

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES SERIES

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH[®]

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

SAMPLER

UNIT 1

TEACHER MANUAL | STUDENT MANUAL | TEXTBOOK

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES SERIES

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH[®]

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

TEACHER MANUAL

Samples reduced; not actual size

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USING UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH CURRICULUM

Curriculum Overview

The Bible has been the most influential book in the history of the world, printed, in part or in whole, in 2,800 languages worldwide. Christians believe the Bible is God's Word. Through it, the creator of the universe speaks to humankind in a way he does nowhere else. If the Bible's claim to reveal God is authoritative, then it extends to every area of life—to everyone in the world, at all times. If the Bible's revelation about God is accurate, then what it says is authoritative.

The first volume in the Understanding the Times series, *Understanding the Faith* is an apologetics handbook that lays the foundation for a Christian worldview by studying what the Bible reveals about God, humanity, and life in this world. *Understanding the Faith* addresses life's most important questions like "Why do we exist?" and "What is the meaning of life?" from a biblical perspective.

But is the Bible a trustworthy source? Does it contain errors and discrepancies? What about the critiques and questions of skeptics and atheists? *Understanding the Faith* answers the common challenges people pose in attempting to refute Christianity. It deals with these issues in a way that will instill confidence in God and his word while equipping readers to be courageous, articulate, and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Curriculum Sections

Before beginning this curriculum, it will be helpful to understand its structure and components.

1. **Syllabus:** What occurs each day and when assignments are due.

[The standard schedule for this course assumes your class meets 5 days per week for 36 weeks. However, the following alternative schedules can be found online:

- 5 days per week for 36 weeks
- 4 days per week for 36 weeks
- 3 days per week for 36 weeks
- 2 days per week for 36 weeks
- 1 day per week for 36 weeks
- 5 days per week for 18 weeks
- 4 days per week for 18 weeks
- 3 days per week for 18 weeks
- 2 days per week for 18 weeks
- 1 day per week for 18 weeks]

2. **Objectives:** Main learning goals for each chapter.

3. **Chapter Discussion Questions:** A review of the material read in each chapter.

4. **Classroom Activities:** Activities designed to reinforce content from each chapter.
5. **Readings:** Primary source materials, sometimes from non-Christian sources.
6. **Reading Discussion Questions:** A review of the material from the primary source readings.
7. **Reading Quizzes:** Multiple-choice and true/false questions for each primary source reading.
[Student copies can be found online. Website and passcode are at the back of this manual.]
8. **Videos:** Lectures from experts, which dive deeper into key subjects.
9. **Video Outlines:** Notes from each video.
10. **Video Discussion Questions:** A review of the material covered in each video.
11. **Video Quizzes:** Multiple-choice and true/false questions for each video.
[Student copies can be found online. Website and passcode are at the back of this manual.]
12. **Key Points:** Includes key questions, terms, verses, players, and works from each chapter reading.
13. **Writing Assignments:** Essay questions to answer at the end of each chapter.
14. **Tests:** A mixture of questions (matching, multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and essay) taken from each chapter's content.
[Student copies can be found online. Website and passcode are at the back of this manual.]

Wheatstone Training Videos

Summit has partnered with Wheatstone Ministries to provide you with training on how to lead a fruitful conversation in class. Visit summit.org/wheatstone and use the code SMWS1617 to access these short videos.

Reflect

A weekly blog that connects the worldviews and ideas you are discussing in class with pop culture illustrations. We've also included helpful resources for further enrichment in each post. Visit summit.org/reflect-signup to sign up for notifications or summit.org/reflect-archive to access current entries.

College Credit

If you are interested in learning more about college credit for this course, please take visit summit.org/college-credit for more information.

Summit Alumni Network

This is a fabric of Christian thinkers and doers woven together by Summit Ministries' conference and curriculum grads. We gather—online and in-person—for ongoing study, strengthening community, and serving the cities in which we live. Join the network at summit.org/alumni.

TEACHING UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH CURRICULUM

Course Overview

Understanding the Faith is an introduction to the core beliefs of Christianity and the most common objections to the faith, designed as a prequel to *Understanding the Times* (though it works great as a stand-alone course). By the end of the course, students will have a solid grasp of the essentials of a Christian worldview and will be well equipped to respond to the most common objections to the faith.

The textbook is divided between theology and apologetics according to the pattern below:

1. Introduction

- Chapter 1: Introduction

2. Theology

- Chapter 2: What the Bible Is and Isn't
- Chapter 3: Does the Bible Have Authority?
- Chapter 4: What the Bible Says about God
- Chapter 5: The Bible: God's Big Story, Part 1
- Chapter 6: The Bible: God's Big Story, Part 2
- Chapter 7: How to Read the Bible
- Chapter 8: What the Bible Says about Loving God
- Chapter 9: What the Bible Says about Loving Our Neighbors

3. Apologetics

- Chapter 10: Is God Christian?
- Chapter 11: Supernatural Good and Evil
- Chapter 12: Isn't Christianity Anti-Science?
- Chapter 13: Isn't Claiming Truth Intolerant?
- Chapter 14: Why is There Evil and Suffering?
- Chapter 15: What's the Deal with Hell?
- Chapter 16: Is God a Mean Bully?
- Chapter 17: If Christianity Is True, Why Do People Walk Away?

4. Comprehensive Review

- Chapter 18: Conclusion

Theology

Theology is quite simply “the study of God.” This is a huge area of study, and we certainly aren’t going to try to cover every topic in *Understanding the Faith*. We’ll look primarily at God’s self-revelation in Scripture, what his character is, what his plan is for the world, and how that practically affects our lives today.

It might be difficult to get your students interested in studying theology because many people have the conception that it is only the irrelevant business of armchair professors. However, we want students to see that our theology touches every area of life. What we think about God affects the way that we live. Studying theology should lead us deeper into the knowledge and worship of God.

What we are striving for in this section of the textbook is what C. S. Lewis termed *Mere Christianity*. The “mere” does not refer to a minimal Christian commitment, but rather the truths upon which all Christians can agree. These are the defining characteristics of Christian belief over denominational discrepancies. Regardless of their denominational background, our hope is that students will see the truths that unite all believers across time and place. Of course, there are areas on which we will disagree. These issues are important, and we don’t want to imply that they don’t matter. In fact, students should be encouraged to look carefully at these issues. For the purpose of this course however, we have tried to stick to those defining characteristics of Christian belief.

Apologetics

From chapter 10 on, the textbook will present and answer some of the major objections to Christianity. We are dealing here with what has traditionally been called “Apologetics.” As you may know, apologetics has nothing to do with apologizing. Rather, it is from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “to give a defense in a court of law.” 1 Peter 3:15 admonishes us, “*But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*”

One misstep that is all too common within the study of apologetics is that students will be tempted to use it as a weapon to crush opponents of Christianity. However, this is not the point. We must keep in mind that we are commanded to love others. People are not argued into Christianity. The goal of apologetics is not to win arguments, but to remove barriers that people have in putting their trust in Jesus. We want to present a reasonable case for Christianity that is both intellectually and emotionally satisfying.

Finally, apologetics must be tailored to the audience. Not every critic or doubter of Christianity is a Richard Dawkins. Not everyone needs to hear the cosmological argument for God’s existence or have the logical case for miracles explained to them. In reality, most people will have one or two objections that hold them back from trusting Christ. The job of the apologist is to find out what those objections

are and be prepared to answer them well. This is why apologetics has as much to do with listening as presenting.

Course Structure

Understanding the Faith can be used effectively over a one- or two-semester period. The course will look a little different depending on which syllabus you choose, so we suggest reading over this content before selecting your syllabus.

In the traditional classroom model, the teacher lectures during class time and students complete outside work at home. In this course, the idea is for students to read the textbook, watch lectures, and read other sources prior to class time. When students come to class, they will discuss those ideas in the context of relationship under the guidance of a teacher. It is in this sense that we have “flipped” the classroom.

Two-Semester (180-Day) Course

Because content flows through relationships, we structure the course so that there is adequate space for both meaningful relationships and meaningful content. There are 18 chapters in the textbook, and we allocate 2 weeks per chapter.

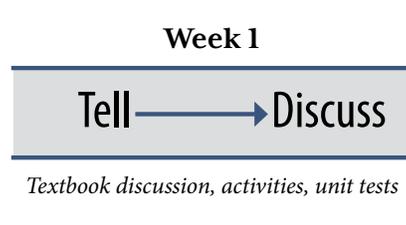
To make this happen, we offer a “tell and show” model. The first week, we tell the students about the patterns of ideas and their consequences; the second week, we show them where these ideas are being discussed and practiced in the real world.

Week 1	Week 2
Tell → Discuss	Show → Discuss
<i>Textbook discussion and activities</i>	<i>Lecture videos, primary source readings, quizzes, Dear Doug essays, unit tests</i>

We don’t want students to believe what we’re saying simply because we’re saying it. We want students to hear claims being made by the textbook and then see those ideas played out in real life. The first week is spent in the textbook and the second week is spent looking at “outside materials,” that is, non-textbook readings and videos that cover the same themes as the textbook. Usually these outside materials consist of primary source readings, videos from other worldview perspectives, and video lectures. Each outside reading and video will have accompanying discussion questions to help students evaluate what they have just read or watched. At the end of the second week, students will turn in a Dear Doug essay and take a unit test.

One Semester (90-Day) Course

The one-semester (90-day) course is going to look a little different from the two-semester course. Because we have half the time, this schedule will cover only the textbook reading (or “tell” side) of the curriculum. As such, we will not be allotting time for extra outside readings or videos. To keep the students from having to test every week, we recommend administering two tests every two weeks.



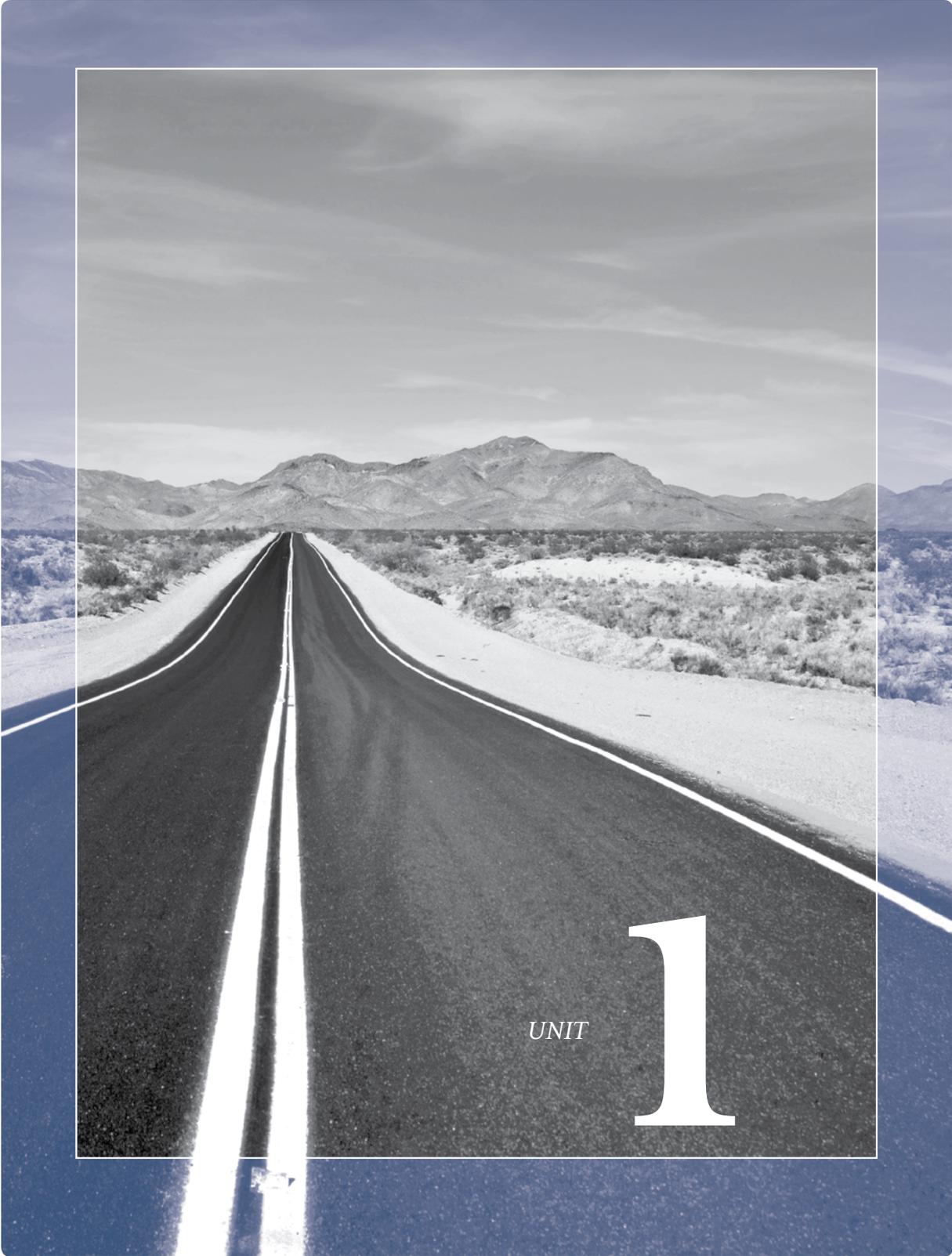
Assessments and Grading

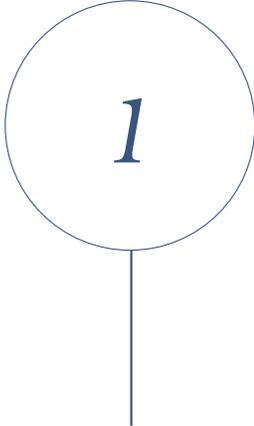
Every school and teacher has a different grading system. Since this is your course, we want you to do whatever works best for you. We have included a grading scale below to give you an idea of how to get started. Please note that it is only a suggestion. If it doesn't work for you, don't feel the need to use it.

- **Participation:** You may want to give your students some form of incentive for participating in class discussion. (Note: This does not apply to the homeschool version since it is self-paced).
- **Quizzes:** We have included 5-question quizzes for every outside reading and video lecture. The quizzes are true/false or multiple choice.
- **Unit Tests:** At the end of every chapter, students will take a test. The tests are a mix of question styles (Matching, multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer).
- **Dear Doug Essays:** At the end of every chapter, students will write a letter/essay to a fictional college student named Doug. Usually, his letters will contain four specific questions for the students to answer.

- **Final Exam:** The final exam consists of 100 mixed style questions (Multiple choice, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank). Since chapter 18 is a comprehensive review, this will also be the unit test for that chapter.

Assessment	% of Grade
Participation	10%
Quizzes	15%
Unit Tests	35%
Essays	35%
Final Exam	5%
TOTAL	100%





1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. articulate why they need guidance in life. [1.1–1.2]
2. identify how ideas affect the way they live. [1.3]
3. explain the five key questions that affect their direction in life. [1.4]
4. describe why it is important to understand the times in which they live. [1.5]
5. discuss why the search for knowledge is possible. [1.6]
6. state why the search for knowledge is biblical and important. [1.7]
7. list different types of authority and state the relevance of each to their lives. [1.8]
8. present evidence for why Christians should submit to God’s authority. [1.9–1.10]
9. articulate why biblical faith isn’t blind or without reason. [1.11]
10. discuss how to deal with doubt. [1.11]
11. explain why this book is important. [1.12–1.14]
12. summarize why they should live out their faith in the location God has placed them. [1.15]

CHAPTER 1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1.2 Activity

GETTING DIRECTIONS FOR LIFE

Objective: Students will compare and contrast the ways in which good and harmful ideas can positively or negatively affect confusing issues humans face.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: computer or paper and pencil, index cards
- Write out the questions from the text that involve the different confusing issues humans face on index cards before class starts.
- Time Required: 15–30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Facilitate a class discussion brainstorming the ways teens can discern between good and bad ideas that affect their lives.
2. Distribute one index card to each student. Select a student to read their question aloud. Choose a volunteer to give an answer that would be a good idea guiding the person toward a future of success or going somewhere. Next, choose a volunteer to give an answer that would be a bad idea guiding the person toward a failure in life or going nowhere. Ask students what would cause a teen to choose the idea that could lead them toward failure. Invite students to share about themselves or anyone they know who may have made either of the choices presented.
3. Continue the process until all questions have been read and answered.
4. Finish by discussing why teens need guidance if they plan to go somewhere with their life.

1. Why was this book written? [1.2]

This is a guidebook to assist you in the exploration of God. It addresses such questions as these:

- Who is God?
- Where is he?
- What is he like?
- Can we trust what the Bible says about him?
- Are we dealing with fact or fiction when it comes to God?
- Does he really exist or did humans just make him up to give life meaning?
- How is God relevant and why is Christianity a valid search for him?
- What about the sincere critiques and questions of skeptics, cynics, and atheists?

This isn't just an abstract study. Understanding is the most important thing a human can do. If we don't know God, we will find it next to impossible to gain insight into practical questions such as these:

- Where did I come from?
- What does God want from me?
- What should I do for a job?
- Should I get married?
- How can I live in harmony with those around me?

2. What is the result of the human search for answers? [1.2]

Humans are the only animals who ask questions like “Why do we exist?” and “What is the meaning of life?” The products of our musings and thought processes are called **ideas**. Some ideas accurately reflect our world; others don't. Ideas can be either helpful or harmful. Figuring out the difference is key to a meaningful life.

The ideas we ultimately adopt shape how we see the world. It is these ideas that end up informing the choices we make and dictating how we live. Some ideas accurately reflect the world, but many do not. Good ideas help us live well; bad ideas lead us away from truth and into danger.

3. How do ideas influence the direction of our lives? [1.3]

We are constantly bombarded by ideas in every advertisement we see, video game we play, book we read, and song we listen to. These ideas are either true or false, but they are never neutral. False ideas influence us every day and are competing for our allegiance.

Ideas suggest information about how the world works and thus influence how we live. They help us shape the bits and pieces of daily life into a “big picture” that gives meaning and purpose to our existence. Ideas are like the details on a map. A good map can help us navigate the road ahead and avoid getting lost. The more accurately our map conforms to reality, the more likely we are to understand the world we live in.

4. Is there a principle we can use to make sense of the vast array of ideas? [1.4]

There is more information than we can possibly process and more ideas than we can ever consider. King Solomon said, “Of the making of books there is no end” (Ecclesiastes 12:12) and that was before the printing press, the Internet and the Cloud! Which ideas should we accept, which should we ignore, and which should we actively oppose as dangerous?

The Apostle Paul offers the following approach to sifting information and ideas:

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Chapter 1.4 Activity

FIVE QUESTIONS AFFECTING OUR DIRECTION IN LIFE

Objective: Students will create idea maps to show how the five key questions affect their lives.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: computer or paper and pencil
- Time Required: 30–45 minutes

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into five groups.
2. Review the concept of idea maps from the end of Lesson 1.3. Assign each group one of the five key questions.
3. Have each group create an idea map that shows how the question affects the life of a teen. The groups should brainstorm ideas of how the question affects them personally and then write a detailed map about a fictitious teen.
4. When all groups have finished, have a spokesperson from each group present to the class. Each group besides the one presenting should suggest at least one idea that could be added to the idea map for that question.

5. What are five important questions with which every human must grapple? [1.4]

The really important questions in life have to do with the following:

- Origin
- Identity
- Meaning
- Morality
- Destiny

Where did we come from? Are we the product of time and chance or were we created “on purpose”? The various creation stories contradict one another. Which one makes the most sense in light of the evidence we have?

Who are we? Human beings are animals, but is there more to us than that? Do we have an immaterial spirit? Do we have intrinsic worth and dignity?

What is real and true and how do we know? Is “reality” real or an illusion? Why do humans not only exist but also wonder about why we exist?

How should we live? Are there rules for the good life? Who makes them? Are they true for all times and all cultures, or do they depend on circumstances?

What happens next? Where is history headed? Is there an afterlife? If so, what is it like? Should we try to fix the world we live in or just wait for things to improve in the next life?

Chapter 1.5 Activity

WHY WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

Objective: Students will write an email to one of the priests of Issachar explaining why Christians today need to understand the times.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: computer or paper and pencil
- Time Required: 30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Direct students to write an email to one of the priests of Issachar explaining why teens today need to understand the times.
2. After they have written the email explaining their thoughts on the topic, they will find a partner and read each other’s emails.
3. Have the students write an email expressing what the priest might answer back to their partner’s original email.
4. Allow time for students to read the email answer. Invite volunteers to read the original email along with the response to the rest of the class.

6. How do the answers to some of the questions above shape the answer to others?

[Ask your students to arrange the above five questions in order of importance. Then have different ones explain why they chose the order they did.]

7. What can we learn from the ancient tribe of Issachar about living a good life? [1.5]

The tribe of Issachar had an “understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). Their faith informed and guided their *way*. Deuteronomy 10:12 says we should “walk in all his ways.” There’s a right way and a wrong way to go in life; a way of wisdom and a way of foolishness; a way of life and a way of death.

If we understand the right way, the wrong way will become evident. If we know how to stay on the right way, we can discern when we (and others) deviate from the path (Romans 1:18–21).

8. What is “epistemology” and why is it important? [1.6]

Episteme is Greek for “knowledge” and **epistemology** is the branch of philosophy that addresses the nature of knowledge. It deals with what we know, how we know, and how what we know relates to what is real.

While it is impossible to know reality exhaustively, we can know it truly. Still, people disagree about what can be known. Some claim we can’t know anything outside our personal reality and that we must get in touch with our higher selves to find true knowledge. This approach is known as **relativism**—the belief that truth, knowledge, and morality are relative to the individual, society or historical context.

Christianity takes a different approach. It is based on the Bible, which reveals a God who does not change the rules of reality to suit his whims. Nor does he adjust right or wrong according to the actions and philosophies of any particular community.

9. What problem does relativism create for secular humanists? [1.6]

Paul Kurtz, an atheist philosopher who helped develop secular humanism, acknowledged the problem with relativism:

Nevertheless, the humanist is faced with a crucial ethical problem: Insofar as he has defended an ethic of freedom, can he develop a basis for moral responsibility? Regrettably, merely to liberate individuals from authoritarian social institutions, whether church or state, is no guarantee that they will be aware of their moral responsibility to others. The contrary is often the case. . . . Once these sanctions are ignored, we may end up with [a man] concerned with his own personal lust for pleasure, ambition, and power, and impervious to moral constraints.

Without revealed moral truth, anything can be seen as good or bad relative to our current situation. Even if we want to do the right thing, if there’s no absolute standard by which to judge, who’s to say what’s right and wrong?

Chapter 1.7 Activity

IS IT TRULY GODLY TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE?

Objective: Students will choose a Bible verse and design a poster communicating to others that they should seek biblical knowledge.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: Bible, computer, poster paper and markers
- Time Required: 15–30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Direct students to choose a Bible verse from the text or one they find in the Bible that addresses why biblical knowledge is important for today's teens.
2. Set out paper and markers or have students use a computer to design a poster inspiring teens to seek biblical knowledge and why that is important.
3. Display the posters in the classroom and discuss the message of each poster.

10. Should Christians study worldviews and philosophies that are at odds with Christianity? [1.7]

False ideas are so prevalent that there is no way to avoid them without avoiding society all together. The Bible warns us to be wise and to not be taken captive by such ideas.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:20, 25)

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

Being taken captive by false ideas is bad, but this doesn't mean studying other ideas is wrong. The Bible is full of examples of people who understood the truth from God's perspective and were better thinkers and leaders as a result. The Bible shows that God cares very much about knowledge, which is why we should also care:

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6)

“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” (Proverbs 18:15)

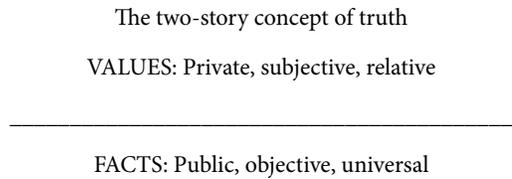
“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” (Hosea 4:6)

“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.” (Philippians 1:9)

11. What is the “two-story concept of truth” and why is it dangerous? [1.8]

Professor Nancy Pearcey explains the two-story concept of truth as described by her mentor, Francis Schaeffer:

Using the metaphor of a building, [Schaeffer] warned that truth had been split into two stories. The lower story consists of scientific facts, which are held to be empirically testable and universally valid. The upper story includes things like morality, theology, and aesthetics, which are now regarded as subjective and culturally relative. Essentially the upper story became a convenient dumping ground for anything that an empiricist worldview did not recognize as real. Schaeffer used a simple graphic, which we can adapt like this:



The way to overcome this artificial separation is to recover Christianity as a knowledge tradition. To do that, we have to believe God is actually real and has authority as opposed to being just a figment of our imaginations.

12. What problems are created by the “fact/value split?” [1.8]

The erroneous division of truth into “fact” and “value” means matters of science are considered **objective facts**, while ethics and theology are considered **subjective opinions**. This leads to the assumption that science is a matter for the mind while faith is a matter for the heart.

Because of this divide, the life of the mind has been unnaturally divorced from religion. Claims about God’s existence and authority are treated like personal opinions. But if people don’t believe God is real (a fact about the world), they won’t give him the authority he deserves in their lives.

Chapter 1.9 Activity

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE AUTHORITY?

Objective: Students will create skits to show hard and soft authority.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: none
- Time Required: 30–45 minutes

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into two or four groups depending on the number of students in your class. Have one or two groups brainstorm ideas to illustrate the characteristics of hard authority and have the other groups illustrate the characteristics of soft authority.
2. Allow time for the groups to prepare and briefly practice the skit.
3. Select a group to perform their skit about hard authority. Let student volunteers identify how each characteristic was portrayed in the skit. Discuss situations where students have encountered that type of authority and how they felt in those situations.
4. Select a group to perform their skit about soft authority. Let student volunteers identify how each characteristic was portrayed in the skit. Discuss situations where students have encountered that type of authority and how they felt in those situations.
5. After all groups have performed their skits, ask students which type of authority they respond to the best and why. Discuss as a class.

13. What does it mean to have authority? [1.9]

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines authority as: (1) “The power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience,” and (2) “the power to influence others, especially because of one’s commanding manner or one’s recognized knowledge about something.” The first definition could be called “hard” authority and the second “soft” authority.

Hard authority is the power to give orders and enforce obedience. It is

- **Extrinsic:** it resides in the office rather than the person.
- **Hierarchical:** both parties understand that one has standing over the other.
- **Punitive:** if you resist, there will be consequences.

Soft authority is the power of influence. People possess it because others respect who they are and what they know. It is

- **Intrinsic:** it resides within the person.
- **Relational:** a person who obeys does so because he or she trusts the source.
- **Non-punitive:** those who obey aren't forced to act on penalty of law.

14. What types of authority does God have? [1.9]

Christianity sees God's authority revealed generally in nature and specifically in Scripture. He has the right to give orders and demand obedience backed by the threat of punishment. He also has the power to influence and persuade people because of his character and knowledge or out of earned respect.

God's authority is

- hard and soft
- intrinsic and extrinsic
- relational and hierarchical
- obligatory and persuasive

15. Is doubt a good reason for not submitting to God's authority? [1.10]

We evaluate claims of authority all the time and decide whether or not to submit to them. Most people who have considered the claims of Christianity have legitimate doubts about those claims:

- How do I know the Bible is true?
- If something is in the Bible, do I have to obey it?
- What does the Bible say about obeying authorities?
- Am I obligated to follow the Bible, even if those who say they believe it don't obey its teachings?

These are important questions, but in themselves they are not a sufficient cause for doubt. If the balance of evidence shows Christianity to be true and authoritative, it's reasonable to accept it.

16. What is biblical faith? [1.11]

Faith is firm trust or confidence in someone or something. Biblical faith is based on knowledge (Colossians 1:9–10) that can be tested and verified (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is trusting in a faithful God who is who he says he is and who does all he has promised to do. It is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Biblical faith is not blind, nor does it believe without good reason. It is based on evidence. It is valid because its object is actually worthy of belief.

Faith derives its value not from the intensity of the believer but from the genuineness of the one she believes in. True faith is faith in the right object; faith in an unfaithful person is worthless or worse. (David Clark)

Chapter 1.11 Activity

BUT ISN'T CHRISTIANITY BASED ON FAITH, NOT KNOWLEDGE?

Objective: Students will research and find five observable or provable facts found in the Bible.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: computer or Bible concordance
- Time Required: 15–30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Direct students to search the Scriptures and find five facts that are provable and/or observable. For each fact students write down, have them explain why or how this could be proven as a fact. For example, Isaiah 40:22 mentions “the circle of the earth,” a fact that was proven true when explorers finally navigated around the world and didn’t fall off an edge of what they thought was a flat world.
2. Allow about 10 minutes to find the verses and write their explanations.
3. Invite volunteers to read a fact and their explanation. On the board write down the categories for the facts, such as history or nature.
4. Continue to have students read their facts and write down the categories. Discuss whether these facts are disputed or accepted today and why.

17. Can a person have faith and doubts at the same time? [1.11]

Yes. All of us experience doubts because we are limited in our knowledge. We have questions for which we don’t have satisfactory answers and may never get them. But doubt can actually be a healthy part of a Christ-centered, thoughtful life.

A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of

tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection. (Tim Keller)

Dealing with doubt is part of being mature in the faith. But we must also learn to doubt our doubts so they don't overpower everything else in our lives.

18. What are the areas where you might be embarrassed if someone were to challenge your faith? [1.13]

[Answers will vary.]

Chapter 1.14 Activity

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

Objective: Students will write an essay about why they feel it is important to understand their faith.

Preparation:

- Materials Needed: computer or paper and pencil
- Time Required: 30–45 minutes

Procedure:

1. Direct students to write an essay about why they feel it is important to understand their faith. Set an appropriate length and guidelines for the essay. Give the students ample writing time in class.
2. Invite volunteers to read their essays to the class. After listening to an essay, have students share how that person's essay encourages them to want to understand their faith.
3. Allow time for students to read the email answer. Invite volunteers to read the original email along with the response to the rest of the class.

19. Are today's Christian young adults prepared to defend their faith in a pluralistic world? [1.14]

Summit Ministries has discovered some alarming findings about today's Christian young adults:

- **They are unprepared for opposition:** *Only one out of six* students understands the worldviews that set themselves up against the knowledge of God.
- **They cannot mount a defense:** While more than two out of three students are confident that the Christian worldview is true, *only one in five feels* prepared to defend it as such.
- **They are failing at spiritual disciplines:** *Only one in three* students claims to have a strong devotional or prayer life.
- **They feel alienated from God:** Imagine a youth group meeting at church: *only one in two* students assembled there actually feels close to God.

Young Christians are disengaging from their faith and embracing what sociologist Christian Smith calls "liberal whateverism." Yet fully 60 percent say they want to make a difference. They just need guidance.

20. What is the main battle of our time? [1.15]

The main battle of our time isn't over territory or power. It's a battle for truth against lies, for justice against injustice, and for good against evil. Christians must be brave and stand up for truth.

[Christians] are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith. We must show our Christian colours, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent and concede everything away. (C. S. Lewis)

This doesn't mean we should major in the minors. We should agree on the non-negotiable basics of the faith while exercising charity in the areas where we disagree.

21. What reasons can give to show that the Bible is the Word of God?

Answers might include the following:

- Fulfilled prophecy
- Cohesive message from beginning to end
- Many of its historical details can be verified
- Its positive impact on human history and on millions of individuals
- How its claims relate accurately to logic and reason

“DOES GOD EXIST?” READING

Christian philosopher William Lane Craig explains why the idea that God is dead is itself dead in many academic circles. Along with a resurgence of traditional philosophical arguments for God—cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological—new arguments have been presented and defended by top-tier Christian philosophers.

Craig briefly outlines eight reasons in support of God’s existence:

1. God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.
2. God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.
3. God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
4. God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
5. God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness.
6. God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.
7. The very possibility of God’s existence implies that God exists.
8. God can be personally known and experienced.

Together these arguments make a strong case for a personal God as the best explanation for universe in which we find ourselves.

DOES GOD EXIST?

by William Lane Craig

On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine carried a lead story for which the cover was completely black except for three words emblazoned in bright, red letters against the dark background: “IS GOD DEAD?” The story described the so-called “Death of God” movement then current in American theology. But, to paraphrase Mark Twain, it seemed that the news of God’s demise was “greatly exaggerated.” For at the same time that theologians were writing God’s obituary, a new generation of young philosophers was re-discovering His vitality.

Back in the 1940s and ‘50s it was widely believed among philosophers that any talk about God is meaningless, since it is not verifiable by the five senses. The collapse of this Verificationism was perhaps the most important philosophical event of the twentieth century. Its downfall meant a resurgence of metaphysics, along with other traditional problems of philosophy which Verificationism had suppressed. Accompanying this resurgence came something altogether unanticipated: a renaissance of Christian philosophy.

The turning point probably came in 1967 with the publication of Alvin Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds*, which applied the tools of analytic philosophy to questions in

the philosophy of religion with an unprecedented rigor and creativity. In Plantinga's train has followed a host of Christian philosophers, writing in professional journals and participating in professional conferences and publishing with the finest academic presses. The face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. Atheism, although perhaps still the dominant viewpoint in Western universities, is a philosophy in retreat. In a recent article, University of Western Michigan philosopher Quentin Smith laments what he calls "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." ("The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism', *Philo*, Vol 4, #2, at philoonline.org). Complaining of naturalists' passivity in the face of the wave of "intelligent and talented theists entering academia today," Smith concludes, "God is not 'dead' in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments."

The renaissance of Christian philosophy has been accompanied by a resurgence of interest in natural theology—that branch of theology which seeks to prove God's existence without appeal to the resources of authoritative divine revelation—for instance, through philosophical argument. All of the traditional philosophical arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments, not to mention creative, new arguments, find intelligent and articulate defenders on the contemporary philosophical scene.

But what about the so-called "New Atheism" exemplified by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens? Doesn't it herald a reversal of this trend? Not really. As is evident from the authors it interacts with—or rather, *doesn't* interact with—the New Atheism is, in fact, a pop-cultural phenomenon lacking in intellectual muscle and blissfully ignorant of the revolution that has taken place in Anglo-American philosophy. It tends to reflect the scientism of a bygone generation, rather than the contemporary intellectual scene.

Eight Reasons in Support of God's Existence

I believe that God's existence best explains a wide range of the data of human experience. Let me briefly mention eight such cases.

(I) God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.

Suppose you were hiking through the forest and came upon a ball lying on the ground. You would naturally wonder how it came to be there. If your hiking buddy said to you, "Forget about it! It just exists!" you would think he was either joking or just wanted you to keep moving. No one would take seriously the idea that the ball just exists without any explanation. Now notice that merely increasing the size of the ball until it becomes coextensive with the universe does nothing to either provide, or remove the need for, an explanation of its existence.

So what is the explanation of the existence of the universe (by "the universe" I mean all of spacetime reality)? The explanation of the universe can lie only in a transcendent reality beyond it—beyond space and time—the existence of which transcendent reality is metaphysically necessary (otherwise its existence would also need explaining). Now there is only one way I can think of to get a contingent entity like the universe

from a necessarily existing cause, and that is if the cause is an agent who can freely choose to create the contingent reality. It therefore follows that the best explanation of the existence of the contingent universe is a transcendent personal being—which is what everybody means by “God.”

We can summarize this reasoning as follows:

1. Every contingent thing has an explanation of its existence.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is a transcendent, personal being.
3. The universe is a contingent thing.
4. Therefore, the universe has an explanation of its existence.
5. Therefore, the explanation of the universe is a transcendent, personal being—which is what everybody means by “God.”

(II) God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.

We have pretty strong evidence that the universe has not existed eternally into the past, but had a beginning a finite time ago. In 2003, the mathematician Arvind Borde, and physicists Alan Guth and Alexander Vilenkin were able to prove that *any* universe which has, on average, been expanding throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past, but must have a past spacetime boundary (i.e., a beginning). What makes their proof so powerful is that it holds so long as time and causality hold, *regardless* of the physical description of the very early universe. Because we don’t yet have a quantum theory of gravity, we can’t yet provide a physical description of the first split-second of the universe; but the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem is *independent* of one’s theory of gravitation. For instance, their theorem implies that the quantum vacuum state which may have characterized the early universe cannot have existed eternally into the past, but must itself have had a beginning. Even if our universe is just a tiny part of a so-called “multiverse,” composed of many universes, their theorem requires that the multiverse *itself* must have had a beginning.

Of course, highly speculative physical scenarios, such as loop quantum gravity models, string models, even closed timelike curves, have been proposed to try to avoid this absolute beginning. These models are fraught with problems, but the bottom line is that none of these theories, *even if true*, succeeds in restoring an eternal past for the universe. Last year, at a conference in Cambridge celebrating the seventieth birthday of Stephen Hawking, Vilenkin delivered a paper entitled “Did the Universe Have a Beginning?” which surveyed current cosmology with respect to that question. He argued that “none of these scenarios can actually be past-eternal.” Specifically, Vilenkin closed the door on three models attempting to avert the implication of his theorem: eternal inflation, a cyclic universe, and an “emergent” universe which exists for eternity as a static seed before expanding. Vilenkin concluded, “*All* the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning.”

But then the inevitable question arises: *Why* did the universe come into being? What brought the universe into existence? There must have been a transcendent cause which brought the universe into being—a cause outside the universe itself.

We can summarize this argument thus far as follows:

1. The universe began to exist.
2. If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a transcendent cause.
3. Therefore, the universe has a transcendent cause.

By the very nature of the case, that cause of the physical universe must be an immaterial (i.e., non-physical) being. Now there are only two types of things that could possibly fit that description: either an abstract object like a number, or an unembodied mind/consciousness. But abstract objects don't stand in causal relations to physical things. The number 7, for example, has no effect on anything. Therefore, the cause of the universe is an unembodied mind. Thus again we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its Personal Creator.

(III) God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.

Philosophers and scientists have puzzled over what physicist Eugene Wigner called “the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics.” How is it that a mathematical theorist like Peter Higgs can sit down at his desk and, by pouring over mathematical equations, predict the existence of a fundamental particle which, thirty years later, after investing millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours, experimentalists are finally able to detect? Mathematics is the language of nature. But how is this to be explained? If mathematical objects like numbers and mathematical theorems are abstract entities causally isolated from the physical universe, then the applicability of mathematics is, in the words of philosopher of mathematics Mary Leng, “a happy coincidence.” On the other hand, if mathematical objects are just useful fictions, how is it that nature is written in the language of these fictions? The naturalist has *no* explanation for the uncanny applicability of mathematics to the physical world. By contrast, the theist has a ready explanation: When God created the physical universe He designed it in terms of the mathematical structure which He had in mind.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

1. If God did not exist, the applicability of mathematics would be just a happy coincidence.
2. The applicability of mathematics is not just a happy coincidence.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(IV) God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.

In recent decades scientists have been *stunned* by the discovery that the initial conditions of the Big Bang were fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life with a precision and delicacy that literally defy human comprehension. This fine-tuning is of two sorts. First, when the laws of nature are expressed as equations, you find appearing in them certain constants, such as the gravitational constant. The values of these constants are independent of the laws of nature. Second, in addition to these constants, there are certain arbitrary quantities which define the initial conditions on

which the laws of nature operate—for example, the amount of entropy (disorder) in the universe. Now these constants and quantities fall into an extraordinarily narrow range of life-permitting values. Were these constants or quantities to be altered by less than a hair's breadth, the life-permitting balance of nature would be destroyed, and life would not exist.

There are three live explanatory options for this extraordinary fine-tuning: physical necessity, chance, or design.

Physical necessity is not, however, a plausible explanation, because the finely-tuned constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature. Therefore, they are *not* physically necessary.

So could this fine-tuning be due to chance? The problem with this explanation is that the odds of all the constants and quantities' randomly falling into the incomprehensibly narrow life-permitting range are just so infinitesimal that they cannot be reasonably accepted. Therefore, the proponents of the chance explanation have been forced to postulate the existence of a 'World Ensemble' of other universes, preferably infinite in number and randomly ordered, so that life-permitting universes like ours would appear by chance *somewhere* in the Ensemble. Not only is this hypothesis, to borrow Richard Dawkins' phrase, "an unparsimonious extravagance," it faces an insuperable objection. By far, the most probable observable universes in a World Ensemble would be worlds in which a *single* brain fluctuated into existence out of the vacuum and observed its otherwise empty world. So, if our world were just a random member of the World Ensemble, by all probability we ought to be having observations like that. Since we don't, that *strongly* disconfirms the World Ensemble hypothesis. So chance is also not a good explanation. Thus,

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. The fine-tuning of the universe is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, the fine-tuning of the universe is due to design.
4. Thus, the fine-tuning of the universe constitutes evidence for a cosmic Designer.

(V) God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness.

Philosophers are puzzled by states of *intentionality*. Intentionality is the property of being about something or of something. It signifies the *object-directedness* of our thoughts. For example, I can think about my summer vacation, or I can think of my wife. No physical object has intentionality in this sense. A chair or a stone or a glob of tissue like the brain is not about or of something else. Only mental states or states of consciousness are about other things. In *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (2011), the materialist Alex Rosenberg recognizes this fact, and concludes that for atheists, there really are no intentional states. Rosenberg boldly claims that we never *really* think about anything. But this seems incredible. Obviously, I am thinking about Rosenberg's argument—and so are you! This seems to me to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of his atheism. By contrast, for theists, because

God is a mind, it's hardly surprising that there should be other, finite minds, with intentional states. Thus intentional states fit comfortably into a theistic worldview.

So we may argue:

1. If God did not exist, intentional states of consciousness would not exist.
2. But intentional states of consciousness do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(VI) God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.

In our experience we apprehend moral values and duties which impose themselves as objectively binding and true. For example, we recognize that it's wrong to walk into an elementary school with an automatic weapon and shoot little boys and girls and their teachers. On a naturalistic view, however, there is nothing *really* wrong with this: moral values are just the *subjective* by-products of biological evolution and social conditioning, and have no objective validity.

Alex Rosenberg is brutally honest about the implications of his atheism here too. He declares, "there is no such thing as ... morally right or wrong." (*The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, p. 145); "Individual human life is meaningless ... and without ultimate moral value." (p. 17); "We need to face the fact that nihilism is true." (p. 95). By contrast, the theist grounds objective moral values in God, and our moral duties in His commands. The theist thus has the explanatory resources to ground objective moral values and duties which the atheist lacks.

Hence we may argue:

1. Objective moral values and duties exist.
2. But if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(VII) The very possibility of God's existence implies that God exists.

In order to understand this argument, you need to understand what philosophers mean by "possible worlds." A possible world is just a way the world might have been. It is a description of a possible reality. So a possible world is not a planet or a universe or any kind of concrete object, it is a world-description. The actual world is the description that is true. Other possible worlds are descriptions that are not in fact true but which might have been true. To say that something exists in some possible world is to say that there is some consistent description of reality which includes that entity. To say that something exists in *every* possible world means that no matter which description is true, that entity will be included in the description. For example, unicorns do not in fact exist, but there are some possible worlds in which unicorns exist. On the other hand, many mathematicians think that numbers exist in every possible world.

Now with that in mind, consider the *ontological argument*, which was discovered in the year 1011 by the monk Anselm of Canterbury. God, Anselm observes, is by definition the greatest being conceivable. If you could conceive of anything greater

than God, then *that* would be God. Thus, God is the greatest conceivable being—a maximally great being. So what would such a being be like? He would be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, and He would exist in every logically possible world. A being which lacked any of those properties would not be maximally great: we could conceive of something greater—a being which did have all these properties.

But this implies that if God's existence is even *possible*, then God must exist. For if a maximally great being exists in any possible world, He exists in all of them. That's part of what it means to be maximally great—to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every logically possible world. So if God's existence is even possible, then He exists in every logically possible world—and therefore in the actual world.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists.
2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being exists in the actual world.
6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists.
7. Therefore, God exists.

It might surprise you to learn that steps 2–7 of this argument are relatively uncontroversial. Most philosophers would agree that if God's existence is even possible, then He must exist.

So the question is, is God's existence possible? Well, what do you think? The atheist has to maintain that it's *impossible* that God exists. That is, he has to maintain that the concept of God is *logically incoherent*, like the concept of a married bachelor or a round square. The problem is that the concept of God just doesn't appear to be incoherent in that way. The idea of a being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every possible world seems perfectly coherent. Moreover, as we've seen, there are other arguments for God's existence which at least suggest that it's possible that God exists. So I'll just leave it with you. Do you think, as I do, that it's at least possible that God exists? If so, then it follows logically that He does exist.

(VIII) God can be personally known and experienced.

This isn't really an *argument* for God's existence; rather it's the claim that you can know God exists wholly *apart* from arguments, by personally experiencing him. Philosophers call beliefs grasped in this way “properly basic beliefs.” They aren't based on some other beliefs; rather they're part of the foundation of a person's system of beliefs. Other properly basic beliefs would be the belief in the reality of the past or the existence of the external world. When you think about it, neither of these beliefs can be proved by argument. How could you prove that the world was not created five minutes ago with built-in appearances of age like food in our stomachs from the breakfasts we never really ate and memory traces in our brains of events

we never really experienced? How could you prove that you are not a brain in a vat of chemicals being stimulated with electrodes by some mad scientist to believe that you are reading this article? We don't base such beliefs on argument; rather they're part of the foundations of our system of beliefs.

But although these sorts of beliefs are basic for us, that doesn't mean that they're arbitrary. Rather they're grounded in the sense that they're formed in the context of certain experiences. In the experiential context of seeing and feeling and hearing things, I naturally form the belief that there are certain physical objects which I am sensing. Thus, my basic beliefs are not arbitrary, but appropriately grounded in experience. There may be no way to prove such beliefs, and yet it's perfectly rational to hold them. Such beliefs are thus not merely basic, but *properly* basic. In the same way, belief in God is for those who seek Him a properly basic belief grounded in their experience of God.

Now if this is so, then there's a danger that philosophical arguments for God could actually distract your attention from God Himself. The Bible promises, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We mustn't so concentrate on the external arguments that we fail to hear the inner voice of God speaking to our hearts. For those who listen, God becomes a personal reality in their lives.

Summary

In summary, we've seen eight respects in which God provides a better account of the world than naturalism: God is the best explanation of

- (I) Why anything at all exists.
- (II) The origin of the universe.
- (III) The applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
- (IV) The fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
- (V) Intentional states of consciousness.
- (VI) Objective moral values and duties.

Moreover

- (VII) The very possibility of God's existence implies that God exists.
- (VIII) God can be personally experienced and known.

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 This essay originally appeared on the website https://philosophynow.org/issues/99/Does_God_Exist. It is reproduced here with the permission of the publisher and author.

“DOES GOD EXIST?” DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors led to a resurgence of Christian philosophy in the twentieth century?

Despite the proclamation that “God is dead,” a host of Christian philosophers, led by Alvin Plantinga, made a strong case for God’s necessary existence to explain the universe in which we find ourselves. The argument that nothing exists except what can be verified by the five senses—verificationism—collapsed in the face of this intellectual assault.

A renaissance of Christian philosophy was set off by Plantinga’s book, *God and Other Minds* (1967), which applied the tools of analytic philosophy to questions in the philosophy of religion and transformed Anglo-American philosophy as a result. This renaissance was accompanied by a resurgence of interest in natural theology—the branch of theology which seeks to prove God’s existence without appeal to divine revelation.

Along with the traditional philosophical arguments for God such as the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments, new lines of reasoning were presented by Christian philosophers in professional journals and conferences and in academic departments at colleges and universities.

“God is not ‘dead’ in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.” Quentin Smith

2. How does the fine-tuning of the universe provide evidence for a cosmic Designer?

Recent scientific discoveries point to the initial conditions of the Big Bang being fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life with a precision not possible by chance or luck. There are certain constants, e.g., the gravitational constant, that fall into an extraordinarily narrow range of life-permitting values. In addition to these constants, there are certain arbitrary quantities that define the initial conditions on which the laws of nature operate, e.g., the amount of entropy (disorder) in the universe.

There are three possible explanations for this fine-tuning: physical necessity, chance, or design. Physical necessity is out because the constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature. Therefore, they are not physically necessary. The chances of all the constants and quantities falling into the narrow life-permitting range by chance are so infinitesimal that they cannot be reasonably accepted. This leaves design, and that requires a designer.

3. Why is God the best explanation of objective moral values and duties?

In our experience, we comprehend moral values and duties that impose themselves as objectively binding and true. For example, we recognize that it’s wrong to walk into an elementary school with an automatic weapon and shoot boys and girls and their teachers. On a naturalistic view, however, there is nothing wrong with this because moral values are just the subjective by-products of biological evolution and social conditioning, and have no objective validity.

The consistent atheist has to admit that there is no such thing as right or wrong. By contrast, the theist grounds objective moral values in God. Moral duties are based on his character and commands; hence we may argue: 1. Objective moral values and duties exist. 2. If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist. 3. Therefore, God exists.

4. What is the ontological argument and how does it explain God's existence?

The ontological argument was put forth in AD 1011 by the monk Anselm of Canterbury. It goes like this: God is by definition the greatest being conceivable. If you could conceive of anything greater than God, then that would be God. Thus, God is the greatest conceivable being.

Such a being would be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, and he would exist in every logically possible world. A being that lacked any of those properties would not be maximally great because we could conceive of something greater. This implies that if God's existence is even possible, then God must exist. For if a maximally great being exists in any possible world, he exists in all of them.

Most philosophers would agree that if God's existence is even possible, then he must exist. The atheist must prove that it's impossible that God exists; therefore the concept of God is logically incoherent, like the concept of a round square. The problem the atheist faces is that the concept of God doesn't appear to be incoherent in that way. The idea of a being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every possible world seems perfectly coherent.

5. How do we know that God can be personally known and experienced?

The belief that God exists because we can experience him is called a "basic belief." It is not based on some other belief but is part of the foundation of a person's belief system. This is what philosophers call "properly basic beliefs." Other properly basic beliefs would be the belief in the reality of the past or the existence of the external world. Neither of these beliefs can be proved by argument, e.g., how could you prove that the world was not created five minutes ago with built-in appearances of age?

Although these sorts of beliefs are basic, that doesn't mean they are arbitrary. Rather, they are grounded in the sense that they are formed in the context of certain experiences. There may be no way to prove such beliefs, and yet it's perfectly rational to hold them. Such beliefs are not merely basic, but *properly* basic. In the same way, belief in God is for those who seek him a properly basic belief grounded in the experience of God.

The Bible promises, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We must not focus on external arguments to the exclusion of hearing God speak to our hearts. For those who listen, God becomes a personal reality in their lives.

▶ “WHY APOLOGETICS?” VIDEO

Mary Jo Sharp opens with her own story of conversion from atheism to Christianity. She talks about her early struggles with doubt and her efforts to believe in the truth of the Bible. Her search for answers led her into the field of apologetics.

Apologetics is “a defense” for the Christian faith. Apologetics involves knowing what you believe, why you believe it, and how to defend it. Sharp gives three reasons for studying apologetics: (1) to answer doubts, (2) to build confidence, and (3) to change lives. She goes on to explain several ways to do these vital tasks effectively.



To access this video, go to www.summitu.com/utf and enter the passcode found in the back of your manual.

▶ “WHY APOLOGETICS?” VIDEO OUTLINE

Former atheist Mary Jo Sharp rejected Christianity because of many factors:

- Upbringing
- Entertainment and news media
- Shallow and hypocritical Christians
- Distrust of the church

Being exposed to a vibrant Christian and the Bible led to her conversion and ultimately an interest in apologetics. **Apologetics**: giving a “defense” (1 Peter 3:15). Apologetics involves defense and offense:

- Defense—answering _____ **challenges** _____ to the faith
- Offense—presenting _____ **reasons** _____ for belief

Three Reasons for Apologetics

1. Answer Doubts

Doubts are prevalent because of

- life experiences;
- brushes with great _____ **evil** _____;
- exposure to bad arguments without exposure to good arguments;
- limitation of human knowledge; and
- lack of living in God’s presence.

Seeking answers to doubts can root out false beliefs and allow us to trust God. Sometimes we won’t find answers to doubts; we just have to live with them.

2. Build Confidence

These things tear down confidence in God:

- Popular atheists who insist Christianity isn’t intellectually credible
- Media and education that present a secularized view of the world
- Christians who lack _____ **training** _____, who don’t know how to integrate faith and life, and who reject the need to engage the culture

3. Change Lives

Apologetics can change lives. It transforms us and the people around us.

Personal transformation is proof of God. It’s not that people don’t have answers to their questions, it’s that they don’t have good models.

We can’t change the _____ **culture** _____ unless we are changed first.

▶ “WHY APOLOGETICS?” DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the factors keeping people like Mary Jo Sharp from becoming Christians?

Upbringing: People raised in agnostic or atheistic homes don't see the positive aspects of Christianity. They are taught it isn't a viable worldview. To adopt it later in life would be to go against those they love most.

Entertainment and news media: These often give a distorted view of Christianity and focus on the worst stereotypes.

Shallow and hypocritical Christians: Good disciples are a draw to the faith and poor disciples are a repellent. Hypocritical Christians confirm a nonbeliever's lack of interest in Jesus and the church that bears his name.

2. What is apologetics, and what does it try to achieve?

“Apologetics” comes from 1 Peter 3:15, where we are told to be prepared to give a “defense.” It means to make a case for something. Apologetics builds an *offense for* and a *defense of* Christian beliefs.

The goals of apologetics are to

- answer doubts;
- build confidence; and
- change lives.

Can you think of other goals apologetics can accomplish?

- Win converts to Christ
- Give credibility to the Christian worldview in a pluralistic society
- Make a case for intelligent design as an alternative to evolution

3. How did Jesus respond to the doubts of the apostle Thomas and John the Baptist?

The heart condition is the difference between Thomas and John. Thomas appears to be demanding evidence on his terms. Unless Jesus met his conditions, he wouldn't believe (John 20:24–29).

In the case of John the Baptist, he had an honest question based on his experience—being in prison, being different from what he expected, the reign of the Messiah he had identified. He just wanted confirmation: “Are you the one?” (Luke 7:18–28).

Along with his request, Thomas gets a public rebuke from Jesus. John gets physical miracles to affirm his faith and the highest praise from the Master.

Who do you identify with most, Thomas or John?

4. Why are doubts so prevalent?

Doubt is one of the most frequent and painful problems that plague Christians. It can spring from the following:

- **Life experiences:** Failure by God to live up to our expectations can lead to a contrast between what we experience and what we are promised.
- **A brush with great evil:** Tragedies like the death of a spouse or parent can lead to doubts of God's existence or character.
- **Exposure to bad arguments:** Bad philosophy comes through the Internet and media. Good arguments are harder to find.
- **Limitation of human knowledge:** All humans have doubts about something at some time.
- **Lack of living in God's presence:** Not practicing the spiritual disciplines leaves one weak and susceptible to doubt.

5. What's tearing down confidence in Christianity in our culture?

Popular atheists like Mark Twain, Bill Maher, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris have broad appeal. They articulately insist Christianity isn't intellectually credible.

The **media** presents a secularized view of reality. Hollywood producers, news directors, and educational leaders are largely atheists and promote atheistic worldviews.

Some **Christians** lack training and can't challenge the scientific naturalism of our day, don't know how to integrate faith and life, and reject the need to interact with and engage the culture.

Chapter 1 Key Points

Key Questions:

1. Why are ideas important?
2. How do ideas affect us?
3. How do faith and ideas relate?

Key Terms:

1. Epistemology
2. Faith
3. Hard Authority
4. Relativism
5. Soft Authority*

Key Verses:

1. 1 Chronicles 12:32
2. Esther 4:14
3. Romans 1:18–21
4. Romans 12:2
5. 2 Corinthians 10:5
6. Ephesians 4:17–24
7. Colossians 2:8

**Short answer or essay question on the exam*

CHAPTER 1 ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions with at least one paragraph.

1. Explain the concept of a mental map and how it can help us to understand and explain the world. Who has this kind of “ideas map,” what kinds of questions should it help us answer, and why do our answers matter?

2. What are some reasons Christians give to avoid thinking about “worldly” kinds of knowledge and philosophy, and how might a Christian answer these objections biblically?

3. What is the metaphor of the “two-story concept of truth,” and what are some consequences of thinking that way?

4. How might a Christian respond to the claim that Christianity is based on faith, and that faith is the opposite of knowledge or facts?

Other potential questions:

- What kinds of authority have most influenced your own understanding of Christianity, whether for good or bad?
- What are some doubts that you have heard about from others or experienced yourself? What caused these doubts?

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES SERIES

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH[®]

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

STUDENT MANUAL

Samples reduced; not actual size

WEEK 34

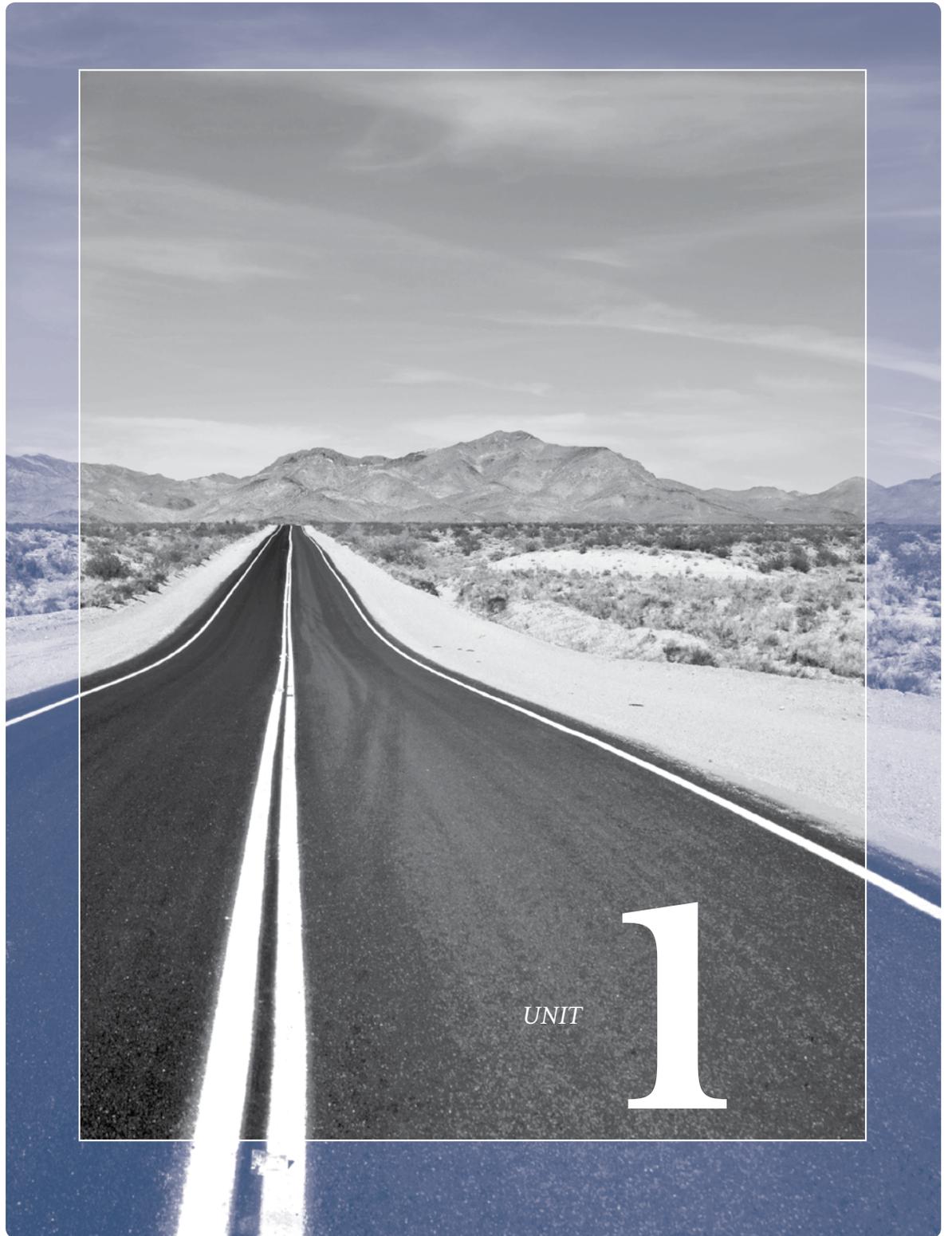
DAY	5-Day	ASSIGNMENT	PG
166	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 17 Questions	340
	In Class	EXPLORE UTF Chapter 17 Activities	340
	At Home	READ “Isn’t Religion Based on Faith?”	346
167	In Class	GIVE “Isn’t Religion Based on Faith?” Quiz	CD
	In Class	DISCUSS “Isn’t Religion Based on Faith?” Questions	355
	At Home	WATCH “Dealing with Doubt”	357
168	In Class	GIVE “Dealing with Doubt” Quiz	CD
	In Class	DISCUSS “Dealing with Doubt” Questions	360
169	In Class	STUDY FOR UTF Chapter 17 Test	
170	In Class	COLLECT UTF Chapter 17 Assignment	CD
	In Class	GIVE UTF Chapter 17 Test	CD
	At Home	READ UTF Chapter 18	

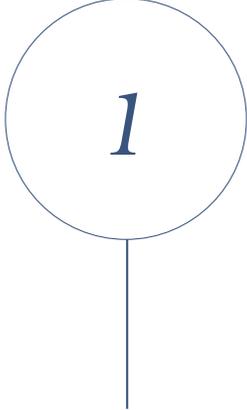
WEEK 35

DAY	5-Day	ASSIGNMENT	PG
171	In Class	REVIEW UTF Chapter 17 Test	
	In Class	REVIEW UTF Chapter 17 Assignment	
	In Class	VIEW UTF Chapter 18 Objectives	365
	At Home	READ UTF Chapter 18	
172	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 18 Questions	366
173	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 18 Questions	366
174	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 18 Questions	366
175	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 18 Questions	366

WEEK 36

DAY	5-Day	ASSIGNMENT	PG
176	In Class	DISCUSS UTF Chapter 18 Questions	366
177	In Class	STUDY FOR UTF Chapter 18 Test	
178	In Class	STUDY FOR UTF Chapter 18 Test	
179	In Class	STUDY FOR UTF Chapter 18 Test	
180	In Class	GIVE UTF Chapter 18 Test	CD





1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. articulate why they need guidance in life. [1.1–1.2]
2. identify how ideas affect the way they live. [1.3]
3. explain the five key questions that affect their direction in life. [1.4]
4. describe why it is important to understand the times in which they live. [1.5]
5. discuss why the search for knowledge is possible. [1.6]
6. state why the search for knowledge is biblical and important. [1.7]
7. list different types of authority and state the relevance of each to their lives. [1.8]
8. present evidence for why Christians should submit to God's authority. [1.9–1.10]
9. articulate why biblical faith isn't blind or without reason. [1.11]
10. discuss how to deal with doubt. [1.11]
11. explain why this book is important. [1.12–1.14]
12. summarize why they should live out their faith in the location God has placed them. [1.15]

CHAPTER 1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was this book written? [1.2]
2. What is the result of the human search for answers? [1.2]
3. How do ideas influence the direction of our lives? [1.3]
4. Is there a principle we can use to make sense of the vast array of ideas? [1.4]

9. What problem does relativism create for secular humanists? [1.6]

10. Should Christians study worldviews and philosophies that are at odds with Christianity? [1.7]

11. What is the “two-story concept of truth” and why is it dangerous? [1.8]

12. What problems are created by the “fact/value split?” [1.8]

13. What does it mean to have authority? [1.9]

14. What types of authority does God have? [1.9]

15. Is doubt a good reason for not submitting to God's authority? [1.10]

16. What is biblical faith? [1.11]

17. Can a person have faith and doubts at the same time? [1.11]

18. What are the areas where you might be embarrassed if someone were to challenge your faith? [1.13]

19. Are today's Christian young adults prepared to defend their faith in a pluralistic world? [1.14]

20. What is the main battle of our time? [1.15]

21. What reasons can give to show that the Bible is the Word of God?

“DOES GOD EXIST?” READING

Christian philosopher William Lane Craig explains why the idea that God is dead is itself dead in many academic circles. Along with a resurgence of traditional philosophical arguments for God—cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological—new arguments have been presented and defended by top-tier Christian philosophers.

Craig briefly outlines eight reasons in support of God’s existence:

1. God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.
2. God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.
3. God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
4. God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
5. God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness.
6. God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.
7. The very possibility of God’s existence implies that God exists.
8. God can be personally known and experienced.

Together these arguments make a strong case for a personal God as the best explanation for universe in which we find ourselves.

DOES GOD EXIST?

by William Lane Craig

On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine carried a lead story for which the cover was completely black except for three words emblazoned in bright, red letters against the dark background: “IS GOD DEAD?” The story described the so-called “Death of God” movement then current in American theology. But, to paraphrase Mark Twain, it seemed that the news of God’s demise was “greatly exaggerated.” For at the same time that theologians were writing God’s obituary, a new generation of young philosophers was re-discovering His vitality.

Back in the 1940s and ‘50s it was widely believed among philosophers that any talk about God is meaningless, since it is not verifiable by the five senses. The collapse of this Verificationism was perhaps the most important philosophical event of the twentieth century. Its downfall meant a resurgence of metaphysics, along with other traditional problems of philosophy which Verificationism had suppressed. Accompanying this resurgence came something altogether unanticipated: a renaissance of Christian philosophy.

The turning point probably came in 1967 with the publication of Alvin Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds*, which applied the tools of analytic philosophy to questions in

the philosophy of religion with an unprecedented rigor and creativity. In Plantinga's train has followed a host of Christian philosophers, writing in professional journals and participating in professional conferences and publishing with the finest academic presses. The face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. Atheism, although perhaps still the dominant viewpoint in Western universities, is a philosophy in retreat. In a recent article, University of Western Michigan philosopher Quentin Smith laments what he calls "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." ("The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism", *Philo*, Vol 4, #2, at philoonline.org). Complaining of naturalists' passivity in the face of the wave of "intelligent and talented theists entering academia today," Smith concludes, "God is not 'dead' in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments."

The renaissance of Christian philosophy has been accompanied by a resurgence of interest in natural theology—that branch of theology which seeks to prove God's existence without appeal to the resources of authoritative divine revelation—for instance, through philosophical argument. All of the traditional philosophical arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments, not to mention creative, new arguments, find intelligent and articulate defenders on the contemporary philosophical scene.

But what about the so-called "New Atheism" exemplified by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens? Doesn't it herald a reversal of this trend? Not really. As is evident from the authors it interacts with—or rather, *doesn't* interact with—the New Atheism is, in fact, a pop-cultural phenomenon lacking in intellectual muscle and blissfully ignorant of the revolution that has taken place in Anglo-American philosophy. It tends to reflect the scientism of a bygone generation, rather than the contemporary intellectual scene.

Eight Reasons in Support of God's Existence

I believe that God's existence best explains a wide range of the data of human experience. Let me briefly mention eight such cases.

(I) God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.

Suppose you were hiking through the forest and came upon a ball lying on the ground. You would naturally wonder how it came to be there. If your hiking buddy said to you, "Forget about it! It just exists!" you would think he was either joking or just wanted you to keep moving. No one would take seriously the idea that the ball just exists without any explanation. Now notice that merely increasing the size of the ball until it becomes coextensive with the universe does nothing to either provide, or remove the need for, an explanation of its existence.

So what is the explanation of the existence of the universe (by "the universe" I mean all of spacetime reality)? The explanation of the universe can lie only in a transcendent reality beyond it—beyond space and time—the existence of which transcendent reality is metaphysically necessary (otherwise its existence would also need explaining). Now there is only one way I can think of to get a contingent entity like the universe

from a necessarily existing cause, and that is if the cause is an agent who can freely choose to create the contingent reality. It therefore follows that the best explanation of the existence of the contingent universe is a transcendent personal being—which is what everybody means by “God.”

We can summarize this reasoning as follows:

1. Every contingent thing has an explanation of its existence.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is a transcendent, personal being.
3. The universe is a contingent thing.
4. Therefore, the universe has an explanation of its existence.
5. Therefore, the explanation of the universe is a transcendent, personal being—which is what everybody means by “God.”

(II) God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.

We have pretty strong evidence that the universe has not existed eternally into the past, but had a beginning a finite time ago. In 2003, the mathematician Arvind Borde, and physicists Alan Guth and Alexander Vilenkin were able to prove that *any* universe which has, on average, been expanding throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past, but must have a past spacetime boundary (i.e., a beginning). What makes their proof so powerful is that it holds so long as time and causality hold, *regardless* of the physical description of the very early universe. Because we don’t yet have a quantum theory of gravity, we can’t yet provide a physical description of the first split-second of the universe; but the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem is *independent* of one’s theory of gravitation. For instance, their theorem implies that the quantum vacuum state which may have characterized the early universe cannot have existed eternally into the past, but must itself have had a beginning. Even if our universe is just a tiny part of a so-called “multiverse,” composed of many universes, their theorem requires that the multiverse *itself* must have had a beginning.

Of course, highly speculative physical scenarios, such as loop quantum gravity models, string models, even closed timelike curves, have been proposed to try to avoid this absolute beginning. These models are fraught with problems, but the bottom line is that none of these theories, *even if true*, succeeds in restoring an eternal past for the universe. Last year, at a conference in Cambridge celebrating the seventieth birthday of Stephen Hawking, Vilenkin delivered a paper entitled “Did the Universe Have a Beginning?” which surveyed current cosmology with respect to that question. He argued that “none of these scenarios can actually be past-eternal.” Specifically, Vilenkin closed the door on three models attempting to avert the implication of his theorem: eternal inflation, a cyclic universe, and an “emergent” universe which exists for eternity as a static seed before expanding. Vilenkin concluded, “*All* the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning.”

But then the inevitable question arises: *Why* did the universe come into being? What brought the universe into existence? There must have been a transcendent cause which brought the universe into being—a cause outside the universe itself.

We can summarize this argument thus far as follows:

1. The universe began to exist.
2. If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a transcendent cause.
3. Therefore, the universe has a transcendent cause.

By the very nature of the case, that cause of the physical universe must be an immaterial (i.e., non-physical) being. Now there are only two types of things that could possibly fit that description: either an abstract object like a number, or an unembodied mind/consciousness. But abstract objects don't stand in causal relations to physical things. The number 7, for example, has no effect on anything. Therefore, the cause of the universe is an unembodied mind. Thus again we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its Personal Creator.

(III) God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.

Philosophers and scientists have puzzled over what physicist Eugene Wigner called "the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics." How is it that a mathematical theorist like Peter Higgs can sit down at his desk and, by pouring over mathematical equations, predict the existence of a fundamental particle which, thirty years later, after investing millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours, experimentalists are finally able to detect? Mathematics is the language of nature. But how is this to be explained? If mathematical objects like numbers and mathematical theorems are abstract entities causally isolated from the physical universe, then the applicability of mathematics is, in the words of philosopher of mathematics Mary Leng, "a happy coincidence." On the other hand, if mathematical objects are just useful fictions, how is it that nature is written in the language of these fictions? The naturalist has no explanation for the uncanny applicability of mathematics to the physical world. By contrast, the theist has a ready explanation: When God created the physical universe He designed it in terms of the mathematical structure which He had in mind.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

1. If God did not exist, the applicability of mathematics would be just a happy coincidence.
2. The applicability of mathematics is not just a happy coincidence.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(IV) God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.

In recent decades scientists have been stunned by the discovery that the initial conditions of the Big Bang were fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life with a precision and delicacy that literally defy human comprehension. This fine-tuning is of two sorts. First, when the laws of nature are expressed as equations, you find appearing in them certain constants, such as the gravitational constant. The values of these constants are independent of the laws of nature. Second, in addition to these constants, there are certain arbitrary quantities which define the initial conditions on

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which the laws of nature operate—for example, the amount of entropy (disorder) in the universe. Now these constants and quantities fall into an extraordinarily narrow range of life-permitting values. Were these constants or quantities to be altered by less than a hair's breadth, the life-permitting balance of nature would be destroyed, and life would not exist.

There are three live explanatory options for this extraordinary fine-tuning: physical necessity, chance, or design.

Physical necessity is not, however, a plausible explanation, because the finely-tuned constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature. Therefore, they are not physically necessary.

So could this fine-tuning be due to chance? The problem with this explanation is that the odds of all the constants and quantities randomly falling into the incomprehensibly narrow life-permitting range are just so infinitesimal that they cannot be reasonably accepted. Therefore, the proponents of the chance explanation have been forced to postulate the existence of a "World Ensemble" of other universes, preferably infinite in number and randomly ordered, so that life-permitting universes like ours would appear by chance somewhere in the Ensemble. Not only is this hypothesis, to borrow Richard Dawkins' phrase, "an unparsimonious extravagance," it faces an insuperable objection. By far, the most probable observable universes in a World Ensemble would be worlds in which a single brain fluctuated into existence out of the vacuum and observed its otherwise empty world. So, if our world were just a random member of the World Ensemble, by all probability we ought to be having observations like that. Since we don't, that strongly disconfirms the World Ensemble hypothesis. So chance is also not a good explanation. Thus,

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. The fine-tuning of the universe is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, the fine-tuning of the universe is due to design.
4. Thus, the fine-tuning of the universe constitutes evidence for a cosmic Designer.

(V) God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness.

Philosophers are puzzled by states of intentionality. Intentionality is the property of being about something or of something. It signifies the *object-directedness* of our thoughts. For example, I can think about my summer vacation, or I can think of my wife. No physical object has intentionality in this sense. A chair or a stone or a glob of tissue like the brain is not about or of something else. Only mental states or states of consciousness are about other things. In *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (2011), the materialist Alex Rosenberg recognizes this fact, and concludes that for atheists, there really are no intentional states. Rosenberg boldly claims that we never really think about anything. But this seems incredible. Obviously, I am thinking about Rosenberg's argument—and so are you! This seems to me to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of his atheism. By contrast, for theists, because

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UNIT 1

God is a mind, it's hardly surprising that there should be other, finite minds, with intentional states. This intentional states fit comfortably into a theistic worldview.

So we may argue:

1. If God did not exist, intentional states of consciousness would not exist.
2. But intentional states of consciousness do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(VI) God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.

In our experience we apprehend moral values and duties which impose themselves as objectively binding and true. For example, we recognize that it's wrong to walk into an elementary school with an automatic weapon and shoot little boys and girls and their teachers. On a naturalistic view, however, there is nothing really wrong with this moral value as just the subjective by-products of biological evolution and social conditioning, and have no objective validity.

Alex Rosenberg is brutally honest about the implications of his atheism here too. He declares, "there is no such thing as ... morally right or wrong." (*The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, p. 145); "Individual human life is meaningless ... and without ultimate moral value" (p. 17); "We need to face the fact that nihilism is true." (p. 95). By contrast, the theist grounds objective moral values in God, and our moral duties in His commands. The theist thus has the explanatory resources to ground objective moral values and duties which the atheist lacks.

Hence we may argue:

1. Objective moral values and duties exist.
2. But if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

(VII) The very possibility of God's existence implies that God exists.

In order to understand this argument, you need to understand what philosophers mean by "possible worlds." A possible world is just a way the world might have been. It is a description of a possible reality. So a possible world is not a planet or a universe or any kind of concrete object, it is a world-description. The actual world is the description that is true. Other possible worlds are descriptions that are not in fact true but which might have been true. To say that something exists in some possible world is to say that there is some consistent description of reality which includes that entity. To say that something exists in every possible world means that no matter which description is true, that entity will be included in the description. For example, unicorns do not in fact exist, but there are some possible worlds in which unicorns exist. On the other hand, many mathematicians think that numbers exist in every possible world.

Now with that in mind, consider the *ontological argument*, which was discovered in the year 1011 by the monk Anselm of Canterbury. God, Anselm observes, is by definition the greatest being conceivable. If you could conceive of anything greater

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than God, then *that* would be God. Thus, God is the greatest conceivable being—a maximally great being. So what would such a being be like? He would be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, and He would exist in every logically possible world. A being which lacked any of those properties would not be maximally great: we could conceive of something greater—a being which did have all these properties.

But this implies that if God's existence is even possible, then God must exist. For if a maximally great being exists in any possible world, He exists in *all* of them. That's part of what it means to be maximally great—to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every logically possible world. So if God's existence is even possible, then He exists in every logically possible world—and therefore in the actual world.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists.
2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being exists in the actual world.
6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists.
7. Therefore, God exists.

It might surprise you to learn that steps 2-7 of this argument are relatively uncontroversial. Most philosophers would agree that if God's existence is even possible, then He must exist.

So the question is, is God's existence possible? Well, what do you think? The atheist has to maintain that it's *impossible* that God exists. That is, he has to maintain that the concept of God is *logically incoherent*, like the concept of a married bachelor or a round square. The problem is that the concept of God just doesn't appear to be incoherent in that way. The idea of a being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every possible world seems perfectly coherent. Moreover, as we've seen, there are other arguments for God's existence which at least suggest that it's possible that God exists. So I'll just leave it with you. Do you think, as I do, that it's at least possible that God exists? If so, then it follows logically that He does exist.

(VIII) God can be personally known and experienced.

This isn't really an *argument* for God's existence; rather it's the claim that you can know God exists wholly *apart* from arguments, by personally experiencing him. Philosophers call beliefs grasped in this way "properly basic beliefs." They aren't based on some other beliefs; rather they're part of the foundation of a person's system of beliefs. Other properly basic beliefs would be the belief in the reality of the past or the existence of the external world. When you think about it, neither of these beliefs can be proved by argument. How could you prove that the world was not created five minutes ago with built-in appearances of age like food in our stomachs from the breakfasts we never really ate and memory traces in our brains of events

we never really experienced? How could you prove that you are not a brain in a vat of chemicals being stimulated with electrodes by some mad scientist to believe that you are reading this article? We don't base such beliefs on argument; rather they're part of the foundations of our system of beliefs.

But although these sorts of beliefs are basic for us, that doesn't mean that they're arbitrary. Rather they're grounded in the sense that they're formed in the context of certain experiences. In the experiential context of seeing and feeling and hearing things, I naturally form the belief that there are certain physical objects which I am sensing. Thus, my basic beliefs are not arbitrary, but appropriately grounded in experience. There may be no way to prove such beliefs, and yet it's perfectly rational to hold them. Such beliefs are thus not merely basic, but *properly* basic. In the same way, belief in God is for those who seek Him a properly basic belief grounded in their experience of God.

Now if this is so, then there's a danger that philosophical arguments for God could actually distract your attention from God Himself. The Bible promises, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We mustn't so concentrate on the external arguments that we fail to hear the inner voice of God speaking to our hearts. For those who listen, God becomes a personal reality in their lives.

Summary

In summary, we've seen eight respects in which God provides a better account of the world than naturalism: God is the best explanation of

- (I) Why anything at all exists.
- (II) The origin of the universe.
- (III) The applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
- (IV) The fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
- (V) Intentional states of consciousness.
- (VI) Objective moral values and duties.

Moreover

- (VII) The very possibility of God's existence implies that God exists.
- (VIII) God can be personally experienced and known.

This essay originally appeared on the website https://philosophy.com/issues/99/Does_God_Exist. It is reproduced here with the permission of the publisher and author.

"DOES GOD EXIST?" DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors led to a resurgence of Christian philosophy in the twentieth century?
2. How does the fine-tuning of the universe provide evidence for a cosmic Designer?
3. Why is God the best explanation of objective moral values and duties?

"DOES GOD EXIST?" DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. What is the ontological argument and how does it explain God's existence?
5. How do we know that God can be personally known and experienced?

▶ **"WHY APOLOGETICS?" VIDEO**

Mary Jo Sharp opens with her own story of conversion from atheism to Christianity. She talks about her early struggles with doubt and her efforts to believe in the truth of the Bible. Her search for answers led her into the field of apologetics.

Apologetics is "a defense" for the Christian faith. Apologetics involves knowing what you believe, why you believe it, and how to defend it. Sharp gives three reasons for studying apologetics: (1) to answer doubts, (2) to build confidence, and (3) to change lives. She goes on to explain several ways to do these vital tasks effectively.



To access this video, go to www.summita.com/utf and enter the passcode found in the back of your manual.

▶ **"WHY APOLOGETICS?" VIDEO OUTLINE**

Former atheist Mary Jo Sharp rejected Christianity because of many factors:

- Uplifting
- Entertainment and news media
- Shallow and hypocritical Christians
- Distrust of the church

Being exposed to a vibrant Christian and the Bible led to her conversion and ultimately an interest in apologetics. **Apologetics:** giving a "defense" (1 Peter 3:15). Apologetics involves defense and offense:

- Defense—answering _____ to the faith
- Offense—presenting _____ for belief

Three Reasons for Apologetics

1. Answer Doubts

Doubts are prevalent because of

- life experiences;
- brushes with great _____;
- exposure to bad arguments without exposure to good arguments;
- limitation of human knowledge; and
- lack of living in God's presence.

Seeking answers to doubts can root out false beliefs and allow us to trust God. Sometimes we won't find answers to doubts; we just have to live with them.

2. Build Confidence

These things tear down confidence in God:

- Popular atheists who insist Christianity isn't intellectually credible
- Media and education that present a secularized view of the world
- Christians who lack _____, who don't know how to integrate faith and life, and who reject the need to engage the culture

3. Change Lives

Apologetics can change lives. It transforms us and the people around us.

Personal transformation is proof of God. It's not that people don't have answers to their questions, it's that they don't have good models.

We can't change the _____ unless we are changed first.

▶ **"WHY APOLOGETICS?" DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the factors keeping people like Mary Jo Sharp from becoming Christians?

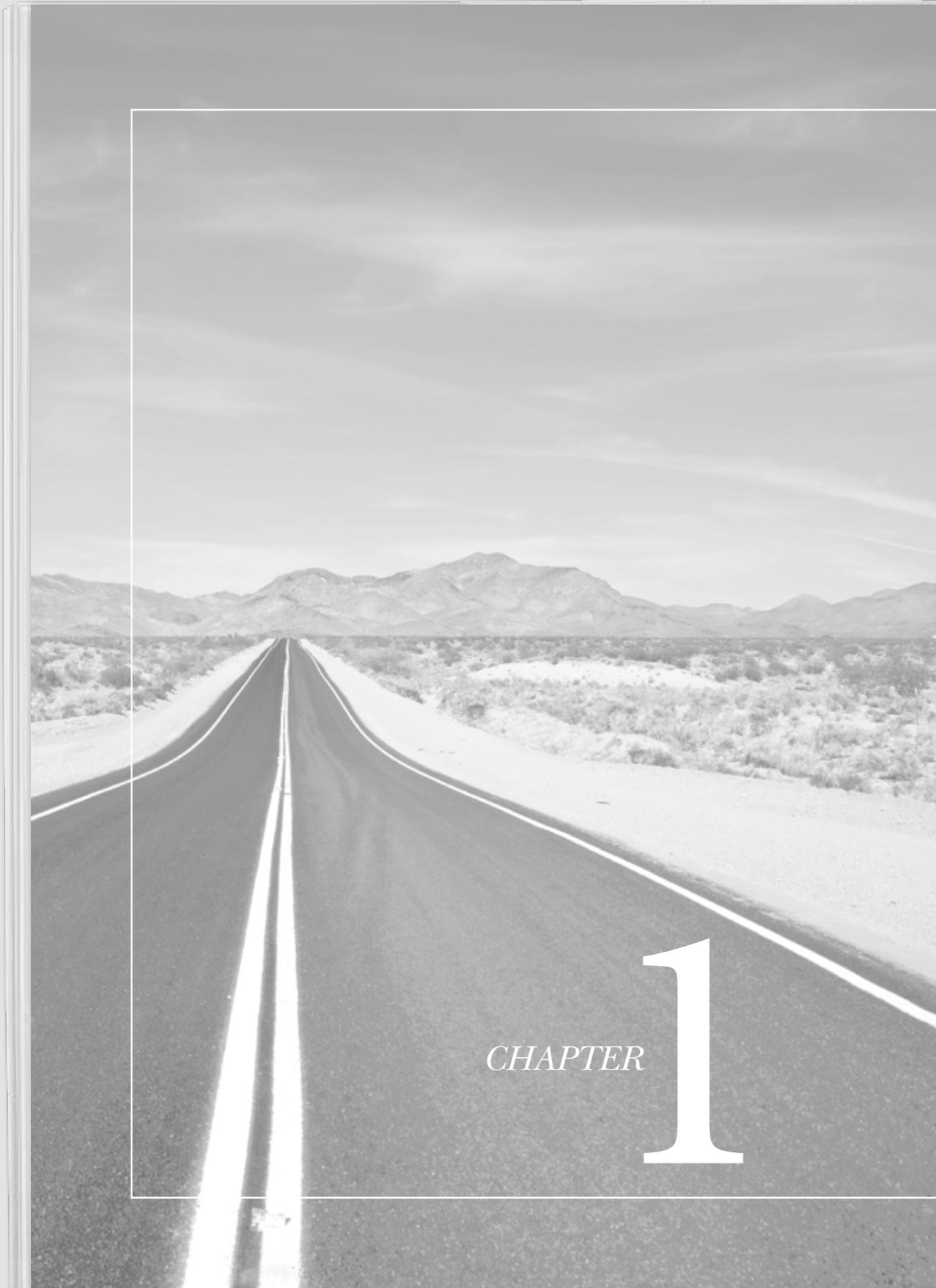
2. What is apologetics, and what does it try to achieve?

3. How did Jesus respond to the doubts of the apostle Thomas and John the Baptist?

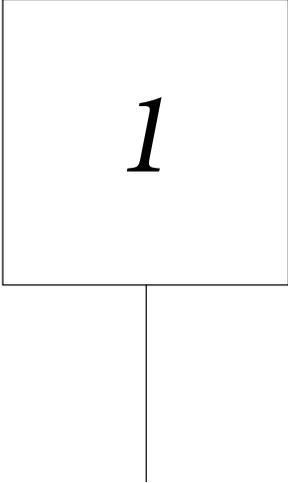
"WHY APOLOGETICS?" DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. Why are doubts so prevalent?

5. What's tearing down confidence in Christianity in our culture?



CHAPTER
1



1

INTRODUCTION

1. HOW TO FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Let's say you parachute into the middle of New York City's Central Park. When you land, a mysterious stranger says to you, "There is a five-thousand-dollar diamond necklace waiting for you at Tiffany & Co. It's yours, free, on one condition: you have to claim it in the next twenty minutes."

Even if you care nothing for diamond necklaces, this would get your attention. You could always sell it and keep the cash.

"But what is Tiffany & Co., and how do I get there?" you ask.

"I can't tell you," says your anonymous source. "You'll have to find out on your own."

Of course, you suspect a trick. After all, you just parachuted in. You know nothing about your would-be benefactor. But the necklace is worth a lot, so you have a strong incentive to check it out.

Your heart begins pounding. You feel your pocket—smartphone must have fallen out during the jump. You’ve never been in New York City before. The time limit creates a sense of

If you want the necklace, you’re going to have to overcome your fear (and your embarrassment at dragging a parachute behind you) and start asking for directions.

urgency—if you just wandered around for a few hours, you might eventually find Tiffany & Co. But you don’t have hours. You have twenty minutes.

If you want the necklace, you’re going to have to overcome your fear (and your embarrassment at dragging a parachute behind you) and start asking for directions. You will probably have three questions: Where am I? Where is Tiffany & Co.? What is the fastest way to get there?

But what kind of person do you ask? It must be someone who knows New York City generally and where certain stores are in particular. The homeless guy on the bench may know the layout of New York City, but he doesn’t seem like the kind of guy who would know much about jewelry stores. The skateboarding teenager probably won’t know either. Will the mom pushing the baby in a stroller?

Let’s say you find a source you think might be credible. How do you know he or she is telling the truth? After all, people in New York act as if they know what they’re doing, but some of them must be just as lost as you. *In fact, they might be wrong and not even know it.* Or worse, your source may have a sick sense of humor and think it’s funny to send you running off in the wrong direction. Will you ask more than one person to get confirmation? What do you do if their answers conflict?

The middle of Central Park to Tiffany & Co. on Fifth Avenue on the southeast side of the park is less than a mile. You can easily make it there inside of twenty minutes, especially if you jog. But it will take a few minutes to get directions and to orient yourself. There’s no time for mistakes.

If you want the necklace, you’ll have only one chance.

2. GETTING DIRECTIONS FOR LIFE

Some things about the search for the Tiffany & Co. necklace are very much like real life.

People who figure out what works in life are rewarded. The rewards may be tangible (money or things) or intangible (peace of mind, satisfaction with a job well done). The rewards may be temporal (in this life) or eternal (beyond death). Either way, there is a time limit; one out of every one person dies (you’ve probably noticed). There is a real world with real rules. You can’t set off to the north and expect to reach a southerly destination (except after a very long walk and swim around the earth).

This book was written to aid you in your exploration for God: Is he real? What is he like? Is what the Bible says about him authoritative and worthy of obedience? Many people question whether this is a valid pursuit. Some think it is irrelevant whether God exists. Others see belief in God and the Bible as an anesthetic that exists only to help those who have a low

tolerance for pain cope. Still others see God and the Bible as fictions invented to help the powerful oppress the weak.

We should not be too quick to dismiss these assertions. There are undoubtedly people who claim to be Christians but live as if God is irrelevant. And we can easily imagine people embracing Christianity because they want a crutch to help them hobble through life or a club with which to bully others.

Skeptics, cynics, atheists, agnostics, and firm believers all have at least one thing in common: they don't know everything. Beyond general things (such as how to walk without falling down, how to feed ourselves, and so on), we need help. Think of all the confusing issues humans face:

Skeptics, cynics, atheists, agnostics, and firm believers all have at least one thing in common: they don't know everything.

- Is there a God? And what do I understand to be true about him?
- How should I respond to those who believe differently, especially those whose understanding of God tells them to harm people like me?
- Where did we come from? Are we really a special creation of God, or are we the result of a random process of evolution? What does this mean for how we live together?
- What should I do for a job? What kinds of jobs are worth doing? How can we create more jobs?
- What does God want from me? How can I even know? What if people who have a different view of him try to stop me from doing what he wants?
- Should I get married? What is marriage anyway? If two people of the same sex want to marry each other, is that truly marriage?
- How can I live in harmony with those around me? Which political and economic policies are most harmonious with human flourishing? How should we respond when bad decisions made by leaders create disharmony?

It's tempting to dismiss these questions as trivial, but they matter. In the end, we have to act on what we know, and all our questions and actions will lead us to some destination. You might say, "I refuse to think about this—I'm not going anywhere," but you actually are. In this case, *nowhere* is surely as much a destination as *somewhere*.

All these questions about direction in life matter because we humans are not mere animals; we need to make sense of the world, not just survive in it. Among all

You might say, "I refuse to think about this—I'm not going anywhere," but you actually are. In this case, *nowhere* is surely as much a destination as *somewhere*.

living creatures, only human beings seem to wrestle with *why* we exist. In *A World without Heroes*, George Roche said:

Man is a very *strange* animal.... Not that there is anything particularly queer about our physical equipment; this is all quite reasonable. But gorillas have hands as we do, yet use them for very little, and never to play the piano or skip stones or whittle or write letters. Dolphins have bigger brains than we do, but you seldom hear them discoursing on nuclear physics. Chihuahuas are more hairless than we, but have never thought to wear clothes.... Man alone weeps for cause, and “is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter.”¹

The products of our musings and mental processing are called *ideas*, and our lives are full of them.² Some ideas accurately reflect our world. Many do not. Some help us; others cause harm. Are there clues we can use to figure out the difference?

3. IS ONE DIRECTION BETTER THAN ANOTHER?

Alice was completely overwhelmed by Wonderland and at an absolute loss for where to go. She asked the Cheshire Cat,

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?”
 “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
 “I don’t much care where—,” said Alice.
 “Then it doesn’t matter which way you walk,” said the Cat.
 “—so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.
 “Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”³

The dialogue between Alice and the Cat is more profound than it might appear. Even if we don’t care enough to think deeply about truth and meaning, our ideas lead us somewhere. Of that we can be certain. But where do they lead?

Even if we don’t care enough to think deeply about truth and meaning, our ideas lead us somewhere.

Our culture floods our senses with ideas—advertisements, programming, conversations, text messages. All this noise can seem like random, neutral bits of information, but if we look more closely, we realize that every bit of information contains proposals about how the world works. The ideas communicated might be true or false, but they are not neutral. They have the power, for better or worse, to change how we see the world. Over time, patterns emerge that hold certain ideas together and conform our lives to values and ways of living. The ideas we encounter may be complex, but they are not random.

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We are influenced, even if only with tiny nudges, by this information. The average person makes a few big decisions every day (Should I study for this test?) and ten thousand to twenty thousand small ones (Should I eat the

chips first or the sandwich?).⁴ Taken together, that which influences our decisions affects the way we live and possibly even the direction of our lives.

Overwhelmed, many “tune out” and believe whatever they’re told. History tells how unthinking people become the victims of ideas. A characteristic of those in the rising generation, however, is their dissatisfaction with the “That’s just the way it is, so stop asking questions” approach to tough questions. They crave meaning and know they must go beyond seeing the world in “bits and pieces,” as Francis Schaeffer put it, to seeing the big picture.⁵

What we need is a map. Maps provide clear mental models of the terrain we must navigate. A good map shows where the various towns, roads, and landmarks are situated in relation to one another. An “ideas map” would describe the contours of the world of thought and help us navigate the information we encounter. The more accurate our map, the more we’ll understand. On the map of life, there are five major landmarks—five questions we must ask and answer whether we want to or not.

4. FIVE QUESTIONS AFFECTING OUR DIRECTION IN LIFE

Obviously, mastering the world of ideas is a complex undertaking. I think of this every time I visit the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. “The Bod” is one of the world’s great libraries and the repository of more than eleven million books and artifacts. As you imagine Oxford’s majestic spires, recall the apostle Paul’s statement “Take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). How many *thoughts* are in all those books? How could a person possibly master them all?

Thoughtful people have always felt overwhelmed by how much there is to know. Even King Solomon said, “Of making many books there is no end” (Eccles. 12:12). Think how many more books have been written in the centuries and millennia since he said that! Today the world of ideas is more complex than ever. Which ideas should we take seriously? Which should we dismiss as frivolous, incoherent, or patently ridiculous? And which should we actively oppose as dangerous?

Maybe it will help to identify five landmarks on the “idea map” that form five questions every human must grapple with.

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Origin. Where did we come from? Some say we were created by God to bear his image. Others say we evolved through random-chance processes. One American Indian creation story begins with “The woman and the man dreamed that God was dreaming them.”⁶ So were they already created and dreaming, or were they part of God’s dream? Is the story intended to be taken literally, or is it poetry? The various creation stories contradict one another. They can’t all be right, but which is wrong?

Identity. Who are we? What is a human being? Are we more than just animals? Does every human being have intrinsic worth and dignity, or are worth and dignity determined by

external factors, skills, and attributes? Further, most people suspect that something is wrong with us. What exactly, if anything, is wrong, and how do we fix it?

Meaning. What is real and true, and how do we know? What is life all about? Is there purpose to our lives, or must we contrive it somehow? Is reality real or an illusion? Is there such a thing as “the good life,” and if so, what is it? What makes life worth living at all? Why do humans not only exist but also wonder about why they exist? Will the answers we embrace determine what we ultimately live for and the lengths to which we should go to achieve it?

Morality. How should we live? Are there rules for the good life? Who makes them? Are they true for all times and all cultures, or do they depend on our circumstances? A study by

A study by Barna Group states 83 percent of young adults said moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6 percent said moral truth is absolute.

Barna Group states that 83 percent of young adults said moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6 percent said moral truth is absolute.⁷ Is morality based on feelings? Does morality change if our feelings change?

Destiny. What happens next? Where is history headed? Is there an afterlife? If so, what is it like? Clearly there is something wrong with the world: poverty, injustice, pain, and sickness exist. How do we explain this?

And what do we do about it? Some say that bad things are just an illusion, while others say that bad things result from evolution and have no larger meaning. Still others blame sin. Some say there is a possibility of redemption, but there are many different ideas about what that means. Should we try to fix things or merely look forward to a life beyond this one?

And just when we think we’ve got everything figured out, one question continues to haunt us all: How do we know that our answers to these questions are right?

5. WHY WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

The Bible tells of a tribe in ancient Israel called Issachar, whose men had an “understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32). Those who understand the times aren’t as likely to be tricked by wrong ideas. What’s more, because they understand reality more clearly, they can come up with solutions to the problems that plague us all.

The Old Testament often uses the Hebrew word *derek* to describe a direction-filled life. *Derek* means “the way.” According to seminary professor Joel Williams, the ancient Hebrews

Those who understand the times aren’t as likely to be tricked by wrong ideas.

thought “to walk in the ways of God meant to live according to his will and commandments.”⁸ Deuteronomy 10:12 says that we should “walk in all his ways.” Isaiah 40:3 says to “prepare the way of the LORD.” In life, there is a right way to go and a wrong way to go. There is a way of wisdom and a way of foolishness. There is a right way and a

wicked way. There is a way of life and a way of death.

If you can understand the right way, the wrong way will become evident. If you can know how to stay on the right way, you can discern when you (and others) deviate from the path.

The apostle Paul, for example, in his lengthy and complex letter to the Christians in Rome, begins with a summary of how humanity had lost its way:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom. 1:18–21)

In this passage Paul describes what happens when people reject God. As a friend of mine puts it, when people do not think well of God in their minds, God gives them minds that do not think well.

Although it might sound broad-minded to argue that we should invite everyone to live as he or she pleases, the world does not change to fit our whims and desires. If Christianity is true, then it accurately describes the world *as it actually is*. Rejecting Christianity, then, is the same as rejecting reality itself. Inevitably, the real world crashes in, revealing the consequences of rejecting God’s rules and patterns.

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For more than fifteen years, British physician and psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple cared for the poorest of the poor in London’s slums. He observed in the process that the government’s attempts to show compassion to the poor actually worsened their situations. Drunkenness, promiscuity, gluttony, and abuse were common, along with all the health consequences you might expect from such lifestyles.

As Dalrymple tried to heal people’s wounds, he asked, “Why do you live like this?” Stunningly, he concluded that these vulnerable individuals had simply embraced—and practiced—the ideas about gender, sexual liberation, and meaning that were taught in theories at top universities and in the media.

In his book *Life at the Bottom*, Dalrymple turns his acerbic wit on twentieth-century intellectuals who “sought to free our sexual relations of all social, contractual, or moral obligations and meaning whatsoever, so that henceforth only raw sexual desire itself would count in our decision making.” Dalrymple shows that the results of adopting these ideas “both literally and wholesale” are horrifying.

If anyone wants to see what sexual relations are like, freed of contractual and social obligations, let him look at the chaos of the personal lives of members of the underclass....

Here are abortions procured by abdominal kung fu; children who have children, in numbers unknown before the advent of chemical contraception and sex education; women abandoned by the father of their child a month before or a month

after delivery; insensate jealousy, the reverse of the coin of general promiscuity, that results in the most hideous oppression and violence; serial stepfatherhood that leads to sexual and physical abuse of children on a mass scale; and every kind of loosening of the distinction between the sexually permissible and the impermissible.⁹

After reading Dalrymple’s graphic portrayal of the consequences of creating our own moral standards, we need to reevaluate the wisdom of the world in light of the wisdom of God; we need to rediscover the differences between right and wrong, good and evil.

6. CAN WE KNOW THE RIGHT WAY? CAN WE KNOW ANYTHING AT ALL?

When people make up worldviews, they tend to make up ones they believe they can successfully live out. The Christian worldview is not like that. Scripture reveals a God who does not change the rules and patterns of reality just because people do not like them. He does not adjust right or wrong according to the actions and philosophies of any particular community. As essayist Flannery O’Connor said, “Truth does not change by our ability to stomach it emotionally.”¹⁰ Conversely, God does not consider something to be true just because people do manage to stomach it or because it seems to give them success.

But God does care that we know the truth he makes plain to us. He cares that we understand the consequences of turning a blind eye to his standards of righteous thought and behavior.

The study of what knowledge is, how we know, and how our knowledge relates to what is real is called **epistemology** (*episteme* is Greek for “knowledge”).¹¹ What we believe about knowledge itself serves as a kind of greenhouse in which we nurture our ideas and transplant them into every area of life.

Epistemology: the branch of philosophy that seeks to understand the nature of knowledge.

Although it may not be possible to know everything, surely it is possible to know something. Yet some disagree

with even this, claiming that we can’t know anything outside our own “personal” reality and must instead get in touch with consciousness—our “higher selves.” Trying to search for knowledge outside ourselves wilts our true potential. New Spiritualist writer Shakti Gawain believes that “when we consistently suppress and distrust our intuitive knowingness, looking instead for [external] authority, validation, and approval from others, we give our personal power away.”¹²

Relativism: the belief that truth, knowledge, and morality are relative to the individual, society, and historical context.

The idea that truth and morality depend on our personal or cultural situation is called **relativism**. If relativism is correct, one of the main goals in life should be to remove any barriers people might face in finding truth for themselves. But isn’t this dangerous? Even Paul Kurtz, an atheist philosopher who helped develop a philosophy called “Secular Humanism,” acknowledged that it can be:

The humanist is faced with a crucial ethical problem: Insofar as he has defended an ethic of freedom, can he develop a basis for moral responsibility? Regretfully,

merely to liberate individuals from authoritarian social institutions, whether church or state, is no guarantee that they will be aware of their moral responsibility to others. The contrary is often the case. Any number of social institutions regulate conduct by some means of norms and rules, and sanctions are imposed for enforcing them.... Once these sanctions are ignored, we may end up with [a man] concerned with his own personal lust for pleasure, ambition, and power, and impervious to moral constraints.¹³

Kurtz understands that unless there is some revealed moral truth we are all obligated to obey, anything can be construed as good or bad relative to the situation in which we find ourselves. Even though we strive to do the right thing, if there is no absolute standard by which to judge, then we may honestly disagree among ourselves what the right thing is.

So if there are no absolute standards, how do we decide who is right and wrong when it comes to making societal decisions? According to Corliss Lamont, who donated the proceeds of his father's business fortune to build a library at Harvard University and in turn was able to serve as Harvard's "humanist chaplain," the answer is easy: intelligence. "For the Humanist," Lamont said, "stupidity is just as great a sin as selfishness; and 'the moral obligation to be intelligent' ranks always among the highest of duties."¹⁴ The implication of this statement is that only intelligent people are capable of making correct moral choices, leading to the assumption that intelligent people are to act as the moral compass for the rest of society. The smartest people should be in charge, and the rest of us must follow.

But surely some intelligent people are evil, right? Should we believe what they "know" just because they're smart? There must be a better way. Christianity may have an answer, but it leads to a whole lot of other questions.

If there are no absolute standards, how do we decide who is right and wrong when it comes to making societal decisions?

Surely some intelligent people are evil, right? Should we believe what they "know" just because they're smart?

7. IS IT TRULY GODLY TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE?

The Bible calls on Christians to have their minds and hearts renewed to discern right from wrong and good from evil (Rom.12:2)¹⁵ and to be renewed in the spirit of their minds (Eph. 4:17-22).¹⁶

But for some Christians, this mission is at odds with what they wrongly understand Christianity to be. Some say it is a waste of time and even sinful to talk about non-Christian ideas. We should just study the truth, they say. Many even quote the passage "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:20, 25).

Closely read what the passage actually says. It doesn't say that philosophy or scholarship or debating is bad; it says that approaching life from a worldview not centered in

God is a foolish thing to do. Studying is not bad; being taken captive by false ideas is. The Bible is full of examples of people who understood the truth from God's perspective and were better thinkers and leaders as a result. Daniel, for example, was even considered by a pagan king to be the wisest of men because his heart and mind were completely committed to God.

Similarly, some think Colossians 2:8 prohibits Christians from the study of philosophy when it says, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." Have philosophies deceived people? Certainly. But it does not follow that philosophy itself is deceptive and should not be studied. Rather, we should be wary of any idea based on human wisdom rather than Christ. Christian philosophers, then, must work hard to operate from a knowledge of Christ and a desire to serve their neighbors, helping them find release from their own captivity of heart and mind.

This leads us back to the idea of knowledge. To know something about a subject means to be acquainted with the facts and truths surrounding it. A close examination of Scripture shows that God cares very much about knowledge:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Ps. 19:1-4)

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Prov. 2:6)

An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (Prov. 18:15)

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hosea 4:6)

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment. (Phil. 1:9)

So God does care about what we know. But does it really matter whether we understand the times and know what we ought to do? Can we even claim to know what people "ought" to do?

8. IF KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT TO GOD, WHY ISN'T IT IMPORTANT TO CHRISTIANS?

Many people believe that Christianity can't contribute to the world's body of knowledge. A professor once told me, "You believe what you believe because you have faith. I believe what I believe because I have the facts." Ouch. Was my professor's assessment correct?

Nancy Pearcey is a professor and author who has studied the Christian worldview for decades. She says that the confusion over what we can know stems from an uncertainty about “upper versus lower story truth.” The problem, Pearcey says, is we have created an artificial separation between “fact” (what is demonstrably true) and “value” (what is important). She explains the idea as it was described by her mentor, Francis Schaeffer:

A professor once told me, “You believe what you believe because you have faith. I believe what I believe because I have the facts.” Ouch.

Using the metaphor of a building, [Schaeffer] warned that truth had been split into two stories.

The lower story consists of scientific facts, which are held to be empirically testable and universally valid. The upper story includes things like morality, theology, and aesthetics, which are now regarded as subjective and culturally relative. Essentially the upper story became a convenient dumping ground for anything that an empiricist worldview did not recognize as real. Schaeffer used a simple graphic, which we can adapt like this:

The two-story concept of truth

VALUES

Private, subjective, relative

FACTS

Public, objective, universal

This dichotomy has grown so pervasive that most people do not even realize they hold it.¹⁷

In Pearcey’s mind, people have come to accept this fact/value split and don’t question it anymore, even though it pushes Christian thought to the fringes of society. Pearcey isn’t the only one who has noticed this. J. P. Moreland, a respected philosopher and evangelical Christian, says,

There has emerged a secular/sacred separation in our understanding of the Christian life with the result that Christian teaching and practice are privatized and placed in a separate compartment from the public or so-called secular activities of life. The withdrawal of the corporate body of Christ from the public sphere of ideas is mirrored by our understanding of what is required to produce an individual disciple. Religion has become personal, private, and too often, simply a matter of “how I feel about things.” By contrast, the culture encourages me to invoke my intellect in my secular, public life. By way of example, I’m always encouraged to use my intellect in how I approach my vocation, select a house, or learn to use a computer. But within the sphere of my private, spiritual life of faith, it is my heart, and my heart alone, that operates. The life of the mind is thus separated, broken off, and compartmentalized

as a function of the “secular” life instead of more naturally being integrated with the spiritual. As a result, Sunday school classes, discipleship materials, and sermons too often address the heart and not the head, or focus on personal growth and piety and not on cultivating an intellectual love for God in my vocation.¹⁸

Clearly, both Pearcey and Moreland think it is incorrect to separate the world into the secular and sacred, into facts and values. The only way to overcome this artificial separation is to recover Christianity as a knowledge tradition. To do that, we have to believe that God is actually real and has authority as opposed to being just a figment of our imaginations. As it turns out, this question of authority is one of the trickiest questions of our day.

9. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE AUTHORITY?

Who has authority? Too often, we think *we* do. It’s common to hear, “I don’t think God would send anyone to hell” or “I would never worship a God who didn’t allow people in love to get married.” In these cases, the speaker claims authority on behalf of (or over) God. Is this legitimate? To answer this question, we need to understand what authority is all about in the first place.

Consider two definitions of the word *authority* from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*: (1) “The power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience” and (2) “the power to influence others, especially because of one’s commanding manner or one’s recognized knowledge about something.”¹⁹ Let’s call the first definition “hard” authority, and let’s call the second “soft” authority. Let’s take a look at each in turn.

Hard Authority: the power or right to give orders and demand obedience with the threat of punishment.

Hard authority is the power to give orders and enforce obedience. In the military, the general has hard authority over the captain. If a captain disobeys the general’s direct order, he or she can be court-martialed and imprisoned. On the road, a police officer has hard authority to enforce the speed limit and issue penalties for violations. Here are three characteristics of hard authority:

1. **Hard authority is *extrinsic*.** It resides in the *office* rather than in the *person*. The off-duty police officer may not be allowed to issue tickets. An army captain is no longer obligated to accept orders from a retired general.
2. **Hard authority is *hierarchical*.** Both parties understand that one has standing over the other. “Because I said so!” is a valid, though not necessarily winsome, argument when a general gives a command to a captain.
3. **Hard authority *commands* obedience because it is *punitive*.** It has “teeth”; if you resist, there will be consequences.

Soft authority, on the other hand, comes from the power of influence. People possess it because others respect who they are and what they know. Upon his retirement, the general in

the example above may offer counsel, but not orders, to the military. A police officer may advise you on how to protect your home from burglars. A medical doctor may give you advice when you're sick. Soft authority, then, also has three identifying characteristics:

1. Soft authority is *intrinsic*. It resides within the person. Others may be wise to follow it, but they are not compelled to do so.

2. Soft authority is *relational*. A person who obeys it does so because the advice seems sound or because he or she trusts the source.

3. Soft authority *persuades obedience rather than commands it*. It is *nonpunitive*. Those who resist may face consequences but they aren't breaking the law.

Soft Authority: the power to influence and persuade others because of a person's knowledge or out of an earned respect.

Unless you've joined the military or have agreed by contract to obey in certain ways, most of the authority in your life is probably soft authority. This is not to say there are no consequences for ignoring authority. In the situation of the military general or the off-duty police officer or the medical doctor, the law permits you to ignore the advice you've been given. Ignoring it may lead to a bungled military strategy or a higher risk of burglary or a longer duration of staying sick, even though you won't go to jail as a result.

Even so, the categories of hard and soft authority overlap more than you might think. If you take a stand for a certain political position, your college professor might grade you down. Sometimes people are denied job promotions because they refuse to commit unethical acts. Sometimes Christian actors are denied parts in movies because they refuse to use vulgar language or perform nude.

The law permits you to ignore the advice you've been given.

As we will see in later chapters, Christianity is based on the authority of God as revealed both generally in nature and specifically in the Bible. Following Christ will lead to a life of peace with God that is not contingent upon your circumstances. And one day, according to the Bible, Jesus will return as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).²⁰ On that day, he will render judgment, bestow rewards, and punish evil. God's authority is both hard *and* soft, extrinsic *and* intrinsic, obligatory *and* persuasive, hierarchical *and* relational.

10. WHY SHOULD WE SUBMIT TO GOD'S AUTHORITY?

Obviously, submitting to God's authority is a weighty matter. Some people have no problem doing it. Others intellectually know they should obey God but struggle to do so. Still others reject God's authority entirely. These different responses usually have something to do with a person's early experiences of authority.

Our earliest experience with authority involves believing and obeying our parents, teachers, and pastors. At first it doesn't even occur to us to doubt them. Over time we gradually learn that they are not expert authorities on everything; they are capable of being wrong. If

we are rebellious, we might think this gives us the right to ignore them entirely. We no longer fear what they will do to us, so we no longer respond to their commands. Of course, in disobeying these authorities, we choose to obey someone else—usually our peers or, indirectly, popular-culture icons. We're selective, often unreasonably so, and refuse to respond to our parents' "Because I said so" but may unquestioningly obey a rock star whose best argument is "Because I said so."

Imagine a student we'll call Dalton. Dalton grows up in a strongly authoritarian ("hard") church and is so accustomed to being told "Because I said so" that he stops questioning it. His problem isn't unanswered questions but rather unquestioned answers.

When Dalton arrives at his History of Civilizations class at college, the professor says that the Bible is filled with nonhistorical myths, a claim illustrated with apparently compelling

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examples. His own lectures, the professor promises, will strive to reflect the consensus of today's best scholars, regardless of where they lead. The professor is popular and cheerful, not mean or angry. He's funny in class, and to disagree with him is to appear grumpy and humorless. In fact, he is a genuinely nice person, at one point taking the time to help Dalton figure out a complex registration schedule when nobody else would. Compared to the rigid voices from Dalton's past, the professor is very appealing.

How should Dalton reconcile the authority of his church and the authority of his professor?

We evaluate authorities all the time. Should we believe the politician who tells us what we want to hear?

Should we believe the weather person's forecast? Should we believe the friend who says, "You *have* to see this movie!"? Sometimes we believe what others say because we lack good reason not to. Plus, if we had to try to evaluate every claim—for example, asking three people instead of one what time it is—we would end up in gridlock. If I ask someone for directions, I don't know if the person is honest, sane, or knowledgeable, but my life experience tells me that people don't usually tell pointless lies to strangers. Similarly, if my history teacher says George Washington died December 14, 1799, or that John F. Kennedy was born May 29, 1917, I have no reason to doubt her.

Evaluating authority is much harder if we're filled with doubt. If you've ever engaged in online debates about faith, you know that many people are conspiracy theorists: "Your priest was *deceiving* you—it's a conspiracy to keep the church in power!" "You were *lied* to by your parents—it's a conspiracy to keep you from enjoying life!" Can you *prove* there is no conspiracy to deceive you? Probably not. But just because a skeptic (or cynic) raises questions does not mean his doubts should be considered "authoritative." Instead, we should gather reliable sources ("authorities") and life experiences, think and pray about them carefully, and then act on them.

Most people who have considered the claims of Christianity have doubts about those claims. How do I know that the Bible is true? If something is in the Bible, do I have to obey it? What does the Bible itself say about obeying authorities? Am I obligated to follow the Bible

even if those who say they believe it are following it poorly? These are important questions, but in themselves they are not a strong basis for doubt. If the balance of evidence shows Christianity to be authoritative, it would be unreasonable to reject it. For those who confess Christianity (affirming that “Jesus is Lord”), Jesus’s view of the world must become their view of the world.

11. BUT ISN’T CHRISTIANITY BASED ON FAITH, NOT KNOWLEDGE?

At this point, both believers and nonbelievers might have objections. Believers might say, “You’re missing the point of Christianity. It isn’t about facts; it’s about faith.” Nonbelievers could readily agree: “You Christians believe by faith; we non-Christians believe facts. Stop trying to tell us what to do.”

Steven Pinker, a professor at Harvard University, defines faith as “believing something without good reasons to do so.”²¹ But this is far too simplistic if not downright misleading. Certainly, biblical faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), and it involves trusting that God is who he says he is and will do all that he has promised to do.²² But biblical faith is based on knowledge, not blind obedience. In Colossians 1:9–10, the apostle Paul says, “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the *knowledge* of his will in all spiritual *wisdom* and *understanding*, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the *knowledge* of God.” The more we know, the better able we are to walk by faith.

Biblical faith is not blind. As we will see, the Bible is unique among books because it includes so many specific details—details that can be observed to be true or not true. It practically *invites* scrutiny. The apostles were confident not that their faith would be interesting to others but that it would be seen to be factual. In 1 Corinthians 15:19, the apostle Paul tells his readers, in essence, “You can check out the evidence for the resurrection of Christ for yourself. You’ll see that it actually happened. And if it didn’t happen, everything else I’m telling you is false.” Maybe it was based on the apostle Peter’s own occasional doubting that he encouraged his readers to be prepared to give good reasons for the hope they placed in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).²³

The Bible is unique among books because it includes so many specific details—details that can be observed to be true or not true. It practically *invites* scrutiny.

What makes faith valid is not that we have it but that the object of our belief is actually worthy of belief. Theologian David Clark says, “Faith derives its value not from the intensity of the believer but from the genuineness of the one she believes in. True faith is faith in the right object; faith in an unfaithful person is worthless or worse.”²⁴ It is not enough to be sincere in our belief. We can sincerely believe that our parachutes will deploy as we jump out of a plane over Central Park, but all the sincerity in the world won’t help if the parachutes turn out to be ordinary backpacks.

So what do we do with doubt, then? All of us experience doubt because all of us are limited in our knowledge. We have questions for which we have not gotten satisfactory answers. But doubt can actually be a healthy part of a Christ-centered, thoughtful life. Here’s how pastor Tim Keller says it:

A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection.²⁵

Dealing with doubt is part of what it means to mature in the faith. It takes courage to doubt. But here's a hugely important key: rather than just give up, you should be *specific* about what bothers you, and you should gather the *will* to look for answers. Learn to doubt your doubts so they will not overpower everything else in your life.

12. COMING OF AGE IN THE WORLD OF IDEAS: WHY THIS BOOK IS IMPORTANT

Maybe it would be helpful if I illustrated this with some of my own story. My name is Jeff Myers. I grew up in a small town where everyone I knew was either Protestant or Catholic (or lapsed from one of the two). Other than by the one classmate who was a Jehovah's Witness, I was never confronted with other faiths in my town. I didn't even meet a Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or true atheist until I went to college. There, however, my world expanded, and the choices stopped being simple.

Growing up, I never imagined that I might be a scholar, mostly because I could barely understand what was going on in class, even in elementary school. My teachers' instructions didn't

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make sense to me, leading to poor grades and a lot of running laps in gym class. I could feel my heart pounding when they issued instructions because I knew I would forget or misunderstand them. My greatest fear was that I would not understand what people wanted from me and that I would be punished, either by them or by life, as a result.

I did love to read, though, and even in the middle of the school day, I would find myself tuning out the teacher and reading a book about whatever I was interested in at the time. I didn't necessarily learn what my teachers wanted me to learn, but I did enjoy learning about the topics I found interesting, such as philosophy and history.

Unfortunately, the more I learned about philosophy and history, the more at odds I felt with the faith of my parents. Our family attended a small conservative church. I remember one day the pastor gave a sermon on why women should wear dresses and not slacks or jeans. Why was this kindhearted, well-meaning pastor taking so much time to answer questions like this, which were of no concern to my classmates and me, and ignoring such questions as "Why does a good God allow pain and suffering?"

Fortunately, just after I graduated from high school, my father arranged for me to attend a two-week program in Colorado sponsored by the organization I now lead, Summit Ministries. Summit has been around for a long time (more than fifty years!) and was started by David Noebel.²⁶ Noebel and the other instructors helped me acquire answers to my

difficult questions about God, the world, and life's purpose. It changed my life and led me into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

One of the most important gifts I received from Noebel was a mental model of worldviews. From this, he showed how the Christian worldview is more in tune with the way the world actually is than any other worldview we studied.

Summit gave me a vision for leadership. Noebel was the first to show me the reference to the tribe of Issachar from 1 Chronicles 12:32, who had an "understanding of the times" and would "know what Israel ought to do." Notice the connection: because the men of this tiny tribe understood the times, they knew how to lead Israel. Learning this made me want to focus my life on understanding the times so I could make a difference.

Today I have the privilege of heading up that same ministry. Our mission hasn't changed: to cultivate young leaders to transform culture with a biblical worldview. Our headquarters is in a collection of Victorian buildings in Manitou Springs, Colorado, a little town the *New York Times* has described as a "hippie Mayberry."²⁷ I live there with my family. I went to school nearby at the University of Denver, where I had some great professors and earned a doctorate of philosophy in human communication studies.

Summit Ministries continues the wonderful tradition of cultivating rising generations to know the truth and to lead. Its instructors are world-class experts committed to living godly lives, communicating vibrantly, dialoguing, and mentoring others. They don't desire to impress people with how smart they are but rather want to prepare purposeful, resolute, articulate, and passionate champions of the Christian worldview. Simply put, Summit helps high school and college students learn what they need to know in order to become our nation's most trusted leaders.

My goal for you is, first, that you will be a more thoughtful person when it comes to understanding the ideas that rule our world. But more than that, I want you to experience confidence in God and the Bible such that you are motivated to be a courageous, articulate, compassionate, completely sold-out follower of Jesus Christ who applies your faith to every area of life.

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13. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK SERIES

There are three books in this series, which is called *Understanding the Times*:

- *Understanding the Faith: A Survey of Christian Apologetics*. We'll explore the nature of God, what the Bible is all about, and how to answer the common challenges people

pose in attempting to refute Christianity. Along the way, we hope you come to not only understand the importance of the Bible intellectually but also love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

- *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews.* We'll compare the Christian worldview with five other worldviews that all want their truth claims to be believed in Christianity's place. We'll also learn to respond to those challenges in ten academic areas that most students will face in college—and in life.
- *Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Challenges.* We'll learn how to be intelligent, thoughtful Christians living in today's world. We will explore some of the most difficult issues of our day and apply to them our understandings of God, his revelation, and our insight into the other worldviews.

For most people, this series of books will serve as a clear, comprehensive, and compelling case for Christianity, which is good in and of itself. But if you're the kind of person who craves

But if you're the kind of person who craves a sense of purpose, who longs for a noble cause, who has sensed that most people move through their lives unaware, then this series will mean so much more: it will be an essential part of your journey to becoming a champion for truth.

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The search for truth is not one we should fear. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate."²⁸ We're going to have plenty of debate and discussion. We approach each question honestly, deal with the doubts many experience while courageously doubting those doubts, and always move toward the truth.

14. UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

By picking up this book and deciding to study it, you join a long line of tens of thousands of leaders in business, politics, medicine, science, ministry, the arts, and dozens of other cultural channels of influence who have committed to knowing the facts and truth about Christianity; their beliefs have become stronger, their values deeper, their convictions more firm, and their actions more likely to take them in the direction they should go.

At Summit, we've uncovered some convincing findings about why all this matters:

- Today's Christian young adults are unprepared for opposition. Only one out of six students understands the worldviews that set themselves up against the knowledge of God (Col. 2:8).²⁹

- Today’s Christian young adults cannot mount a defense. Although more than two out of three students are confident that the Christian worldview is true, only one in five feels prepared to defend it as such.
- Today’s Christian young adults are failing at spiritual disciplines. Only one in three students claims to have a strong devotional or prayer life.
- Today’s Christian young adults feel alienated from God. Imagine a youth group meeting at church: only one in two students assembled there actually feels close to God.³⁰

Understanding the faith makes a big difference. An in-depth study of 1,591 students who studied with Summit showed a dramatic positive influence on their level of Christian commitment, feeling of closeness to God, devotional life, prayer life, church attendance, sharing of faith, understanding of a Christian worldview, understanding of other worldviews, confidence in the truth of a Christian worldview, ability to explain their beliefs, and ability to defend those beliefs when challenged. In fact, the average respondent says he or she is 85 percent better prepared—almost twice as prepared—for higher education.

This is great news for a struggling generation. Of today’s young people in America ages twelve to twenty-two, only one in five possesses a sense of purpose in life,³¹ while 25 percent are at “risk of not achieving ‘productive adulthood.’”³² Young Christians are disengaging from their faith, embracing instead what sociologist Christian Smith calls “liberal whateverism.”³³ Yet fully 60 percent say they want to make a difference.³⁴ They just need guidance.

Of today’s young people in America, ages twelve to twenty-two, only one in five possesses a sense of purpose in life, while 25 percent are at risk of not achieving productive adulthood.

Let’s get ready to embark on a journey through the world of ideas. At points, it may be rough going. Don’t give up! Some things might not make sense at first. You might realize flaws in your thinking or disagree with what you read. I’m fine with that as long as you’re motivated to do something. C. S. Lewis observed, “If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.”³⁵ The study of ideas isn’t just to find what “works for me.” It’s about expressing the truth publicly and persuasively. It’s about leadership.

15. FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

For most of my life, I wished I lived in a *Lord of the Rings* moment—an age of defining battles and a clear difference between good and evil. Our world might not seem so clearly divided, but we do live in an epic time. What we do now will affect the world for hundreds of years, for evil as well as for good. In a world of change, small things often become great in consequence. Karl Marx, notorious founder of the world’s most bloody and miserable worldview, did most of his work alone in a quiet library. When Marx died, only a handful attended his funeral. And still, as pastor and theologian Dave Breese memorably phrased it, his ideas “rule the world from the grave.”³⁶

The battle of our time isn't just a battle for territory or power; it's a battle for truth. It is your destiny to battle for truth against lies, for justice against injustice, and for good against

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evil. This is no accident in God's sovereign plan. It is time for us to be brave and stand up. C. S. Lewis says that Christians "are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith." We give in too much, he says. "We must show our Christian colours, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent and concede everything away."³⁷

Of course, the need to understand the times as Christians does not mean we know everything. I have to confess, my greatest fear in writing this book is that if people read it and disagree with any given point, the dialogue between us will break down. Too often, Christians succumb to what political theorist and historian Russell Kirk called the "excommunication temptation," a belief that we all must agree on everything or else there is no truth and that those who "disagree with me" must be shunned.³⁸ What we're shooting for in this book is what C. S. Lewis called *mere* Christianity: agreement on the nonnegotiable basics of the faith while exercising charity in the areas where we disagree. For my part, I'll try to outline my assumptions and thinking as clearly as possible as well as what I understand to be the biblical basics. I encourage you to, as you read, think about how we can move forward together even where we disagree.

Several millennia ago, a young Jewish woman named Esther was pushed into marrying King Xerxes, one of the cruelest and most pompous kings of ancient history. Sometime after-

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ward, Esther's uncle Mordecai uncovered a plot, hatched by one of the king's trusted advisors, to massacre the Jewish people. Mordecai urged Esther to intercede with the king. She informed him that the king, in his paranoia, would have anyone killed who came into his presence without invitation—including, presumably, his own queen. But Mordecai pressed her to act by saying, "Who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14 NIV). Perhaps we too have come to a royal position for such a time as this.

16. CONCLUSION

We'll get started in the next chapter by examining what the Bible is and isn't. This is sure

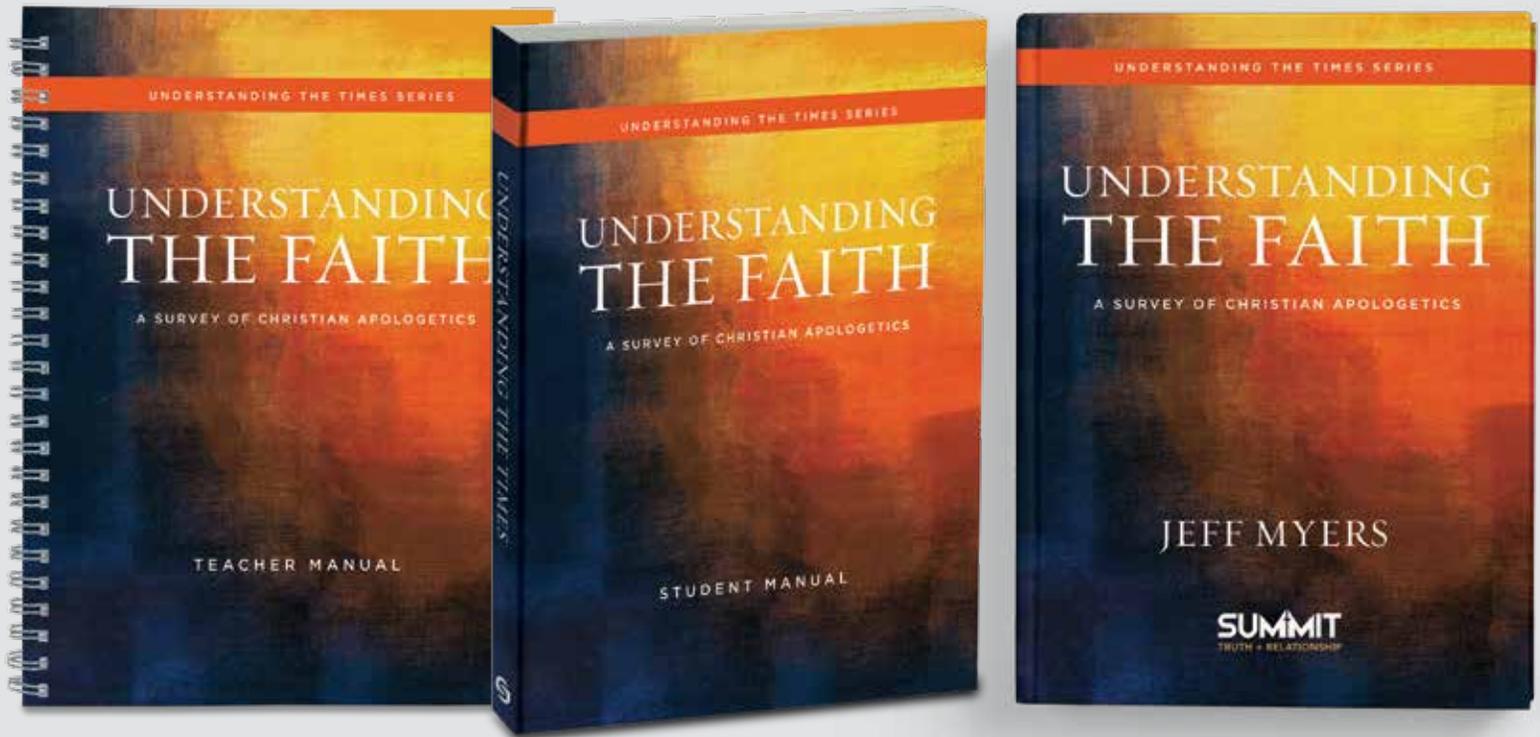
Get ready to think hard, because the following chapters will engage you at the *intellectual* level. More than that, though, be ready to wonder.

to be controversial. The Bible has been the most influential book in the history of the world, and it's not because—as some would claim—it is a love story from God, an instruction manual for life, a book of dos and don'ts, or even a book about admirable heroes. It is something much, much more. Interestingly, some famous skeptics and atheists have understood this even better than many Christians.

So get ready to think hard, because the following chapters will engage you at the *intellectual* level. More than that, though, be ready to wonder. This book will engage you at the level of *imagination* as well: life is an art, not a science. If God is real and the Bible is authoritative, then truth is real and there is a sure way in which we should walk. We should be prepared to follow it.

ENDNOTES

1. George Roche, *A World without Heroes: The Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 1987), 103. Note: the words “is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter” quoted within this text are from G. K. Chesterton.
2. Dictionary.com defines *idea* as “any conception existing in the mind as a result of mental understanding, awareness, or activity.” Dictionary.com Unabridged, Random House, Inc., dictionary.reference.com/browse/idea.
3. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Boston: Colonial Press Inc., 1865), 41.
4. Jim Clifton, *The Coming Jobs War: What Every Leader Must Know about the Future of Job Creation* (New York: Gallup Press, 2011), 51.
5. Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 17.
6. “American Indian Creation Myths: Creation,” trans. Frank Thomas Smith, *Southern Cross Review*, www.southerncrossreview.org/19/creation.htm. (Myth originally published in Spanish in *Memoria del Fuego-1* by Eduardo Galeano. His source was Marc de Civrieux, *Watunna. Motologia Makiritare*.)
7. “Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings,” Barna Group, February 12, 2002, <https://barna.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/67-americans-are-most-likely-to-base-truth-on-feelings#Vkz2hGSrRz8>.
8. Joel F. Williams, “Way,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers, and A. B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1370–71. Williams says, “In the concrete sense, a road (Deut. 1:2; Ruth 1:7) or a movement along a particular path, i.e., a journey (Exod. 13:21; 1 Kgs. 19:4). However, Heb. *dere* was also employed more broadly. To walk in the ways of God meant to live according to his will and commandments (Deut. 10:12–13; 1 Kgs. 3:14). In Isaiah ‘the way of the Lord’ can refer to God’s provision of deliverance from enslavement or exile (Isa. 40:3; 43:16–19). The word was often used to identify the overall direction of a person’s life, whether righteous or wicked (Judg. 2:17–19; Ps. 1:6; cf. Matt 7:13–14), wise or foolish (Prov. 4:11; 12:15). In the NT Gk. *hodōs* has a similar range of meanings. In Mark’s Gospel it is used repeatedly to present Jesus as ‘on the way,’ i.e., on his journey to Jerusalem (Mark 8:27; 9:33–34; 10:32). The broader context adds a deeper significance to these more literal references, since Jesus’ willingness to go the way of suffering provides an example for his followers who must also prepare to suffer (Mark 8:31–34). In John 14:6 Jesus claims to be ‘the way,’ i.e., the only means of access to God (cf. Heb. 9:8; 10:19–20). In Acts ‘the Way’ functions as a title for the Christian message (Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22) or the Christian community (9:2; 24:14).”
9. Theodore Dalrymple, *Life at the Bottom: The Worldview That Makes the Underclass* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), xi.
10. Flannery O’Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O’Connor*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 100.
11. Some philosophers posit the existence of categories of meaning that exist whether we know about them or not and that make knowledge possible (idealism). Others focus on what we can know through experience (empiricism). Still others focus on using abstract concepts such as logical arguments to create a structure through which we can know things (rationalism). The postmodern view that knowledge is constructed through our social experiences is called “constructivism.”
12. Shakti Gawain, *Living in the Light: Follow Your Inner Guidance to Create a New Life and a New World* (San Rafael, CA: New World Library, 1986), 69.
13. Paul Kurtz, “Does Humanism Have an Ethic of Responsibility?” quoted in Morris B. Storer, ed., *Humanist Ethics Dialogue on Basics* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1980), 15.
14. Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982), 248.
15. Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
16. Ephesians 4:17–22: “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.”
17. Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 26–27.



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