ***“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by Him and for Him.”***

In Mark 15:39, the Roman Centurion who witnessed Jesus’ death on the cross called out: ***“Surely this man was the Son of God.”***

Even some of the Non-canonical books such as I Clement reads in 36:4-5 ***“But of His Son the Master said, “Thou art My Son ... sit thou on my right hand.”***

Ignatius wrote in 100 AD to the Ephesians and said this about Jesus, ***“Jesus Christ our GOD!”***

Another Non-canonical book Dadache 7:1 reads, ***“Baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the SON and of the Holy Spirit.”***

Polycarp said to the Philippians in 12:2, ***“...the Eternal Priest Himself, Jesus Christ, The Son of God, build you up in faith...”***

Another historian by the name of Tertullian wrote in ***“This Word ... is called the Son of God, from unity of substance with God.***

Let me give you one more historian by the name of Eusebius, ***“We believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, GOD of God, Light of Lights, Life of Life, Son, only begotten, Firstborn of all creation.”***

I know and understand that this can be pretty heavy, but in this short list of writings other than what we have in the Word of God, we clearly see the teaching that Jesus is Divine and it stretched from the New Testament time of 90 AD to the time of Constantine in 313 AD.

Dan Brown might object to these thoughts and contend that these were forced on people of that day.

But let me take you to a historical event on March 303 AD when Diocletian gave an Imperial Edict and it read,

“...published everywhere ordering that the churches be razed to the ground, that the Scriptures be destroyed by fire, that those holding office be deposed and they of the household be deprived of freedom, if they persisted in the profession of Christianity.” - Eusebius

Folks, listen to me – Believer this is important here. These early Christian believers who wrote these things about Jesus’ divinity were slaughtered for their faith up until the time of Constantine’s 313 Edict of Milan that proclaimed ***“that it was right that Christians and all others should have the freedom to follow the kind of religion they favored.”***

Nothing is more exciting than getting into spiritual discussions with seekers – although, I’ll admit that sometimes these discussions don’t work out the way you think they will.

One pastor had an embarrassing incident happen to him. He said, “We were in the South, speaking at a conference, and we were going to one of those Cracker Barrel Restaurants for breakfast. Have you seen these? They have rocking chairs on the porch so folks can sit there and people watch. To get to the door, we had to walk past two rocking chairs. In the first one was a young woman, about 17 or 18 years old, dark hair, dark eyes; and there was a young man about the same age in the other chair. Just as

we were walking in front of the girl, I heard her say, “What’s a deist?”

Well, he had just written a book that discussed that. So he turned and looked her directly in the eyes and said, “A deist is someone who believes that God created the universe but then walked away! A deist is someone who believes God wound up the universe like a giant clock and is just letting it tick down! A deist believes God is distant, detached, and disinterested. But that’s not what the evidence shows! The evidence of biochemistry and genetics, for instance, tell us that God continued his involvement in the world after the moment of creation, and the evidence of history tells us He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to enter into human affairs to redeem humankind....”

And I was going on and on – giving her facts and figures and evidence and logic. Her eyes were as big as saucers. Finally, I turned to Mark and said, “Isn’t this amazing? We happen to be walking past her and she asks, ‘What’s a deist.’”

Mark said, “Lee...she said Buenas Dias!”

But I’ll tell you what: by then, the ice was broken! We ended up getting into a great spiritual conversation with her and her friend.”

Now, sometimes Christians complain that it’s difficult to initiate discussions about Christianity.

But, let me tell you something: in the coming weeks, as this movie opens, it’s going to be difficult not to get into spiritual conversations!

People are going to love to talk about The Da Vinci Code!

Why? Because it’s so controversial
Because it’s comes against the established church
Because people are looking for real answers.

II. So how can we, as believers engage with these people in an evangelistic adventure?

There are four things we can all do:

- We can pray,
- we can prepare,
- we can participate, and
- we can partner.

Let’s work our way through that list.

1) First, We can pray.

After all, that’s what Jesus did – in fact, have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus’ prayers for spiritually lost people continued right up until his final gasps on the cross?

As British Pastor John Stott pointed out, the imperfect tense of the Greek in which the New Testament was written tells us that Jesus didn’t just say it once, but he kept repeating it over and over on the cross – while the

nails were being driven through his feet, while the nails were being driven through his hands, all through the torture of the crucifixion – he kept repeating,

“Father, forgive them...Father, forgive them...Father, forgive them, for they know now what they do.”

In that case, how can we justify not praying specifically, fervently, and consistently for our spiritually lost friends?

We need to pray that they wouldn't be confused by the foolishness of the Da Vinci Code,

- that God would open their eyes to their need for a Savior,
- that He would open their eyes to the truth of Scripture,
- that He would prepare their hearts for the Gospel and draw them toward His kingdom.

And we should pray for ourselves –

- that God would open the door to spiritual conversations with our friends,
- that He would guide our words and attitude,
- that He would give us the love and courage we need to point people toward the true Jesus.

Illustration:

I saw the power of prayer a few years ago when I was participating in a baptism service in the old auditorium here.

We were baptizing hundreds of new believers that day, and a woman came up to me to be baptized. A man came up with her.

I said to her, “Have you received Jesus as your forgiver and leader?” And she said, “Yes.”

I didn't usually do this, but I looked at the man and said, “Are you her husband?”

He said, “Well, yes, I am.”

I asked, “Have you given your life to Jesus?”

He looked at me for a moment and his face began to sort of screw up – I didn't know what was going to happen.

Then he burst into tears, weeping and sobbing, and he said, “No, I haven't, but I want to right now!”

So in front of thousands of people he repented of his sin, received Jesus as his forgiver and leader, and I baptized him and his wife together.

After the service I was walking off the stage and another woman came running up and threw her arms around me.

She was weeping and sobbing and she kept saying, “Nine years, nine years, nine years!”

I said, “Who are you? And what do you mean nine years?”

She said, “That's my brother who you just led to the Lord and baptized. I have been praying for nine long years – and that whole time, I haven't seen one hint of spiritual interest – but look what God did today!”

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My first thought was: There's a woman who's glad she didn't stop praying in Year Eight.

And some of you are thinking, "Well, she's just getting started."

Because you've been praying for someone for ten years, or fifteen years, or twenty years. And you want to give up.

Some of you used to pray for a spiritually lost person who you love – but after a while, you stopped. You sort of made the decision for them.

Do you have someone like that who you need to resume praying for?

I admit I don't understand everything about prayer.

I know people have free will and can come to their own decisions about Christ.

But I'm also naive enough to believe James 5:16 that says, "*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*"

I particularly like the words of Mother Teresa: "When I pray, coincidences happen; when I stop, they don't."

Who is God bringing into your mind right now who you should be praying for so that you might seize the

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opportunity of The Da Vinci Code to bring them the Gospel?

After all, God is the Great Evangelist – we're merely tools in His hands.

There's no way we can bring about the conversion of anyone; but on the other hand, God can use us in the process of bringing people to faith in Him.

So first, we can pray.

2) Then, second, we can Prepare.

Remember the tsunami that hit the islands off Indonesia without warning and killed so many people a year and a half ago?

What if scientists had been able to warn the residents in advance?

That would have given them enough time to get to higher ground and avoid being swept away.

Well, America is about to get hit with a spiritual tsunami with the coming of The Da Vinci Code movie.

But the good news is that we have advanced warning.

There's still enough time for us to prepare ourselves so we can help people avoid being inundated by heretical teaching and having their faith shipwrecked.

In fact, the Bible told us 2,000 years ago that we need to be prepared.

First Peter 3:15 says, ***“Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. And do this with gentleness and respect.”***

If you're going to be effective in reaching out to people who may be spiritually confused by The Da Vinci Code, then you need to be familiar,

- first, with the story itself and,
- second, with the reasons why its claims don't withstand scrutiny.

So does that mean you should read the book or see the movie?

Well, here's my opinion. If you're thinking of going to the movie simply for personal entertainment, I'd say, “Don't do it.”

Why would you want to reward Hollywood for producing anti-Christian propaganda? But if you're going to take advantage of the Da Vinci Code to reach out to friends and neighbors, then you at least need to be familiar with the story.

You might be able to do that by reading a good summary of the book.

There are several good books in the Christian book stores that help Christians understand and explain the truth of the Word of God or the Divinity of Jesus.

Exploring the Da Vinci Code, might suffice.
Breaking the Code

Or, if you're going to read The Da Vinci Code itself, I'd suggest buying a used copy at Amazon.com, so Dan Brown doesn't get a royalty.

He already made \$40 million from the book last year, so he doesn't need your money.

I will say this: the minute you try to engage someone about the Da Vinci Code, the first question they're going to ask is: have you read the book or seen the movie?

So, at least, I would read the book, maybe do it with a Small Support Group in the Church and allow God to strengthen you to resist any doubt about His Word.

But even if you know your Bible well, you're not going to be prepared to respond to the issues raised by the movie.

- There are too many issues concerning church history and ancient history.
- So I'd recommend you read at least one book that critiques The Da Vinci Code.
- The paperback book – **Exploring the Da Vinci Code, by Stroble would be a good book to buy to give to a friend.**

Also you could go to www.LeeStrobel.com, and view video clips of interviews with experts and his free newsletter called Investigating Faith, which will give you updates.

3) Third, We need to Participate.

In other words, jump into this adventure and engage people as Paul did in Acts 17 and as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman at the well that Derek preached about in John 4 last Sunday night.

Basically, there are three levels of participation for you to consider.

Level 1 is what Bill Hybels might call, **Just Walk Across the Room.**

In other words, intentionally seek out opportunities to engage in conversations about The Da Vinci Code with people you encounter in your everyday life. This is a level everyone can participate in!

What you'll find it that it has never been easier to get into a spiritual conversation.

Many of you will do this and you'll be farther ahead and equipped because you've got a church that educated you.

- Not only did you hear the sermon
- But you also studied it in your Small Group
- You were willing to buy a book to read about it.

But you just walk up to them and ask, "Say, have you seen the Da Vinci Code?"

If they say yes – and there are some estimates that **nearly one out of every three Americans has read it** – then I ask, **"Did you like it?"**

Then you ask the follow-up question is: **"What percentage of it do you think is true?"**

Now, it's a good idea to have a resource handy to put into their hands if you can't spend a lot of time in the conversation.

That's why you could use a paper book to give to them to read, such as **Exploring the Da Vinci Code** or **Breaking the Da Vinci Code.**

But let's face it: we're more apt to get into spiritual conversations if we know we don't have to necessarily bring it to resolution right then and there, but we can give them a book that will answer all their questions.

Or **Level 2 would be** if we had some Small Groups in our church who would be willing to take this on as a Study – you could invite them to come to your study.

What a wonderful opportunity to do some serious evangelistic outreach with people who have questions and especially for those who are unchurched.

Here are some questions you could take into discussion:

- Which did you like more, the book or the movie?
- What parts of the movie did you like best and which did you like least?
- What did you think of Tom Hank's hair? Don't laugh – that's turning into a big deal. Apparently, the studio is upset because audiences that have previewed the movie have hated Hank's hair style!

Then get into more substantive questions, such as:

- What did you hear that changed your opinion about history?
- What did you hear that changed your opinion about Jesus?
- If you could ask God about one issue raised by the movie – and you knew He would address it – what

would you ask?

The Da Vinci Code movie is a great impetus for saying to people, “Hey, I know you liked the book or movie – how'd you like to join a group to discuss some of the main issues that Dan Brown raises?”

You can tell them about what we are doing here at PCN in the next three weeks.

- We will discuss next week: The Truth about Women and Jesus' relationship with them.
- We will discuss the following week: Can we Trust the four Gospels of the Bible.
- And the fourth week we will discuss: The Real Truth about what's Right and what's Wrong with 'The Da Vinci Code.'

Now, I realize some of you are not going to be effected one way or the other.

But I hope and trust you won't dismiss this “Hot Topic” and you'll at least help us pray on Level 1.

One other thought. Many of you are already in small groups.

Could I challenge you to push the pause button on what you're currently studying and spend the next four weeks going through the Da Vinci Code curriculum so you'll be ready when friends ask you questions.

Or, better yet, invite a few of your friends to join your group for the next four weeks.

Friends, I hope you'll pray about the level of participating that God wants you to pursue – and then seize this spiritual opportunity!

Colossians 4:5 says, *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”*

It's not everyday that a major book and motion picture catapult Jesus into the center of daily conversations and media interest.

This is your chance to leverage this movie to reach your friends who would otherwise not be interested in having a general spiritual conversation.

Now, whatever level of participation you decide is best for you, there's one more P word in our outline –

Partner.

By that, I mean that all of us as individuals can partner with our church to leverage the Da Vinci Code movie for God's glory.

I really think they're going to be exciting services,

covering the most important issues raised by the book – from the hottest topic (whether Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene) to the most important topic (whether Jesus really is the Son of God).

Please, partner with the church in reaching your friends.

We promise you we will pray and work and sacrifice to produce the very best services we can, by God's grace; but we need you to walk across a room and invite a friend, a neighbor, a colleague, a family member – or even a stranger to attend.

And the service is just the beginning.

People can stop in for ten minutes or stay for an hour to get into informal Da Vinci Code Discussion Groups.

When you invite a friend get some discussion flowing.

Friends, when we pray, when we prepare, when we participate, and when we partner – I believe God is going to use this entire Da Vinci Code debacle for His glory.

While it's a bit disingenuous coming from him, even Tom Hanks, who stars in the movie, got it right when he said, **“I think the movie may end up helping churches do their job. If they put up a sign saying, ‘This Wednesday we're discussing the gospel,’ 12 people show up. But if the sign says, ‘This**

Wednesday we're discussing The Da Vinci Code, 800 people show up."

You remember the story of Joseph, who was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and yet eventually rose to the highest governmental levels of Egypt, where he was able to save many from starvation.

In the end, his brothers thought Joseph would punish them for their betrayal – but instead, Joseph forgave them.

As he said in *Genesis 50:20*: ***"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...."***

I don't know why Dan Brown wrote The Da Vinci Code.

For the life of me, even though it's a good read, I don't know why it has become one of the biggest-selling novels in history.

But I do know this: the final chapter of The Da Vinci Code has yet to be written.

Because God can turn what has wrought so much ill and use it to accomplish so much good – and the best news is that He's inviting you and me to participate in that process.

So let's commit ourselves and our seeking friends to God. Garry is going to come and lead us in a time of guided prayer.