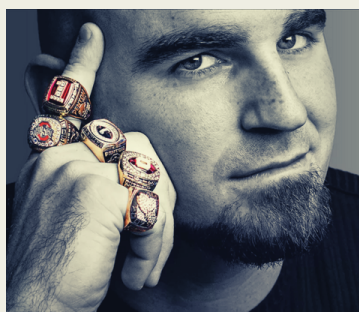


Joel PENTON

FOUNDER & CEO, LIFEWISE ACADEMY



A former defensive tackle and national champion for the perennial powerhouse Ohio State Buckeyes, where he earned the Danny Wuerffel Trophy (otherwise known as the humanitarian Heisman), Joel Penton is the author of three books and the founder and CEO of

LifeWise Academy—a groundbreaking program providing Bible education to students in over 100 public schools, during school hours, across the country. A widely sought-after speaker, over 1,000 live audiences and a million people have taken in his message. He currently resides in Columbus, Ohio with his wife, Bethany, and their five children.

AVAILABILITY

- 10am-2pm ET, Mon.-Fri. is preferred, but can be flexible
- Unavailable May 27-29
- Evenings and weekends unlikely, but possible with enough advance notice
- Eastern time zone (Columbus, OH)

ONLINE

Click the icons below to find Joel & LifeWise online.

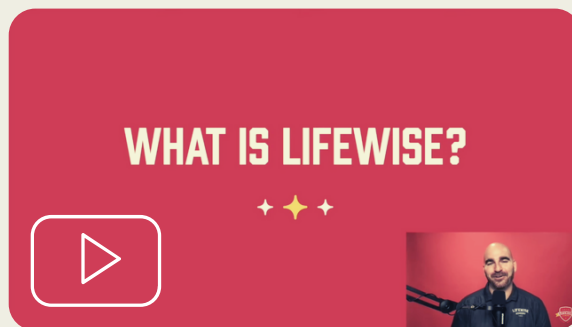


WHAT IS LIFEWISE ACADEMY?

Founded in 2019, LifeWise Academy is a released time religious instruction (RTRI) program which provides Bible-based character education to public school students. Under released time laws, students can be released from public school during the school day to attend religious classes, provided the program is off school property, privately funded and parent-permitted. Since its launch, LifeWise has quickly grown to serve more than 100 schools nationwide. LifeWise serves students by offering practical Bible-based education for the betterment of students' academic performance, character development and mental health. LifeWise believes all students can benefit from the message of the Bible and takes great care to make all instruction relatable and helpful to those without a church or Christian background. LifeWise Academy also serves alongside educators by reinforcing and complementing their efforts. In addition to seeing improved behavior and academic performance, public schools with a local released time program can attract families who may otherwise opt out of public education for lack of religious instruction. LifeWise Academy is careful in adhering to federal, state and district policies and flexible in coordinating with school officials, remembering that LifeWise is serving them—not vice versa.



For answers to FAQs, [click here](#).



Click on the image to the left to watch Joel as he discusses the origins and basics of LifeWise Academy and released time laws.

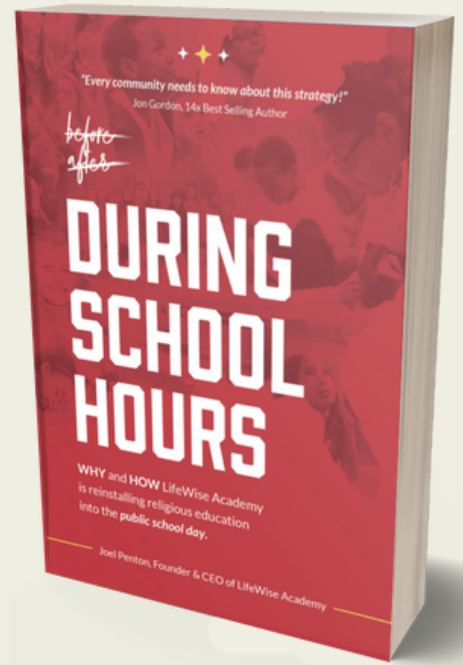
TO BOOK AN INTERVIEW, CONTACT:

JASON JONES 512.720.2996

JASON@JONESLITERARY.COM



ABOUT THE BOOK



DURING SCHOOL HOURS: WHY AND HOW LEFWISE ACADEMY IS REINSTALLING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INTO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL DAY

Decades ago, we systematically removed religious education from the public school day. LifeWise Academy is bringing it back. *During School Hours* is the true story of how it's happening. The book's first half investigates why religious education was removed from America's public schools, the unintended consequences of its removal and why reinstalling it is a game-changer. Its second half explains how this new and rapidly growing organization is using a little-known Supreme Court decision to bring it back — During School Hours.

UNIQUENESS, RELEVANCE

- The book not only explores why God was systematically removed from public schools, but how — and the consequences we're experiencing today. But it's unique in that it offers a solution, detailing how a decades old seldom-used and little-known Supreme Court decision allows for its reinstallation.
- Studies show that 1 in 5 children are dealing with a mental health issue. Decades of research have clearly demonstrated that religious participation effectively lowers rates of suicide as well as anxiety, depression and other mental disorders.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Why religious education was removed
- Why removing religious education costs everything
- Why reinstalling religious education is a game changer
- Why religious education creates true neutrality
- How religious education integrates legally
- How released time has survived, hidden in plain sight, for 70 years
- How LifeWise Academy was born
- The explosive growth of LifeWise Academy
- The released time revolution
- How communities can join the movement
- Studies, percentages, citations and references re: the very powerful and positive impact of religious education on students and schools.
- How/why religious education outpaces other programs in the development of general character, delinquency and risk behaviors

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- What is LifeWise Academy?
- Teaching the Bible “during school hours?” What about the separation of church and state?
- What kind of impact is LifeWise seeing in communities?
- Taking kids off school property for a Bible class and bringing them back sounds like it could be challenging. How do the logistics work?
- Tell me about LifeWise's curriculum. What are students taught?
- Are you seeing much push back from schools or communities?
- How do local LifeWise programs get started?
- "But religious instruction isn't the purpose of public education, Joel!" What do you have to say to that objection?
- Which religions would be taught? Won't it offend people?
- So how do you fit LifeWise classes into the schedule anyway?

"We're convinced that released time has been the single greatest missed opportunity to impact the next generation of public school students. what we're seeing and experiencing is bigger than we ever imagined. It's starting to feel ... like a revolution."

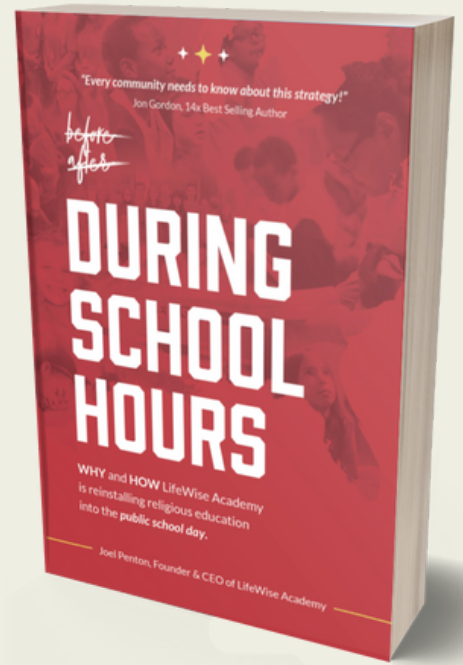


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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ... AND IS NOT

This book is *not* about politics.

For most people, their views on public education are directly connected to their political views. But none of those views are the point of this book. Joel doesn't address right-wing or left-wing ideas or political parties or anyone's favorite candidates. There is room in this book for people of all political persuasions, and no one has to think (or vote) like the author in order to consider or appreciate what he'll discuss in these pages.

This book is *not* about the merits of public education.

Joel will not be discussing the value of public education itself or whether students should attend public schools. The LifeWise approach assumes that public schools are a permanent part of our education landscape. There are many who are fully committed to public education and those who recommend other tracks (like private schools, charter schools, or homeschool), and there is much he could say about each option. This book is not the place for that debate. The one thing he does say on this topic—because it is important—is that he believes all educators are heroes and that they serve their students and communities in selfless, sacrificial ways. They give their time, money and hearts to seeing their students thrive. And they are to be supported and commended.

This book is *not* about the methods of public education.

Joel will not be exploring the systems and models, past or present, of public education. He will mention them because it's necessary to make his point. But this book will not be debating how this model is so much better than that model or which model he prefers. Because the issue isn't the model at all. No matter what model schools choose, his argument will remain the same: it is imperative that we once again include religious education during school hours.

This book is *not* about 'the good old days'.

There were many good things that we can point to about education in the past, as well as things we wouldn't want to repeat. Really, there's no such thing as 'the good old days,' so this book isn't a call to turn back the clock in any way. Instead, this book is about the future. It lays out strategies—practical, positive, real-world strategies—that will work in today's society with its new and unique needs and in the decades to come.

Lastly, this book is *not* about theology.

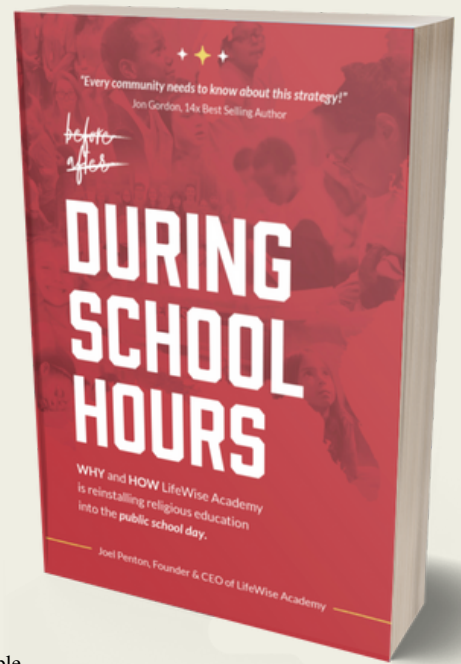
Full disclosure: LifeWise Academy is a Christian religious education program that teaches the Bible. But this book is not the author's attempt to convince anyone about his theological views. There are great books for that, which he's happy to recommend, but his theological position is not the point. Regardless of Joel's theology, or yours, it's easy to see the benefits that religious education can bring to the public school system and its students. But again, specific points of theology will not appear anywhere in these pages.

This book *is* about the WHY and HOW of reinstalling religious education into the public school day.

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The day I spoke at the Van Wert building dedication in 2018, I was also invited to sit in on a board meeting. That day, the board asked me what has become the most compelling question I've ever heard. I now call it "The Riddle." It goes like this: Why aren't more communities doing released time? If released time is legal, and it clearly is ... If it is effective and impactful, which it clearly is. And if the students and families love it, which they do—in Van Wert, over 95 percent of elementary students participate. If all of that is true, then why doesn't every community have one of these programs? Communities can support at least one McDonald's, a library, youth sports of all kinds, a community center or YMCA and a variety of churches, so one would think that every community in America would also have a program like this to teach the Bible to their public school students. But they don't. Very few released time programs exist.

I'd been working full time with schools around the country for more than a decade before I even heard of released time. It is definitely time to ask why. Why hasn't released time spread since the 1952 Supreme Court ruling? And what would it take to make it grow now? The board challenged me to think about it. And I did. Actually, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I had an idea that day about what released time could look like. But I also wasn't arrogant enough to think I'd really stumbled onto something totally new. Surely someone else had already done what I was imagining, right? I made it my mission to find out. And that's why I like to call that day, "The day I stopped sleeping." (I'm only slightly kidding.)

I began to research released time. And I discovered two things. First, a program like the one I was envisioning, one that could spread to every community, did not exist and, as far as I could tell, had never existed. And second, there were some really good reasons why. Before and After Zorach, released time programs existed even before the 1952 Supreme Court case, *Zorach v. Clauson*, established its three-pronged road map. But the Zorach decision, which should have been a "win" for religious education, ultimately wasn't. Instead, we can see an important, and somewhat surprising, before-and-after pattern. Before Zorach, there had been a steady increase in religious instruction programs. The very first one was in 1914 in Gary, Indiana. And by the end of the 1940s, there were released time programs in 46 states. The Supreme Court actually researched these programs for the *McCormick* decision and found that "according to responsible figures almost 2,000,000 in some 2,200 communities participated in 'released time' programs during 1947."

In 1948–49, a quarter of the superintendents who responded to an NEA survey had a released time program in their district, serving about two million students. For nearly forty years, religious programs and released time programs spread throughout the country. But then the Supreme Court erected legal barriers against religious programs and religious activities in public schools.

After that, everything changed.

After *McCormick* in 1948, and despite the Zorach decision in 1952, the number of released time programs dropped by 12 percent across the nation. Most of the programs that had existed before 1947 were not reinstated when Zorach was decided, and very few new programs were started to replace them. After 1952, it was as if released time was immediately snuffed out. So what happened?

There are several theories about this stark before and after.

Most earlier released time programs were not likely in compliance with all three prongs the Supreme Court laid out in 1952. Many were happening on school campuses, and moving off campus presents led to significant logistical challenges. So lacking the time, personnel, money or church support to completely reinvent the programs to become compliant, their leaders chose to shutter them completely.

Another theory is that most people never heard of the Zorach decision or, if they did, didn't realize its implications. This was the only Supreme Court decision in favor of religious education in almost twenty years, and it could have simply been lost in the overall crackdown on religious education in public schools happening during those decades.

My personal theory has to do with timing. Released time was defined too early, before communities saw the need for it. Basically, while the Supreme Court decisions took effect immediately, applying them into every district took much longer. If local schools or communities didn't really think the legal stuff was a big deal or thought it would never impact their region or their school, they may have dismissed the court cases as extreme. By the time the legal crackdown on religion in schools hit them locally, the idea for released time was buried in the details of legal history. When communities finally saw the need, there was no practical way to discover the solution that had already been defined. It's like a scientist in the 1850s writing a book that defines quantum mechanics. Even if someone read the book at the time (which wouldn't be likely), it wouldn't have been relevant yet. But over a hundred years later, when we've actually started studying quantum mechanics, no one would even know to find and read his book.

Of course, we really can't know exactly what caused such a major change. Whether it was any (or all) of these reasons, however, the end result was the same: the number of released time programs took a nosedive following *McCormick* and never recovered.

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