



# THE WILBERFORCE FORUM

## *The Centurions Program*

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Begun in 2004, the Centurions Program is designed to develop and equip an ongoing fellowship of Christian men and women who will be trained by Chuck Colson and the Wilberforce Forum to restore our culture by effectively thinking, teaching, and advocating the Christian worldview as applied to all of life. Participants are from a variety of backgrounds, careers, and geographic areas, each of whom are intent on learning more about a biblical worldview and passing that knowledge on to others.

Many Centurions are drawn to the program by an awareness of the cultural divides in our world. In a society that values tolerance more than truth, even Christians have become susceptible to the sometimes subtle messages of relativism and postmodernism where truth is dismissed, declared, or negotiated rather than discerned. Centurions are committed to finding the truth and leading others to it. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life – no man comes to the Father except by me.” As Christians, we know that all truth begins and ends in the person of Christ and we know that God has given us Scripture as His revealed, written word. The Centurions Program, therefore, is a biblically-based, Christ-centered, worldview teaching program in which participants seek to know Christ and make Him known, seeking to discern and apply his viewpoint in every human endeavor.

### **About the Need for Biblical Worldview Training**

According to The Barna Research Group, only 22% of adults and just 6% of teens acknowledge the presence of absolute moral truth<sup>1</sup>.

George Barna’s 2003 national survey found that only 9% of born again Christians hold a biblical worldview. In his words, “Although most people own a Bible and know some of its content, our research found that most Americans have little idea how to integrate core biblical principles to form a unified and meaningful response to the challenges and

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<sup>1</sup> Barna Research Group, 2001.

opportunities of life. We're often more concerned with survival amidst chaos than with experiencing truth and significance."<sup>2</sup>

Without a solid foundation in biblical truth, moral standards are relaxed. In fact, the Barna Group's research found that Christians who did not hold to a biblical worldview were substantially more likely to condone premarital cohabitation, drunkenness, homosexuality, profanity, adultery, pornography, and abortion.<sup>3</sup> A worldview that sees truth as relative has no room for the stark reality of sin.

Additionally, a worldview that sees truth as relative must accept all religions as equally valid. A biblical worldview, however, sees Jesus as the only source of Truth and the only path to the Father. It gives Christians a zeal for evangelism and the tools to effectively communicate the good news of the Kingdom of God. These tools are becoming increasingly important among younger generations of Americans who value intellectual debate about philosophies and religious views. A recent survey on evangelism by The Barna Group found that young adults are far more likely to engage in "Socratic evangelism" – sharing their faith by engaging nonbelievers in a dialogue about "current issues and personal struggles."<sup>4</sup>

### **About The Centurions Program**

Through the Centurions Program, Christians from around the country are trained to be biblical worldview advocates in their churches and communities. Centurions make a lifelong commitment to teach others what they have learned and to shape culture by living out a biblical worldview in their spheres of influence.

The Centurions Program is an intensive, in-depth, distance-learning course lasting one year. Participants complete homework assignments, work through a daily devotional, attend weekend residences in Lansdowne, Virginia, meet regularly with an accountability partner and a prayer partner, develop and teach a worldview class, and participate in web conferences and an online community. The goal of the program is to raise up a spiritual army of Christians who view life through a biblical mindset and are equipped to identify, understand, and countermand opposing worldviews, while advocating effectively and winsomely for a Christ-centered biblical worldview.

Throughout the program, Centurions explore a number of key issues related to worldview thinking. Topics include the clash of worldviews, the Christian mind, creation and intelligent design, the Fall, truth vs. relativism, and salvation, redemption and restoration. In addition, Centurions look at how worldviews influence life in the areas of economics, work, ethics, marriage, family, sexuality, popular culture, literature and the arts, natural law, and politics. Centurions learn to advocate for the truth through apologetics, teaching, and challenging false worldviews.

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<sup>2</sup> George Barna, "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," Barna Research Group, December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Survey Shows How Christians Share Their Faith," Barna Research Group, January 2005.

## Methodologies

*Homework assignments* include reading books and articles, watching films, listening to music, writing essays, and interacting with believers and nonbelievers. In each case, the goal is to identify the inherent worldview message and to use that message as a starting point for talking about biblical worldview. A sample reading list (subject to change for 2006) is attached.

Each week, Centurions work through a series of *devotionals*. Using Scripture and the writings of pre- and post-Reformation thinkers, each day's selection includes study questions for contemplation. Centurions are expected to record their meditations in a journal and to post one journal entry each week in the online community.

Three *weekend residences* in Lansdowne, Virginia, provide a venue for fellowship and personal interaction. Each seminar includes plenary sessions, group devotionals, small group discussions, and time for fellowship.

Between the second and third weekend residence, each Centurion develops and teaches a *worldview class* or leads a small group on worldview issues. Centurions are also expected to develop and nurture relationships with people from opposing worldviews, broadening their opportunities to share from a biblical worldview. Before the third weekend seminar, each Centurion develops a three-year action plan, outlining how they intend to use their biblical worldview knowledge to bring others into a deeper understanding of the Creator.

Each Centurion is asked to meet monthly with an *accountability partner*. Ideally, a Centurion's accountability partner will be his or her pastor or another spiritually mature leader from the Centurion's home church. Centurions spend at least two hours each month with their accountability partners, allowing the accountability partner to monitor the Centurion's progress and provide feedback. In addition, each Centurion is asked to meet weekly with a *prayer partner*, who reviews the Centurion's homework, hears what the Centurion is learning, and prays with and for the Centurion.

Much of the Centurions Program is conducted online. Each month, Centurions meet online for a *web conference*. Each month's web conference features a guest speaker who will deliver a lecture, followed by a question and answer time. Teleconferences occasionally replace the monthly web conference. An *online community* for Centurions includes a message center, bulletin board, and document repository. This online community provides a way for Centurions to quickly and easily share ideas and learn from one another.

## Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, participants are expected to:

- Understand what it means to think Christianly and will be able to articulate the elements of a biblical worldview, with particular emphasis on defending the propositions that truth exists and that it is knowable.
- Be equipped to think through worldview issues for themselves.

- Understand the basics of other major worldviews competing with Christianity in Western culture, including Islam, postmodernism, secular modernism, and New Age.
- Know how to engage with individuals who hold divergent ideas about reality, not just how to engage the ideas themselves.
- Be committed to teach what they have learned to others, equipping them to know and do.
- Be linked to each other in a community of learning, accountability, and mutual encouragement.
- Know how to use Wilberforce Forum resources and materials, extending the ministry of the Wilberforce Forum into their communities.
- Demonstrate growing spiritual maturity, effective worldview living, and zeal for reaching the lost with the Gospel.

Outcomes will be evaluated primarily through peer review and self-evaluation. At the outset of the course, each Centurion completes a personal development questionnaire, which measures his or her spiritual maturity, understanding of worldview, teaching experience, and engagement with nonbelievers. At the conclusion of the program, Centurions will chart their progress in each of these areas. To ensure objectivity, each Centurion's accountability partner is asked to complete the same exercise, evaluating their partner in each of the key areas.

### **Requirement for Application**

- A vital faith in Jesus Christ
- A sense of wonder about God's Truth and the world
- Life-long pursuit of learning and intellectual growth
- A forward looking life-long commitment to hone and teach a keen biblical worldview to others, recognizing that ideas drive action and direction, and only true ideas drive right actions in the right direction
- A passion to shape a truth-based culture that increasingly embodies biblical principles
- Commitment to one year of formal learning from January 2006 to January 2007 (tentative dates). Training will include three weekend conferences in Lansdowne, Virginia (dates to be determined), monthly web conferences, mentoring sessions, and approximately 10-15 hours of homework—reading and writing—per week.
- Must be an active member in good standing of a church in his or her community
- Letters of recommendation from pastor of current church, an individual who has benefited from his or her teaching in the past, and another non-relative who knows him or her well.
- Completion of application, including acceptance and signing of Prison Fellowship's Statement of Faith.

### **Program Costs**

Costs for the program include a \$1500 program fee (subject to change) to cover costs related to web and teleconferences, speaker fees, materials and supplies and other costs incurred for weekend residences in Lansdowne, Virginia. In addition, Centurions pay an

average of \$275 per weekend for meals and lodging (3 weekends), transportation to and from the weekend residences, and approximately \$300 for books.

### **About The Wilberforce Forum and Prison Fellowship**

The Wilberforce Forum is a division of Prison Fellowship. The goal of the Forum is to help Christians approach life with a biblical worldview so that they can in turn shape culture from a biblical perspective. Using the talents of leading Christian thinkers and writers, the Forum seeks to help Christians think and live Christianly not only in church and family circles, but also in the marketplace and the public square.

The Forum is named for the great eighteenth-century reformer, William Wilberforce, who fought for twenty years in the House of Commons to abolish the slave trade in Britain and even longer for the emancipation of slaves through the British Empire. Because of his love for Christ, he dedicated himself to fight for the freedom of those who could not speak for themselves. Wilberforce sought, as well, to reform the morals of his nation, and his influence helped to lead England into the great nineteenth-century revivals. He exemplifies the Christian's role in society and provides a model for the endeavors of The Wilberforce Forum.

The biblical worldview teaching of The Wilberforce Forum provides the ethical and moral underpinnings for Prison Fellowship's outreach ministries. A non-profit, volunteer-reliant organization, Prison Fellowship's mission is *to exhort, equip, and assist the Church in its ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, victims, and their families, and in its promotion of biblical standards of justice in the criminal justice system.*

This mission statement is uniquely centered on equipping and assisting the Church in *its* ministry. Through the national mobilization and training of thousands of local churches and their members, who come from a variety of denominations and cultural backgrounds, Prison Fellowship develops effective faith-based solutions to the challenges facing prisoners, ex-prisoners, and prisoners' families.

Prison Fellowship was founded in 1976 by Chuck Colson, former Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon. Headquartered near Washington, D.C., Prison Fellowship is now the largest prison outreach and criminal justice organization in the world, operating in all 50 states and in 108 countries around the world.

# Centurions Program Reading List

**\*Subject to change for 2006**

| Month     | Book  |
|-----------|---|
| December  | Armand M. Nicholi, <i>The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life</i> (Free Press, 2003)                         |
| January   | Douglas R. Groothuis, <i>Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism</i> (InterVarsity, 2000)   |
| February  | Philip Johnson, <i>The Right Questions: Truth Meaning and Public Debate</i> (InterVarsity, 2003)  |
| March     | Harry Blamires, <i>The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think</i> (Gospel Light Publications, 1999)   |
| April     | Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., <i>Not the Way It's Supposed to Be : A Breviary of Sin</i> (Eerdmans, 1995)   |
| May       | Peter Kreeft, <i>Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles</i> (St. Augustine, 2003)                        |
| June      | Kenneth Myers, <i>All God's Children in Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture</i> (Crossway Books 1989)  |
| July      | J. Budziszewski, <i>What We Can't Not Know: A Guide</i> (Spence, 2003)  |
| August    | Blaise Pascal, <i>Pensees</i> (Penguin Books, Reissue edition 1995)<br>Bill Donahue et. al., <i>Leading Life-Changing Small Groups</i> , rev. (Zondervan, 1996, 2002) |
| September | David Wells, <i>Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision</i> (Eerdmans, 1998)  |
| October   | Abraham Kuyper, <i>Lectures on Calvinism</i> (Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 2001)   |
| November  | C.S. Lewis, <i>That Hideous Strength</i> (Scribner, 1996)<br>C.S. Lewis, <i>The Abolition of Man</i> (Harper SanFrancisco, 2001)                                      |
| December  | James Sire, <i>Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Live as a Christian Calling</i> (InterVarsity, 2000)  |

## The Wilberforce Forum

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