

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

JEFF MYERS

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH

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Jeff Myers, PhD, President
Summit Ministries

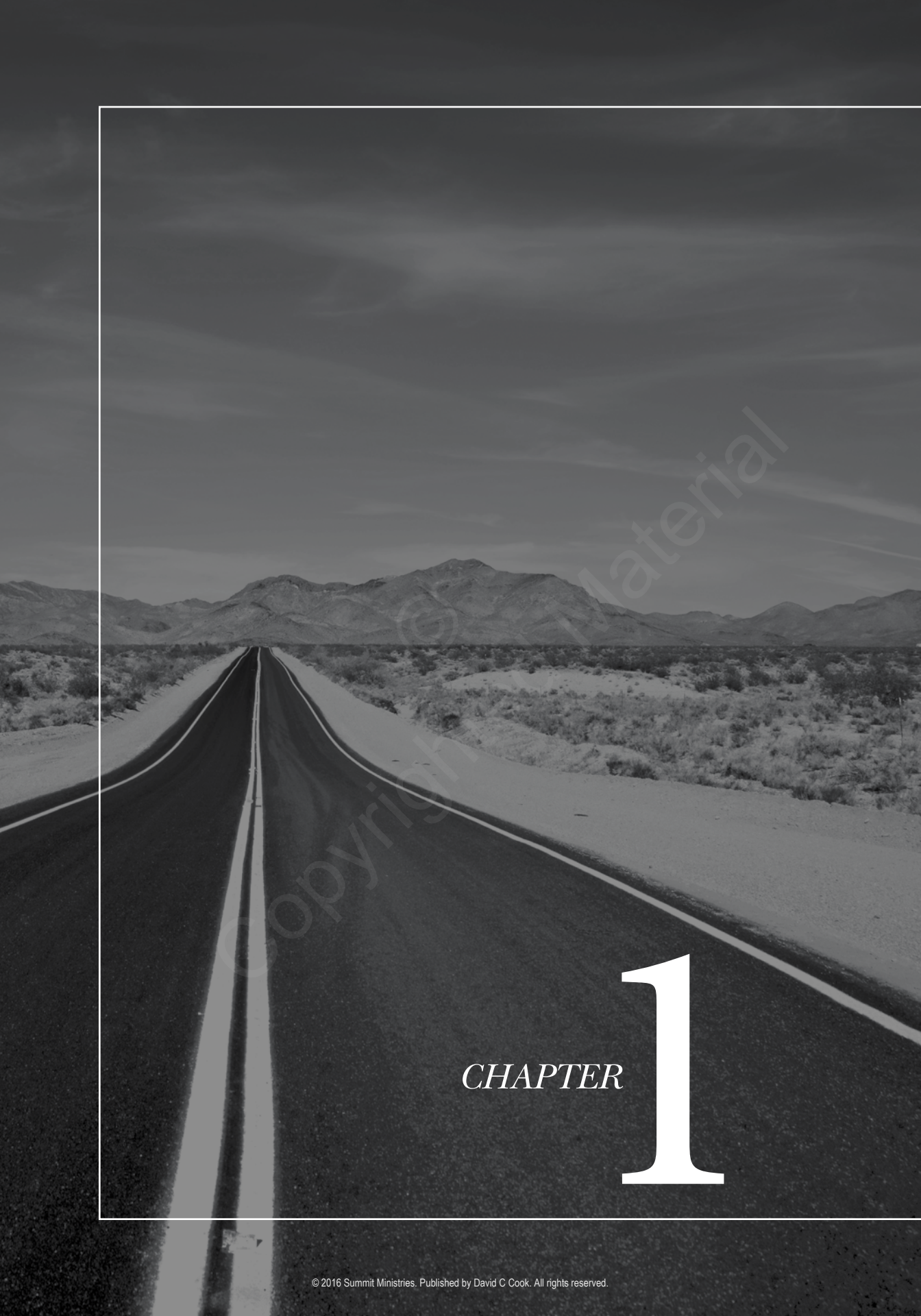
PREFACE

How to Use the Understanding the Times Series

Noted Christian writer and teacher Del Tackett has said that the Understanding the Times (UTT) series needs to be the core in every high school, college, and seminary today. Colson Center president, John Stonestreet, has said that Understanding the Times should have a place in every Christian's home library. Why is this series so important for Christian students and adults in all walks of life to use often in today's complex world?

- ***Understanding the Faith: A Survey of Christian Apologetics*—the first book in the series. Christians can use the UTT series to better understand theology and apologetics.** The knowledge of a solid Christian worldview is a vital starting place for understanding God. And learning to defend the Christian worldview is critical for those who want to share their faith with an unbelieving world. Theology and apologetics aren't just academic exercises for pastors and church leaders; they are worthy endeavors for every believer.
- ***Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews*—the second book in the series. Christians can use the UTT series to gain biblical worldview insight.** *Understanding the Times* helps Christians understand the six major worldviews that drive today's major global events. When issues occur, *UTT* should be one of the books that Christians access to help them form a biblical response. Researchers have cited that only a minority of believers possess a proper biblical worldview. And the faithful would be well advised to know the precepts of the other five major worldviews at odds with Christianity.
- ***Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Challenges*—the third book in the series. Christians can use the UTT series to transform culture.** Once a believer is steeped in biblical theology, apologetics, and worldview, he or she can communicate biblical truth to friends, loved ones, and associates. The gospel affirms the requirement for sharing God's Word on timely topics, as well as developing strong relationships from which to influence and change cultural structures and values. *UTT* helps believers engage biblical faith in life areas where God has placed them today.

As a result, the UTT series is eminently useful for students, teachers, pastors, businesspeople, public leaders, and others who want their faith to make an impact on twenty-first-century society.



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

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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.

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Of that we can be certain. But where do they lead?

The ideas we encounter may be complex, but they are not random.

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.

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.

Which ideas should we take seriously? Which should we dismiss as frivolous, incoherent, or patently ridiculous? And which should we actively oppose as dangerous?

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 that 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

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

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

Secular Humanism: a religious and philosophical worldview that makes mankind the ultimate norm by which truth and values are to be determined; a worldview that reveres human reason, evolution, naturalism, and secular theories of ethics while rejecting every form of supernatural religion.

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.

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

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 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.

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.

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

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.

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 world-views. 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 compassionate 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.'"

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

The battle of our time isn’t just a battle for territory or power; it’s a battle for truth.

evil. This is no accident in God’s sovereign plan. It is time for us to be brave and stand up. C. S. Lewis said that Christians “are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith.” We give in too much, he said. “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 afterward, Esther’s uncle Mordecai uncovered a plot, hatched

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.

by one of the king’s trusted advisers, 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 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.

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

ENDNOTES

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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, *Watumna. Motología Makiritare*.)
7. “Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings,” Barna Group, February 12, 2002, <https://barina.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/67-americans-are-most-likely-to-base-truth-on-feelings#.Vvk2hGSrRz8>.
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. *derek* 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.

18. J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 21–22.

19. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, main ed., s.v. "authority."

20. Revelation 19:16: "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

21. Steven Pinker, "Less Faith, More Reason," *The Harvard Crimson*, October 27, 2006, www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/10/27/less-faith-more-reason-there-is/.

22. Ephesians 2:8: "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

23. 1 Peter 3:15: "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."

24. David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 20.

25. Timothy J. Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), xvi–xvii.

26. David A. Noebel is also the author of the original text, *Understanding the Times*. He and I coauthored a revised version of the work, which in turn became the anchor of the *Understanding the Times* three-book series, of which the current volume, *Understanding the Faith*, is volume 1.

27. Andy Newman, "In Colorado, a Hippie Mayberry," *New York Times: Escapes*, October 19, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/10/19/travel/escapes/19american.html.

28. Quoted in Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 184.

29. Colossians 2:8: "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."

30. This and many of the following findings are discussed at length in *Turning the Tide: Evidence of Impact*, a white paper produced by Summit Ministries, www.turningthetide.net.

31. See William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 8.

32. J. Eccles and J. A. Gootman, eds., *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002), quoted in Annette Bjorklund, *Strengthening Positive Youth Development Environments: Youth Development and Problem Prevention*. University of Wisconsin-Extension (Madison, WI, 2004). Also see Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003).

33. Christian Smith, "Religious Tolerance: Karma, Christ, Whatever," *Huffington Post*, September 16, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-smith/religious-tolerance-karma-christ-whatever_b_965072.html. Similarly, Gary Railsback found that between 30 and 50 percent of young adults who claim to be born-again Christians as college freshmen claim not to be born-again Christians when they graduate in "Faith Commitment of Born-again Students at Secular and Evangelical Colleges," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 39–60. In addition, Scott McConnell found that 75 percent of students who were significantly involved in church in high school are no longer even attending church as twentysomethings in "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay Articles, www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church.

34. Ron Alsop, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 226. From a 2006 survey by Cone Inc., a communications agency, and Amp Insights, a marketing agency.

35. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 28.

36. Dave Breese, *Seven Men Who Rule the World from the Grave* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), chaps. 4 and 5.

37. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 262.

38. See Peter Wehner, "Conservatives and the Excommunication Temptation," *Commentary Magazine*, September 27, 2013.