

Religious audience and the topic of evolution: lessons from the classroom – response to presentation: Lee Meadows

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Lee Meadows: 00:19 I'm Lee Meadows. I am a lifelong southerner. I am a science educator like Jamie under the University of Alabama at Birmingham. There are so many similarities. Most... Everything that I hear from Jamie just gives me a whole lot of hope because my work is in similar ways, I work mainly with Christian fundamentalist in the American South, and there's a huge resistance to learning about evolution. I've been working for about 20 years to try and solve this problem. Working with public school teachers, my basic work has been, how can I help public school teachers in the American South who are very concerned about teaching evolution for a whole bunch of reasons? How can I help them find a pathway to teach evolution? Well, teach the science, but without throwing children into turmoil. Then also like Jamie, I am a religious person myself. (01:18) I grew up Southern Baptist. She mentioned Southern Baptist in her talks. I grew up Christian fundamentalists. I am currently, I'm still a Christian. I'm not a fundamentalist though. I belong to a denomination a conservative Presbyterian denomination that says that young earth or old earth are both acceptable ways to interpret Genesis, but there has to be a historical Adam and Eve, which of course, those of you who know evolution, that throws a monkey wrench into it. But with Jamie's research, there was just so much hope around the research that she did and the way she lined things out about things that I had suspected and thought were true, but I hadn't myself been able to line them out on research. Also, there was a little bit a part of me that was, as Jamie was talking, I was "My people, science education research," everything that she did was so well done from, from the research traditions that were both parts of and just laying it out there. (02:19) Two things that I want to react to what Jamie said, acceptance sticks. That was the first thing that I got out of reading some of her research. She didn't go into it here, but it was looking at, I don't

think she did. It was looking at what happens when the students at BYU, when they learn about evolution, then Jamie looked later on to see where they were. Months later, three months later.

Jamie jensen: 02:50

About three.

Lee Meadows: 02:50

Months later, they hadn't forgotten a lot of the facts about evolution. Their knowledge of evolution had dropped, but their acceptance of evolution had stuck. That was really encouraging to me. It goes back to other science ed research that I've known her for a long time. That says that one thing that science teachers need to focus on is students' attitudes about science. If I'm a kid who gets a positive attitude about science from my science teacher, I'm more apt to read about science in the news, watch science documentaries, keep myself informed about science when I'm an adult. Talk with science about my kid... With my own kids when I have them. (03:32) That's what I saw with what her intervention had done with BYU students and their acceptance. They're more accepting of evolution. They're going to stay dialed into all of the research that comes out later on. That gave me hope for long-term change. Also, it showed me one key thing that has been part of everything that I've been doing. Also the power of a teacher, the power of a really good science teacher, a biology teacher who's tuned into the minds and the hearts of her kids or his kids. Because I think that's where evolution is. Evolution can be so disturbing. If we aren't tuned into kids' hearts, how it disrupts them, how it scares them, they'll shut down. (04:24) So a teacher and in Jamie's study, you've got teachers who are dialed in both ways and then there's that long-term effect. Then the second thing too, again, it's something that Jamie didn't talk about a whole lot here, but is in some of her other research, a generational effect, when you look at what the kids at BYU said, they talked about. So it was actually, it was... Jamie was thinking that it was those parents from that earlier study. The one that with the data that she got, the 30 year old study, those kids had grown up and had kids and those kids are back at BYU. (04:59) Well, their children, the children that are at BYU now are more willing to learn about age of evolution because of what happened with mom and dad. When mom and dad got a chance to

learn evolution at BYU, 30 years ago, that generational effect, this is something I've been talking to science teachers in the South about for a long time. There are kids who come into an Alabama classroom, a Mississippi classroom, Tennessee. They come from a fundamentalist background and they are scared to death, or they've got big defenses up about learning evolution. Well, one of the best things a teacher can do is just give them little small, positive experiences in learning about evolution. You see that general racial effect coming in. If they have good, positive, even though few experiences learning about evolution, they're going to be more apt when they grow up to continue learning about it, and then to say to their kids, "Oh, I studied evolution when I was in high school, it's okay." (06:00) Then the last thing, and then I'll be very brief. Jamie. The one place we differed was I don't focus on acceptance. She talked about that at the beginning of her talk. Acceptance and how important that is in my work. I think it's the different settings we're in, where I'm not working with kids from one denomination and at a denominational university. My focus has been on teachers in public schools and how they can focus on students understanding evolution, but not necessarily believing in it. What I do with that is if science teachers don't require kids to believe evolution, take it to heart. I think there's more chance in the public school classroom that kids are going to engage and develop some acceptance of evolution. All that to say, though, there was so much... I found so much hope in her research and so much concrete research around things that I'd had instincts about for a while. I just applaud you for the work you've done.

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