

# How to communicate effectively about the Da Vinci Code

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Almost a third of America has read the book that presents Jesus, not as God, but a good man, married to Mary Magdalene and a father. The books of the Bible are portrayed as voted on by a church that hates women and attempts to kill anyone brave enough to reveal the "true" story. The movie's challenge to the church is huge, and following are some ideas on how to respond.

The response of the church so far hasn't stopped the book's influence. From the earliest days of the release of the book, Christian apologists quickly released books, articles, blogs and commentary refuting what the author, Dan Brown, referred to as the "facts" of the book. A cerebral, historical, apologetic reaction continues to be the primary response of the church.

It has not been tremendously effective. Just the facts seldom are. Throughout all of history there have been people who have seen the undeniable facts and their hearts were not touched. All of Israel saw the Red Sea parted; only two of them believed God enough to enter the Promised Land. Thousands saw the miracles Jesus performed, but only those who walked with him were his disciples.

It is not that the facts are not important—they are tremendously important, because we serve a God of truth and true history. But reciting the facts is not enough, it is a foundation, but the facts alone seldom change the human heart. From a few days after the release of the Da Vinci code church folks have been screaming about the false picture of Jesus portrayed in the book. Sadly, most of the folks reading the book really don't care.

What follows is not the total solution to the challenges of the book and movie—we will be dealing with this for a long time and I am literally in the process of creating teaching materials for an upcoming series at church. But while the creation of specific responses is in process, I would like to share some communication principles that will help any response you are working on be more effective.

## Define and differentiate your audiences

The number one rule of any effective communication is to know your audience. If, for example, you are a manufacturer of gardening tools and accessories and want to successfully market your product, you will tailor your offerings and your message very differently depending upon your audience, whether they are experienced, serious gardeners, weekend gardeners, or total novices who aren't sure getting their hands dirty is a fun way to spend Saturday morning.

There should be a similar audience segmentation for our responses to the Da Vinci code. Our audiences and some basic suggestions for a response could be divided this way:

1) Christ followers, church members, who believe the Bible and have studied it and the historical background of it. This group immediately saw the plot of the book as fiction and don't understand what the fuss is all about.

Suggested response: The biggest need I see in this group (discussed more below) is for them to see that it IS a big deal to a lot of people. The falseness of the claims of the book are not apparent. Many people are taking the book very seriously and their interest needs to be taken seriously.

2) Christ followers, who know Jesus as Savior, but very little about the Bible or church history. Many of these people have found the book confusing, unsettling and wonder if parts of it could be true.

Suggested response: Some of these folks are quietly frightened. They fear that many of the things they have believed in the past are not true. This is probably where a large majority of church people are. For these folks they need careful, gentle, fact-filled teaching that shows them what the true reality is behind the false claims of the movie.

3) People who are not Christ followers, but who are all created with the God-shaped vacuum in their hearts. Many of these folks consider themselves spiritual and have found in the Da Vinci Code an explanation of sacred history they

accept as truth.

Suggested response: Most of these folks will not go looking for a Christian response to the movie—they are satisfied that the book and now the movie will portray truth and they can't wait to see it. These are the people who need to know that Jesus was not a man whose wife and child were left behind to hide sad secrets, but the God-man who died, rose and is the Savior of all. For responding to them, the next section is very important.

Respond with respect

A second key communication principle is that how you say something is sometimes more important than what you say.

People are not stupid. They can tell when they are being patronized, made fun of, talked down to or if what they consider to be a serious issue is treated too lightly. The tone of a number of many materials I've read about the Da Vinci Code, that are written even by respected pastors and teachers, could be summed up by a tone that says, "How could you be so stupid as to believe that?"

Even supposed "outreach" advertisements for sermon series are headlined something like this: The Da Vinci Code, Fact or Fiction? That is not a bad title and it might be great for believers, but do you honestly think anyone not a Christ follower will be beating down your church doors to find out how wrong, stupid, easily duped they are? Probably not.

We have to sincerely ask ourselves, why anyone who is not already a convinced Christian would want to hear about anything we have to say about the movie. We do need to equip Christians to be strong and knowledgeable about their faith, but when and if you do equipping teaching don't kid yourself that the same arguments and evidence you use with church folks are appealing at all to those outside the church.

Consider the movie an opportunity for dialog, not just confrontation

Jesus didn't share the spiritual or moral world view of the Samaritan woman he met at the well, nor did he approve of her lifestyle, but he didn't approach her quoting chapter and verse about the falseness of her form of worship nor did he immediately attack the sinfulness of her lifestyle.

He engaged her in dialog. First, he asked her for something, a simple drink of water. Then from a time of conversation, questions and answers, he brought up a thirst in her life that was not being satisfied and from there, she discovered spiritual reality.

Before you attempt to engage any audience other than an already convinced church audience, do you understand why the Da Vinci Code is so appealing to people? There are ways to find out. You can ask them. Many of your unchurched friends and neighbors have read the book. Before you ask, you might want to read the book yourself.

You can also go on the web—google Da Vinci and Dan Brown the author; check out

[www.davincicodeforum.com](http://www.davincicodeforum.com). This is not a Christian apologetic site, it is a fan site. Join it, read the posts, pray for understanding and to see into the hearts of the people who contribute.

You may also want to take sometime and ask yourself, what needs is it inside people that the Da Vinci Code is meeting that people are not finding the answers to in the church?

Craft your responses specific to your audience

There is a tremendous amount of material available for already convinced Christ followers, [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org) is just one site and again a google search of the book will bring up a large number of apologetic articles. These can be the basis for sermons, classes on church history and similar responses.

What is lacking is a response to those who love the book and accept it as reality, but for whom we want to share the truth of the Gospel. By the last week in March, I should have some specific suggestions for responding to unchurched folks about the Da Vinci Code on this website, [www.thelionsvoice.com](http://www.thelionsvoice.com). On the website you'll also find numerous other

articles and resources for ministry communicators.

But until that time, this article will have served its purpose if those of you who are planning to preach and teach about the Da Vinci Code, take the time to do more than go over the facts to the already convinced, but to take time to talk to believers in the book, to understand their viewpoint, and to pray and work to communicate the true message of the gospel with gentleness and respect.