



Transcript: What Do We Trust? Rev. Hedy Collver

I knew a woman in college, who, when she was asked what her religion was, would respond with great pride: "I am a Macro Philosopher." She would then say with a smile, "Macro Philosophy is entirely open ended." Macro, meaning very large in scope or scale. She believed that her "philosophy" encompassed everything, nothing off limits, with all options having equal weight and importance. She did not want to be limited or confined.

I thought about this woman, when I read the passage from Ephesians 4 that we read today, especially verse 14: *"Tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching.... influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth."*

The two words that in the Greek, for being tossed and for blown about are two really very interesting words. The first one (*klydonizomai*) speaks of being tossed about as if by very large waves. Thinking of this woman, I could envision her being pushed along by a wave going this way and then by another wave going the other way. Battered back and forth. And then that second word (*perifero*), being blown about. It means to be carried, as if being bodily picked up and brought to one place. And then not being just left there, but being picked up again and brought to yet another place.

Both of these words in the Greek are in the passive tense. This person is being acted *upon*. They're not the one taking the action. This woman was being carried about, tossed about, at the whim of every new idea that crossed her path. She had a really keen intellect, was so excited about the new things she was learning, and yet she never stayed in one philosophical or theological "place" for very long. If you asked her, she would tell you that her journey was so exciting that she absolutely loved it. But what we saw in her was a very restless spirit, never content, never satisfied.

It was easier for her to explain what Micro Philosophy *was not* rather than what it *was*. But one thing she was *very* clear about was that it had nothing to do with organized religion, especially not with the Christian church. Growing up, she'd had some bad experiences with the Christian church and Christians, and she had come to equate those experiences and those particular people with what the church was all about. While Micro Philosophy encompassed a whole lot of things, one thing it definitely did not include was Christianity.

Now, I want you to understand I am not making fun of this woman, in no way, shape, or form. I am not maligning her, I am not telling you that she has flighty or stupid. I have great respect for this woman. Although I know just how restless she was, I believe that she was earnestly seeking real meaning in the best way that she knew how. She just didn't believe— even for a moment— that it could be found in the church.



College is 20 years in my past now. If this woman lived here in Alexandria in 2014, right now, she would probably very much understand this group of people we're going to be looking at over the next six weeks: the “Spiritual But Not Religious.” In the past two decades, this “Spiritual But Not Religious” group has been growing by leaps and bounds.

According to a research group called the Pew Research Center, when people were asked in the early 1990s: “What religion do you adhere to?” 11% of the people said, “None.” 11% of the respondents in the early 1990s said that they had no religious affiliation. By the end of the 90s it was up to 14%. By the mid-2000s, 16%. Just two years ago — in 2012 — the center did another study, and now it was a full 20% of the people who responded said that they were “Spiritual But Not Religious.”

1 in every 5 people. An estimated 46 million people in the United States fall into this category. 46 million Spiritual But Not Religious. That is more than all of the Protestant denominations in the US put together. What does “Spiritual But Not Religious” mean? Often in the church when we talk about “spirituality” and “religion” we're talking about the same thing. We use those words interchangeably.

The definitions are very different for the Spiritual But Not Religious. First, let's talk about the similarities between “spiritual” and “religious.” The similarities can be quickly summed in four different pieces. One: the Spiritual But Not Religious believe that there is something bigger than us, a larger reality, transcendent above human experience. Two: they want to have a deeper connection to that reality. Three: they believe that there are actions that we can take in our daily lives to help us to become better attached to that reality. Then, four: they believe that if you do become better connected to that greater reality through these actions, that it will have an impact on your life that will result in changed behavior.

Those four things are commonalities between spirituality and religion. The major difference is in the *locale* where all that takes place.

For these folks spirituality is what happens *internally*. Spirituality is personal, it is inside us. It is the authentic expression of the connection with the larger reality.

Religion, on the other hand, is considered to be *external* organizational structure. It is doctrine, it is dogma, it is all the things that they feel give too much structure and control. “Religion,” they believe, stifles spirituality.

So when someone claims to be “Spiritual But Not Religious,” what these people are saying is that they do believe that there is something greater than us out there. They just don't believe that the church is the place to find a better connection to it.



One in every five people 20%. 46 million people right out here in the US. And if you look at the folks who are 30 and younger, it's even more. One in three people. 32% of people younger than 30 say that they have no religious affiliation. And when the folks who were doing the study asked these people: What are you doing about it? Are you looking for a religion that will meet your needs, a religions that will fit with who you are? 88% of them said immediately, I'm not looking. 2% of them said I don't really understand the question or I'm not interested in answering.

Quick math, 88 plus 2. A full 90% of the people who said they were Spiritual But Not Religious said that they weren't looking at all. My friends, these people are never going to walk through our doors. These people are not going to seek you and me out for a spiritual conversation. They're just not interested.

I'm working on my doctorate up at Wesley Theological Seminary in DC. When class is in session, I take the Metro to and from school. This past January, on a Tuesday evening, I was coming back during rush hour. How many of you have ever been on the Metro at rush hour? It's awful. It was jam-packed. I got the Yellow Line on at Gallery. Me and about a million and five other people. There were no seats left, I was trying hard not to touch the bars or the straps. I was just kind of standing there, swaying back and forth, trying not to bump into all the people around me.

We got past the airport and, all of a sudden, I started really paying attention to the people around me. I started thinking: Braddock Road, King Street, Eisenhower, Huntington. Those were the only four stops were left on the line. All of these people that I was traveling with, these were my neighbors.

I know the statistics. As I looked around at the mostly young crowd around me, I was overwhelmed by the realization that of these people, a large percentage of them would have no idea how loved they were by God. They wouldn't know! I started thinking: how can we, Aldersgate, reach these people? How can I as a Christian walking around in the world, how can I reach them, how can I tell them, how can they even begin to know?

But, it begs the question also: why does it matter? If this group of people is not at all interested in knowing about us, why should we care about them? If this group of people has no interest in learning about Christianity, why in the world would we spend six weeks in church talking and learning about them?

I'll tell you why: because I have not even in the tiniest bit of doubt that each one of those people is someone who God loves with an undying love. Each one of those people is someone for whom Jesus Christ came to earth, died for and was resurrected to give hope to them. God loves them.

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I also believe it matters for a very personal reason. That Macro-Philosopher that I knew back in college was not just somebody I knew. It was me. I would be that Spiritual But Not Religious in your midst today. If it were not for a group of committed, wonderful Christ-followers — like you — who took me under their wing, who allowed me to ask all of my questions. Who were humble and sweet and funny and honest, and who helped me through their words and actions to understand how much God loved me. That is what we get to do.

You've heard me say before that I believe that the church is the hope of the world. Understand: those are not just pretty words that I was taught to say. I absolutely believe that the church is the hope of the world. But I also want you to understand that when I say “church” I am not talking about religion the way the Spiritual But Not Religious envision it. I'm not talking about the church as a building, as bricks and mortar, glass and wood. I'm not even talking about the structure of our worship service, or committee meetings. I'm certainly not talking about the United Methodist Book of Discipline. I am talking about *you*. You are the hope of the world. *You* are the hope of the world.

Colossians 1:15 tells us that Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. We are called to be the reflection of Jesus Christ as we are going about our daily lives. Our words and actions are to reflect God's love and grace. The image of Christ: that is what we are in the world... for good or for ill. When people come into conversation with us, come into contact with us, have an interaction with us, we want them to be able to experience God's love, God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's joy.

How do we even begin to do that? This is from Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 14 through 19: “When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.”

Several years ago now, my mom gave me this tiny prayer box that I wear on a chain. For many years, I would write down prayers on a little piece of paper, roll it up, and place it inside the box. I would change it out weekly or monthly, whatever it was that I was feeling at that moment. I did this so many times the hinges broke, and the top eventually fell right off. Before I superglued it permanently shut, I had to decide what prayer it was that I thought could carry me through the rest of my life.

I chose a quote from one of my favorite authors, Henri Nouwen. The quote inside rolled up on a little piece of paper goes like this: “When we live in the world with knowledge of Jesus' love, we cannot do other than bring healing, reconciliation, new life, and hope wherever we go.”

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Ephesians 3:18: *“May you have the power to understand how broad, how long, how high, how deep God's love is.”* May you increasingly know how much God loves you. May you know the lengths that God has gone to be able to show you God's love. And may you take that knowledge out into the world with you every single day, so that you can be a reflection of the Christ, who is the sign of the invisible God.

May it be so in your lives this day and always. I offer this to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.