

JOSH McDOWELL
& SEAN McDOWELL

12 Crucial
Truths
of the
Christian
Faith

**BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE UNSHAKABLE
FOUNDATION OF GOD'S WORD**

“As the storm clouds of secularism threaten today’s high school and college culture, there is a growing need for young believers to know what they believe and why they believe as they do. In *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*, Josh and Sean McDowell have addressed that need with clarity, completeness, and conviction. What is most impressive about this magnificent work is that it addresses crucial doctrinal and apologetic issues within a single volume. That alone is worth the price of the book.”

—**J.P. Moreland**, distinguished professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology; author of *The God Question*

“Truth has never been more aggressively denied and resisted than it is today, not only in the world but also in the church. And there has never been a father-son team more skillful at defending the truth in a spirit of grace than Josh and Sean McDowell. This book is a godsend that will help young and old. I’m already planning on buying multiple copies to give away.”

—**Randy Alcorn**, author of more than 60 books, including *Heaven, Truth, and The Grace and Truth Paradox*

“With all the chaos in today’s culture, it’s easy for Christians to lose sight of the essentials of the faith, but those foundational truths could not be more important. This book is an indispensable resource for anyone who wants to get back to the basics of what Christians believe and why. It’s accessible, practical, and full of valuable theological insights for believers young and old.”

—**Natasha Crain**, speaker, podcaster, and author of four books, including *Faithfully Different*

“More than ever, followers of Jesus Christ must lovingly and boldly engage an increasingly deteriorating culture with a biblical worldview. Dynamic father-son duo Josh and Sean McDowell have provided to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ a compelling, credible, and accessible answer to this urgent need. I fully recommend *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*.”

—**Dr. Mark Yarbrough**, president, Dallas Theological Seminary

“In *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*, my friends Josh and Sean McDowell explore the core foundational tenets of Christianity, delivering 12 easily digestible ‘theology 101’ teachings that reaffirm our faith and give us firm footing for knowing what we believe and why. This much-needed resource shares the framework of our faith that should be ingrained in every believer and lived out in relationship with others.”

—**Dr. Tony Evans**, president, The Urban Alternative, and senior pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

“Josh and Sean have created a great apologetics primer for our modern society. Their book *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* explains the eternal truths of Christianity from an apologetics perspective (i.e., giving reasons why we should believe each truth). However, it also goes beyond traditional theology/apologetic books by highlighting why these truths are important for today’s biggest questions. The existence of God, the reliability of Scripture, and the humanity of Jesus are not just important concepts for understanding Christianity. Each of these truths ground other cultural issues—such as our identities as humans, sexuality, marriage, and our understanding of love—all hotly contested issues in our modern world. Essentially, this book gets beneath the theological and evidential questions and emphasizes what these truths mean for our *existential* questions. The pages are filled with stories from Josh’s and Sean’s childhood and parenting journeys, showing caregivers and mentors how to make these truths relevant to the needs of today’s generation.”

—**Hillary Morgan Ferrer**, president,
Mama Bear Apologetics

“Josh and Sean McDowell have done an incredible job of creating a definitive work on developing a biblical worldview while at the same time making it personal. Just like other resources written by them, this will be a classic and the go-to book to help us understand how these 12 essential truths are keys to our faith. What I like so much about the McDowells is this doesn’t read like a stodgy theology book, but rather a book filled with life-changing information presented in a very practical and readable manner.”

—**Jim Burns**, PhD, president, HomeWord,
author of *Doing Life with Your Adult Children: Keep
Your Mouth Shut and the Welcome Mat Out*

“Wow! Josh and Sean have written a book that has it all: theology and apologetics marinated in heartfelt devotions that will help you apply *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* to your life. Highly recommended in this age of skepticism and confusion!”

—**Dr. Frank Turek**, author and president
of CrossExamined.org

“In many ways this book is Josh and Sean McDowell’s crowning work! I have long been a fan of both authors (Josh has been one of the greatest influences in my life!), but *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* is the embodiment of their lives’ effort. This book is apologetics made practical, but it is far more. It is apologetics made relational. I was challenged and encouraged on every page.”

—**Skip Heitzig**, author of *The Bible from 30,000 Feet*,
pastor of Calvary Church, Albuquerque

“Josh and Sean McDowell are a big reason books on apologetics and worldview are said to represent the fastest-growing segments of Christian publishing. These authors are to be commended for serving the needs of a public more spiritually hungry than ever and who are seeking solid answers for their questions about God.

Their newest book, *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*, is a must read for many reasons. This work amply covers topics that are core to what Christianity *is*, but which are rarely addressed by apologetics writers. From the nature of truth to explanations of the Trinity, and from inspiring insights about Christ’s coming to His ascension, *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* will benefit all who open its pages. For decades, apologetics books bearing the name ‘McDowell’ have truly represented the best in compelling scholarship and trustworthy content—and this volume is no exception.”

—**Dr. Alex McFarland**, director, Biblical Worldview and Apologetics,
Charis Bible College, Woodland Park, Colorado

“People are looking for meaning and purpose in life like never before in my lifetime. How does one find hope for the future in a world that believes there is no such thing as truth? Josh and Sean McDowell know that the only thing that gives us true purpose in life is found in the Christian faith. Josh and Sean uncover the beauty of the Christian faith by stating and clearly explaining 12 truths of Christianity. These truths will lead believers to develop an authentic biblical worldview and cause them to live their lives with purpose and hope. This book is a must read for every believer, both young and old.”

—**Dr. Glen Schultz**, founder and director, Kingdom Education Ministries

“The apologetics works of father/son writing duo Josh and Sean McDowell have a special place in my heart and on my bookshelf. They communicate biblical truth in a way that makes sense to non-theologians like me. Among their works, *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* will now have a special place. Josh and Sean let us into their lives through vulnerable stories of joy and pain, all while making the biblical and logical case for 12 central truths of the Christian faith. This book is a key to unlocking the secret of how to communicate truth in a relational way. I believe it will inspire believers and nonbelievers alike.”

—**Jeff Myers**, PhD, president Summit Ministries

“Josh McDowell’s ministry has changed my family and my life. Witnessing the legacy carried on by his son, Sean, shows that Josh has practiced what he’s preached. Many people say that the next generation is our future—but they won’t be our future unless we make them our present. My friends Josh and Sean McDowell understand this and teach us how to prioritize faith and the next generation in *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*. Go get your copy now!”

—**Nick Hall**, evangelist, founder and president of Pulse

“If you want to know why you believe what you believe and how it matters for your life and relationships, you need to read *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith* by Josh and Sean McDowell. This book will show you how to experience the essentials of a relevant faith based on the story of God’s creation, incarnation, and re-creation. You will discover how these 12 truths can transform your perspective, your purpose, and your passion for God and others.”

—**Reverend Samuel Rodriguez**, author of
*From Survive to Thrive: Live a Holy, Healed, Healthy,
Happy, Humble, Hungry, and Honoring Life*

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Cover design by Studio Gearbox

Interior design by KUHN Design Group

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12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith

Copyright © 2010, 2023 by Josh McDowell Ministry and Sean McDowell

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-8702-8 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8703-5 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023938658

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Printed in the United States of America

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 / LB / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A work of this magnitude is not completed without long hours and extensive collaboration with many people. We wish to recognize the following individuals for their valuable contribution to this book.

Dave Bellis, my (Josh's) longtime friend and colleague, for laying the foundation for this book via *The Unshakable Truth*. In many respects, Dave could be considered a “third author,” and we are deeply grateful for his original contribution.

Jason Carlson and Mark Fitter for their insightful analysis regarding the theological perspective presented in the book. Our thanks to Casey Luskin for his help on the chapter on God's existence.

We are grateful for the staff at Josh McDowell Ministry: Matthew Tingblad for his tireless work in shoring up the section on the reliability of the Bible. Duane Zook for seeing *The Unshakable Truth* as “a diamond in the rough” and pushing this revision forward. Dave Bottorff for his dedication to the project and doing all the things necessary to bring this book to completion.

Thanks to the incredible people at Harvest House: Bob Hawkins Jr. and LaRae Weikert for their vision for this work and for all the patience and encouragement they gave us. Kim Moore, who provided invaluable overall leadership to the publishing process. This book, *12 Crucial Truths of the Christian Faith*, is a slight abridgment and update from our 2010 book *The Unshakable Truth*. Our appreciation to Kris Bearss for her extensive editorial help and guidance in making this happen. And to the team at Harvest House who have been involved in the many details required to bring a book to press—we thank you.

Josh McDowell

Sean McDowell

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Introduction

The Real Meaning of Truth

Nearly 20 centuries ago, a high government official, trained in politics and the law, asked a question that has echoed all the way into the twenty-first century.

Imagine Pontius Pilate, then the Roman governor of Judea, standing in his elaborate palace, magisterially bedecked. He posed a set of serious questions to the man who stood shackled between two soldiers.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate asked. The prisoner was accused of sedition.

This prisoner, unlike most, stood straight in the presence of the governor and looked him in the eyes as he spoke. “I am not an earthly king...My kingdom is not of this world.”

“You *are* a king then?” the governor said.

“*You* say that I am a king,” the prisoner answered, aware his interrogator was in a prickly political position, “and you are right.” He looked at the politician with eyes that seemed to read not only his face but his soul. “I was born for that purpose,” he continued, “and I came to bring truth to the world. All who love the truth recognize what I say is true.”

Pilate responded, “What *is* truth?”

Imagine for a moment you are in that hall with Pilate and his prisoner. Imagine the words of the governor’s question echoing off the marbled walls. Imagine the expression on Pilate’s face as he posed the question, scornful at first, then turning serious when the answer did not come quickly.

Imagine the governor's thoughts: *Who is this man? Why does he gaze at me so?* And the prisoner's thoughts: *Have I not just told you? I came to bring truth to the world. Pilate, you are looking at the answer to your own question: I am the truth.*¹

TRUTH IN RELATIONSHIP

On that day in his Jerusalem palace when he met Jesus, Pilate was not merely discussing the truth; he was literally looking at it. Truth was standing before him, clothed in human flesh! Just days earlier, Jesus had told his disciple Philip, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He was saying truth is a person to relate to, "the way" is a person to interact with and follow, and he is the only true source of life. Truth, a way of living, and life itself is embodied in the person of God. And the means to obtain the truth, the way, and the life is through a relationship with Jesus.

To explain or present a biblical worldview and the truths of the faith outside of relationship is to distort and invite error into Christianity. Jesus wasn't simply trying to correct the theology of the Jewish leaders with his teachings. Neither was he launching a new philosophy of the Jewish religion. He was offering a way to restore God's original design for a world gone mad. He was offering the means to restore the God-human relationship that had been broken by sin. Relationship was key. And it still is.

A number of years ago Dartmouth Medical School commissioned a scientific study of young people. The project, which was called "Hardwired to Connect," analyzed the results of more than 260 studies of youth. The report stated that 100 percent of all the studies they analyzed showed that from the moment a baby is born, his or her brain is physically, biologically, and chemically hardwired to connect with others in relationships.² That shouldn't surprise us, since we were created in the image of a relational God for the purpose of relationships. In fact, the healthier we are relationally, the more receptive we will be to God's relational truth.

Author and speaker Mark Matlock made this observation about the students with whom he was ministering:

Some of my students were incredibly intelligent and even showed an interest in Christ, but they never seemed to make a breakthrough.

I was trying to convince them of the evidence of Christ, and they just couldn't get it. Looking back, I realize many of these students were emotionally wounded (or even abandoned) individuals who simply could not connect to what I was saying.³

It stands to reason that if truth is intrinsically relational in nature and we experience struggles or dysfunctions in our relational life, it will be more difficult to receive the truth. But the other side of this coin is that receiving the truth in all its relational meaning can overcome the problems in our relationships. Truth not only points out our wrong and corrects us; it brings relational healing as well, because truth is a person who lovingly cares for us.

As relational beings we think *and* we feel. We have both a mind and a heart. Truth was meant to be proclaimed in the context of relationships so it would reach both our intellect and our emotions. This is the kind of proclamation Paul referred to when he depicted the process that brought the Thesalonians to a vibrant faith: “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you *not only* the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8 NIV).

Paul was passing on the faith relationally just as Christ had modeled it. The truth he proclaims to us appeals to our minds by pointing out our dilemma (sin and death). But it goes on to demonstrate a love that ultimately provides a solution—a way to regain a relationship with God. We live in a broken and relationally disconnected culture. Each of us has relational and emotional struggles. “Truth only”—a set of facts that appeal solely to the intellect—will not solve our emotional and relational issues. Rather, it is truth within the context of relationships that we can believe with our minds and experience with our emotions. It is God's penetrating truth that reveals our true condition, loves and accepts us for who we are, and makes provision to freely forgive us. Relational truth is what each of us needs and craves.

TRUTH IN CONTEXT

As a teenager, I (Josh) sincerely wanted the answers to *Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?* I certainly didn't find answers at home. My father

was the town drunk. I grew up watching in fear and horror as my father beat my mother and wreaked havoc at home. I experienced sexual abuse from a man named Wayne, whom my parents hired as a part-time cook and housekeeper. I eventually told my mother about what Wayne was doing, but she didn't believe me. I can't describe to you the pain of abandonment I felt when my mother refused to believe me. Also, growing up I never remember my father saying that he loved me. The only love I ever felt was from a struggling, abused mother who died suddenly when I was a teenager. So my home was not a place to find answers.

In the small Michigan community where I grew up, everyone seemed to be into religion, so my search started there. I really got into the church scene. But I must have picked the wrong church because I felt worse inside the church than I did outside. So I gave up on the church to provide me any answers.

Then I thought that education might have the answers, so I enrolled in a university. I soon became unpopular with my professors because I hounded them with so many questions. But I learned that my professors had just as many problems, frustrations, and unanswered questions as I did.

Next, I tried prestige. I thought I could find a noble cause, commit to it, and in the process become well known. So I ran for various student offices. It was great at first. People got to know me, and I enjoyed spending the university's money getting the speakers to campus that I wanted. I also liked the idea of spending the students' money for throwing parties. But the prestige thing soon wore off. I would wake up on Monday morning, usually with a headache from the night before, dreading the next five days. I endured Monday through Friday just to experience the party nights on the weekend. But every Monday brought the meaningless cycle all over again.

About that time I noticed a small group of people who seemed different from the others. They appeared to know who they were and where they were going. They had a clear set of convictions about what they believed. And what really stood out was that they appeared to be genuinely happy. Their happiness and joy weren't like mine. I was happy only when things were going great—when I was having “fun.” But they seemed to possess an inner source of joy that I longed for.

I befriended these people and tried to figure out what they knew that I

didn't. One day I asked one of the women in the group what made her so different. She had told me before that she hadn't always been this way, but she had changed. So I asked her, "What changed your life?"

Her answer shocked me. She used two words as a solution, two words I never thought I'd hear at the university. She simply said, "Jesus Christ." I immediately told her I was fed up with religion and the church and was certain it wasn't a solution. This woman shot back, "I didn't say *religion*, I said *Jesus Christ*."

She and her friends went on to explain that a relationship with God through Jesus Christ offered what I would come to know as a biblical truth. They told me it was Christ and his worldview—seeing everything from a biblical perspective—that would answer all the questions I had. They didn't offer to walk me through a shallow prayer or get me to go to church. What they did was challenge me to intellectually examine the claims of Jesus and to determine, in essence, whether God's worldview written in Scripture was credible. I accepted their challenge out of pride. I wanted to prove Christianity was a farce.

What I discovered was that I was the farce. My quest for happiness and meaning was found in Christ.

Most people who know my testimony assume I came to Christ through the intellectual route. They think my examination of the evidence of Christ's deity, his resurrection, and the reliability of Scripture convinced me that God had spoken—and therefore I trusted in Christ. The convincing evidence certainly got my attention, but it was God's love that drew me to him. I saw love between a group of Jesus-followers who devoted themselves to God and one another. God demonstrated his love to me through them. By the power of the Holy Spirit, my life was transformed through a relationship with God. I discovered a whole new way of thinking and living that empowered me to live out truth from his perspective.

WE HAVE A MODEL IN FORMING OUR BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

For us as humans, that relational context is key. The early church provides the ideal model for how the relational truth of God was imparted so effectively

to others. Christianity was birthed from Judaism. Jesus' immediate followers were Jewish men and women who had been raised in a Hebraic model of education. Today practically all modern education in North America, including that of most churches and Christian schools, employs a form of teaching based on a Hellenistic model. Essentially, this Hellenistic approach is to present a student with rational and logical constructs of information that he or she is required to absorb intellectually. To determine if the subject matter has in fact been absorbed, students are asked to regurgitate the information back to the teacher. This is called testing. If the student can accurately repeat the information, he or she passes the course, and the pupil is said to have been "taught."

The Hebraic model of education is quite different. Its goal is not mere memorization of repeatable facts; the goal is for the truth to become one with the pupil to the point that it is lived out. Under this approach, truth is to be learned by practicing it in relationship with others. This means we have not necessarily "learned" a truth simply because we can repeat it to a mentor. It is learned only when it is reflected in our lives in relationship to God, to others, or to our environment. In this educational model, the testing isn't in whether we have the information correctly stuffed into our heads, but rather how the truth has transformed our attitude and behavior.

If we see Christianity simply as a worldview to be discussed, debated, and proven on a rational basis rather than demonstrated on a relational and transformational basis, we will undoubtedly not see Christianity as God intended. Nor will we be passing on the faith effectively to the next generation.

Early in the second century the church firmly established a relational model enabling individuals to embrace the faith and pass it on to others. By AD 130 Justin Martyr declared the Christian faith revolved around a continuing cycle of believing, belonging, and behaving. These three components were not compartmentalized into three disciplines; they were seen as a whole—integrated and continuous.

Believing or knowing the truth is a process of understanding who God is and how we relate to him and others. This truth we believe leads naturally to a transformation of our lives in relationship with God. This is where belonging comes in. Entering into a relationship with God bonds us with others who share that relationship, enabling us to experience a sense of belonging.

The apostle talked about the “unity in our faith” by which “the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:13, 16). We know the truth, and then we become that truth in relationship with God and others in the body of Christ.

The truth process does not stop with believing and belonging. It continues on and affects our behavior. When we become intimate with the truth, it transforms our very being and how we relate to others in community with them. The result is godly living. Truth is to be lived out.

The early church saw this as an organic cycle of bringing new converts to spiritual maturity and equipping them to pass on the faith to others. They modeled before their children and a needy world what it meant to be in relationship with God, both as individuals and as a community of believers. A sense of belonging was established. They would walk their children and new converts through an intentional, life-changing process by instructing them to know and believe the truth handed down by the apostles. They taught them to live out that truth like devoted followers of Jesus and initiated them into an active engagement of the world around them.

This process naturally embedded within each follower of Christ a biblical worldview. The Christian faith was then and still is *an integrated and organic cycle of intimately knowing the truth, being the truth in relationship with God and others, and living the truth before the world around us, starting in our own families.*

This process of forming a biblical worldview and passing on our faith can still work in the twenty-first century. But we do face some challenges, both in dealing with influences in our own lives and influences in the society we’re part of. In order to address those challenges, let’s look individually at each of the three elements that make up this cycle we’ve just outlined and consider how to make them work in the present day.

KNOW THE TRUTH

Picture a small-group Bible study. The group leader, who has just finished reading a Scripture passage, turns to a group member and asks, “Pam, what does this verse mean?”

Pam, a professed Christian, pauses to reflect on the passage. “Well,” she begins after a few moments of careful consideration, “what this verse means to me is...”

Chances are, most of us wouldn’t even detect the subtle shift in meaning reflected in Pam’s use of the words *to me*. But the importance of those two tiny words must not be underestimated. They are indicative of a condition that exists among most Christians today. Most Christians are not looking to the biblical text in order to know *the* truth; they are actually looking for “their truth.” The vast majority in our culture, including many professed Christians, say there is no objective moral truth. In a world with no objective moral truth, one cannot claim any specific truth is to be found in a given Bible verse. Therefore, the best we can do with the Bible is use it as a foil to determine a personal “truth” that meshes with our own way of thinking and thus has meaning only “to me.”

Many pastors and church small-group leaders have become group facilitators rather than teachers of scriptural truth. It’s not so much because these leaders are not intending to share the meaning of scriptural truth—many are. The problem is many people simply hear the truth through their own filter, which, strongly influenced by a postmodern culture, tells them all truth is subjectively and personally determined.

Awhile back, I (Sean) was speaking at a youth rally on the topic of sexuality. In the middle of my talk a girl interrupted and echoed the five words I’ve so often heard from young people: “Who are you to judge?” She was saying I had no right to make moral judgments, because truth is subjective—that is, it was “my truth,” which makes all views equal. This girl, like most of us, has grown up in a culture of moral relativism that prides itself on accepting many truths. We have been told we need to be tolerant of all beliefs and to think that no one way is better than another. In fact, the moment anyone claims to have *the truth*, he or she is labeled as arrogant, bigoted, and judgmental.

Truth, however, is not personal and subjective, as so many people believe. It is based on objective reality.

Greg Koukl, president of Stand to Reason, has pointed out that a person could believe with great conviction that ice cream controls diabetes. But it doesn’t change the objective fact that insulin is the controlling factor. The

same is true for morality. Even if someone believed rape was right, it would still be wrong.

Moral truth isn't something you or I create or decide for ourselves. In fact, it isn't even something God decides. It is something he *is*. The basis of everything we call moral and right springs from the truth that resides in the character of the eternal God who is outside us, above us, and beyond us.

One of the appealing aspects of deciding your own truth is that you can embrace it as something that is personally and experientially yours. But discovering a truth outside yourself is even more personal and experiential when you understand that Jesus is the truth—he is the exact representation of his Father God. And when the person of truth—Jesus—enters our lives, he is there to transform us into a representation of himself.

I realize, of course, Christians can talk all day about how we know the truth because we have experienced Jesus personally. Yet we cannot expect that claim to convince others that what we proclaim as truth is actually true. They can simply claim it might be true for us, but that doesn't make it true for everyone.

Unless that truth can be proven or demonstrated to be true, we cannot expect others to get on board with belief. And that is where knowing why we believe something is true comes into play.

Jesus wanted his followers to believe in him for who he claimed to be, but he didn't want them to believe in him blindly. He wanted them to be confident that what he was asking them to believe was true. So he appealed to the evidence. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" he asked. Then he urged them to "at least believe because of what you have seen me do" (John 14:10-11).

As we said above, truth is more than just a set of facts; it is relational and emotional. It brings joy. But it is impossible for our hearts to rejoice in what our minds reject. That is why we need to know not only *what we believe* but *why we believe it*.

The Bible repeatedly invites us to examine why a truth is true so we can form our convictions. The apostle John, who had firsthand knowledge of the truth, wrote, "Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you

will have life” (John 20:30-31). In other words, John recorded evidence that confirmed Jesus to be the one true God so we could know the truth with confidence and deep conviction.

So as you explore each essential truth of the faith in this book, you will equally examine both the truth you are to believe as well as the evidence for why you can believe it with confidence. Of course, no matter how convincing the evidence is, you still must exercise faith. For example, I (Sean) didn’t have exhaustive knowledge about Stephanie before I married her. I couldn’t know 100 percent she was the person of integrity I firmly believed her to be. But I did have sufficient evidence to make a wise, informed decision on the moral character of the person I was dating. And now that we have been happily married for more than two decades, I thank God we each took that step of reasonable faith.

You will seldom, if ever, have exhaustive evidence, but you can find sufficient evidence to establish that what you believe is credible and objectively true. That is what knowledgeable faith does—it rests its case on sufficient evidence. Noted author and apologist J.P. Moreland aptly defines faith as “a trust in what we have reason to believe is true.”⁴ A faith rooted in truth that we have reason to believe is objectively true will ground us both intellectually and experientially. We can then offer to others a faith that appeals both to the heart and the mind.

BE THE TRUTH

Simply knowing what we believe and why we believe it is not, in itself, sufficient. The truth we believe must also become the very core of who we are. Buying into the Christian faith involves *being a living representation of the truth*.

We McDowell’s had a friend named Frank; his son was called Frankie. Frank was a man of few words; so was his son. Frank appeared most comfortable when his hands were thrust into his pants pockets; Frankie was no different. Frank was a skilled mechanic; Frankie was fascinated by mechanical things. Not once did Frankie’s father ever sit down with him to teach him these behaviors or interests. The son was a representation of his father due to sheer genetics and by simply being in relationship with his dad.

Being a representation of the truth is about allowing the truth of God to penetrate us so intimately that it transforms our very lives. “As the Spirit of the Lord works within us,” Paul states, “we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The purpose of Christ’s Spirit—the truth—coming into our lives is to become like the truth-giver. Frankie had the DNA of his father, so it was natural for him to become like his father. When we receive the Holy Spirit of truth, the apostle Peter says we “share in his divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Metaphorically speaking, God’s very DNA is implanted in us, and a process of transformation begins as we “become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29 *NASB*).

There was a college student years ago, we’ll call him Chad, who registered for all his classes and moved into a dorm room. Chad was working himself through school and was on a tight budget. So for breakfast, lunch, and supper all he could afford to eat was cheese and crackers in his dorm room. Day in and day out, his meals consisted of nothing but mouse food. After a couple of weeks he grew extremely tired of cheese and crackers, so he decided to splurge for one meal and eat at the college cafeteria. He loaded up his tray with meat and potatoes, salad, vegetables, and a couple desserts. When he came to the cashier he asked, “How much for all this?” The cashier responded, “Do you have your student ID?” “Yes,” Chad answered. “Well, it won’t cost you anything. All your meals were included in your registration.”

From the first day of school Chad had had full access to all the food he could eat. Yet he failed to understand how the college meal program was applicable to him. There are many believers who have knowledge of God’s truth and may even know why they believe it, but for some reason they fail to understand how that truth is relevant to their lives. Consequently, the power of that truth isn’t appropriated to their life. So in the chapters that follow, as we discover step-by-step what we believe and why we believe it, we will also uncover the relevant and transforming nature of each truth when it is applied to our specific needs. That application leads to our “brand-new nature...continually being renewed as [we] learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within [us]” (Colossians 3:10).

When we know the truth and become a representation of the truth, we are not only beginning to embrace a biblical worldview, but we are in a position

to effectively pass it on to others. Someone has said, “We teach what we know, we impart who we are.” And if we become a living representation of God’s truth, we will demonstrate it in our lives—we will live it.

LIVE THE TRUTH

John the disciple of Jesus said, “Let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions. It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth” (1 John 3:18-19). Truth is to be lived, and when it is lived, it also becomes an example to others.

Lest you give up hope before you even begin, let us be quick to say that being a representation of the truth doesn’t mean we must live perfect lives. I (Sean) remember a time when I was still living with my parents, and my dad was in a heated argument with Mom. To be honest, Dad was being pretty awful. At one point he threw a folder down on the table and said, “I’m out of here.” He stormed out the door and drove off. I remember thinking, *Man, is he ever ticked.*

I, along with my sisters, went back to doing whatever we had been doing prior to the “Josh explosion.” But it wasn’t long before Dad was back and called us all in for a meeting. In front of us all he told my mom how wrong he had been and how sorry he was that he had hurt her, and he sought her forgiveness. He turned to each of us kids and told us how disrespectful he had been to our mother, and he sought our forgiveness too. Now, my dad’s earlier actions were far from a perfect model of Christlikeness, but he was, nonetheless, a great model of one who was truly following Christ. How? When he realized his offense and sought forgiveness, he was being sensitive to the convicting Spirit of God. My dad was a model of a person who sincerely desires to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Believe it or not, those around us need to see us fail and humbly seek forgiveness. The Spirit of truth through his Word is there “to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right” (2 Timothy 3:16). Being a living reflection of the truth in a fallen world means we sometimes mess up, but when we do, we must realize it and make amends. The great apostle Paul said, “I don’t mean to say that I have already

achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be” (Philippians 3:12).

So as we cover 12 truths of the faith in the pages that follow, we will not only discover: 1) what it is we believe, but 2) why we believe it; then 3) how these truths are relevant to life and how they transform us internally; and finally, 4) how we can live truth out so that it can be imparted to those we love. As these truths take root in our innermost being, we will be reflecting Christ’s way, his truth, his life—living out biblical truth.

GOD EXISTS

As a young teenager, I (Josh) didn't like who I was—the son of the town drunk. I hated my father and everything he stood for, and that impacted what I thought about myself in a significant way. As I grew older and left home, I took with me the puzzling question of “Who am I really?”

As a skeptic, I questioned the existence of a personal God. So I didn't have a definitive answer of who I was meant to be as God's creation. Yet as I would stare up at the stars at night I wondered how everything got here. Planet Earth orbited the sun in just one galaxy among billions that filled deep space. I felt so small and alone in such a vast universe. And to be honest I secretly hoped there was some Intelligent Being out there who could help me understand who I was and what my life was all about.

DOES GOD EXIST?

We do live on a planet in a vast universe. Our home on earth seems so insignificant and small, suspended as it is in the vastness of space. Is God out there somewhere in the vastness? Think about space for a moment. It seems to stretch on and on without any possibility of ending. When we try to imagine the size even of the known universe, it's impossible to truly comprehend. But let's try.

Why Does Anything Exist?

The expanses of the universe are so immense that we measure them using the light-year, which is the distance light travels in 365 days. Light travels at

the speed of 186,282 miles per second. In a year, that distance, multiplied out and rounded off, increases to almost 6 trillion miles. To put that in a perspective we can almost grasp, it takes a sunbeam just over 8 minutes to travel the 93 million miles from the sun to earth. So what is the size of the observable universe in terms of light-years?

Scientists say matter is spread over a space at least 93 billion light-years across. Our galaxy is one of an estimated 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe, has somewhere between 100 and 400 million stars, and is roughly 100,000 light-years across. Our Milky Way's largest galactic neighbor, the Andromeda Galaxy, is approximately 2.5 million light-years away.¹ As finite beings we simply cannot grasp such distances, such magnitude.

Thinking about time presents a similar dilemma. It's impossible to conceive of a beginning or an ending of time because the only thing we can imagine before or after time is just more time. Since everything we experience has a starting and an ending, the concept of eternity is incomprehensible to us.

Time and the vastness of space are for the most part mysteries to us. Could it all be here just by chance? Where did it all come from?

Another great mystery is the three-pound wonderment inside your skull. Your eyes blink and follow the words on this page. The words are symbols with specific meaning that string together thoughts, which you can understand as you read. Meanwhile, your heart pumps; you inhale and exhale; your body is digesting and processing food.

All these involuntary muscle movements are controlled by the miracle organ called the brain. Your ability to walk, run, sit, sleep, touch, see, hear, smell, taste, and feel every type of emotion is being processed right now through over 100 billion nerve cells called neurons.

Your neurons gather and transmit electrochemical signals that tell your muscles to move the parts of your body so they will accomplish what you want them to do. These neurons are like the gates and wires in a computer—only immeasurably more complex. And they are tiny. How small? Medical doctors Joe McIlhaney and Freda McKissic Bush explain, "About 30,000 fit on the head of a pin. Yet if the neurons in just one human brain (about 100 billion) were placed end to end, they would circle the earth four times." And the brain also has more than 100,000 trillion synaptic connections. This is

why they conclude, “The human brain is, without question, the most complicated three-pound mass of matter in the known universe.”²

If the brain is so complex, then how did it come to be? Where did you and your brain, the Milky Way Galaxy, and all that is in the universe come from? Why is there *something* in existence instead of nothing? What or who brought everything into being? And for what purpose?

An Impersonal Power?

Some would say all that exists was created by the universe itself and will one day be reabsorbed by the universe. In this view, an entity or being called God does not actually exist. God, they say, is a cosmic life force that includes all the substance of the universe. Nature and the idea of God are the same. This is called *pantheism*. Further, from this cosmic life force we are all empowered to be god and to be one with the universe. The classic phrase used to describe this belief is “God is all and all is God.” This is the view of God that was propagated so effectively in the movie *Avatar*.

Some who disagree with pantheistic doctrine say that a supreme being who is not a part of the universe created everything that exists, but essentially this being is uninvolved in any further way with creation. This is the view of Deists, who typically reject most supernatural events (prophecy, miracles) and assert that God, “the Supreme Architect,” has a plan for the universe that is not altered either by his intervention in the affairs of human life or by suspension of the natural laws of the universe.³

Those who hold to this Deist philosophy believe there is a God, but he is like a master clockmaker who designed the world, wound it up, and since then has let it run on its own. Someone with this view would not bother to pray to God for help in time of need or for strength to resist temptation. In this view, God is an impersonal being who has left us to make it on our own.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD

Christians, however, believe a personal being existed before time and space as we know it. This being spoke the words “Let there be...” and by the power of his will all that exists came into being (Genesis 1:3). We believe those words

came from the voice of a personal, infinite God who “created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn’t make” (John 1:3). We believe this God is the Intelligent Designer of all that exists.

The questions naturally arise: What is the nature of this God, is he knowable, and why did he create us? While a God with the power to create vast universes is beyond our comprehension in many ways, he is knowable to us finite creatures. How? We can know him truly, sufficiently, and with confidence because of *what he has revealed* about himself to us. For example, God is known to us by at least six characteristics.

God is eternal. “Eternal” means life without beginning or end. There was never a moment when God didn’t exist, nor will he ever end. That is impossible for our minds to grasp. Moses could not understand it. He was out on the backside of the desert herding sheep when God showed up in a bush burning with flames that didn’t consume it. When God sent him to tell the people of Israel he was going to deliver them out of Egypt, Moses said, “They won’t believe me. They will ask, ‘Which god are you talking about? What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?” God replied, ‘I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS. Just tell them “I AM has sent me to you”’” (Exodus 3:13-14). The great I AM has no birthday and will have no funeral.

The prophet Isaiah said, “Don’t you know that the LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding” (Isaiah 40:28).

God is omnipotent. God is almighty and all-powerful. If he wants to do something that is not logically contradictory and consistent with his good character, he can do it.

Job said to God, “I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you” (Job 42:2). King David said, “How great is our Lord! His power is absolute” (Psalm 147:5). The prophet Jeremiah said, “O Sovereign LORD! You have made the heavens and earth by your great power. Nothing is too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:17). The eternal, never-ending God is also the ever-powerful God who can accomplish anything he desires.

God is omnipresent. God is ever-present. His presence encompasses all the galaxies. At the same time, he is with you right now right where you are. King David said, “I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from

your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there” (Psalm 139:7-8). Because we are finite beings it is hard to imagine a being who is everywhere-present, but this is a characteristic of God. “Am I a God who is only in one place?” asks the LORD. “Do they think I cannot see what they are doing? Can anyone hide from me? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:23-24). The ever-present God spans the reach of the universe and yet is there to hear you whisper a prayer.

God is immutable. By his very nature God can always be counted on because he will not change. The psalmist said the earth will perish, “but you [God] remain forever...you are always the same; your years never end” (Psalm 102:26-27). The writer of the book of Hebrews said, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

We can rest secure in a God who does not waver or lie. He will always do what he says he will do. “God is not a man, that he should lie. He is not a human, that he should change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?” (Numbers 23:19). The immutable God is worthy of our complete trust.

God is omniscient. God knows all. Everything past, present, and future, he knows. He has infinite knowledge. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah he declared, “I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isaiah 46:9-10). King David said, “O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me” (Psalm 139:1). Such awesome knowledge is beyond us. Imagine the hard drives of a trillion computers filled with all the information known to humans...and it wouldn't even scratch the surface of God's knowledge.

God is personal. Even though he is the eternal, almighty, ever-present, unchanging, and all-knowing God, he is also a God who desires personal interaction. On one hand his power and awesome might is fearful, yet he is the “God who is passionate about his relationship with you” (Exodus 34:14).

This is actually what I (Josh) was searching for but didn't know it. To know the God of the universe in a personal way would answer so many questions as to who I was, why I was here, and where I was going. God is not an absentee

God who created the universe and then left it to its own devices. He is active and involved with his creation. He entered our world in the form of a human; at the moment of salvation he enters our lives in the form of his Holy Spirit; he answers our prayers and gives us strength through the Holy Spirit; he empowers us to resist temptation and wants to fulfill his purpose in our lives. He is a personal, interactive God who desires a relationship with his creation. Therefore:

We believe the truth that there is an infinite, personal God of the universe.

The angel that spoke to Mary stated it well: “Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). While he is infinite in his existence, power, presence, and knowledge, he wants a relationship with each of us personally. That’s what is so amazing. A God who needs nothing and who can do anything and everything still wants and desires to have an intimate, personal relationship with you and me! That is the God who is and always will be, the God you and I can believe in with confidence.

EVIDENCE FOR GOD’S EXISTENCE

We may *believe* a personal God exists, but can we *know* that he exists? It’s not possible to offer absolute proof of God by having him materialize before a large crowd and demonstrate his omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and glory for all to see.

Even if that happened, many people would not accept it as proof. In fact, God *did* show up in human form and demonstrated his deity with miracles and prophecies. People still doubted he was God.

God has made himself known for those who want to seek him.

Yet, we are not left without sufficient evidence of God's existence. More than enough convincing data is available for anyone who wants to examine it. God has made himself known for those who want to seek him. Jesus said, "Seek and you will find" (Luke 11:9 NIV). There is evidence of him all around us. His fingerprints can be seen anywhere you look—from the vastness of the universe to the tiniest microscopic cell. Let's look at just four evidences or arguments for the existence of God.

1. THE KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The twentieth-century developments in cosmology brought renewed focus to a classic argument for the existence of God—the *kalam* cosmological argument. The name *kalam* may sound sophisticated, but the argument is surprisingly simple. Philosopher William Lane Craig, the most vocal defender of the argument today, states it this way:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Given the rules of logic, if the first two premises are true, then the conclusion necessarily follows.

In teaching my (Sean's) students the first premise of this argument, I challenge them to give an example of something coming into existence from nothing. My query is typically followed by silence while the absurdity of such a request sinks in. How could *some*-thing come from *no*-thing? As the ancient Greeks regularly observed, "Out of nothing, nothing comes." Even David Hume, the great Scottish skeptic, said the idea of something arising without a cause is absurd.

We may not always know the cause of a particular event (such as the breaking of a window or the explosion of a supernova), but it seems reasonable to believe things that begin to exist have a cause. There is a multitude of different scientific evidence pointing to the universe having a beginning. Let's consider one example.

According to the second law of thermodynamics, processes taking place in a closed system always move toward a state of equilibrium. In other words, unless outside energy is added to a closed system, the usable energy within the system will eventually run down. For instance, imagine a cup of hot coffee in a room completely sealed off from the outside (no energy or matter can intrude). Eventually the coffee will cool and match the temperature of its environment. If the coffee were not yet at a state of equilibrium with the room, if the coffee's temperature were still above that of the room, then you would know definitively that it had not been there forever.

In the atheistic view, the universe is a closed system, since there is nothing beyond it (like our coffee in the sealed room). Given sufficient time, the universe will eventually run out of energy and reach a state of equilibrium known as "heat death." At this stage, all the universe's useful energy will be gone. If the universe had been in existence for an infinite duration, then it would have already run out of energy. Yet since there is disequilibrium in the temperature of the universe, it must have a finite past. Therefore, the universe had a beginning.

There is also good philosophical evidence for the beginning of the universe. Imagine you went for a walk in the park and stumbled across someone proclaiming aloud, "...five, four, three, two, one—there, I finally finished! I just counted down from infinity!" What would be your initial thought? Would you wonder how long the person had been counting? Probably not. More likely, you would be in utter disbelief. Why? Because you know that such a task cannot be done. Just as it's impossible to count up to infinity from the present moment, it's equally impossible to count down from negative infinity to the present moment.

Counting to infinity is impossible because there is always (at least) one more number to count. In fact, every time you count a number, you still have an infinite more to go, and thus you get no closer to your goal. Similarly, counting down from infinity to the present moment is equally impossible. Such a task can't even get started! Any point you pick in the past to begin, no matter how remote, would always require (at least) one more number to count before you could start there. Any beginning point would require an infinite number of previous points.

Here's the bottom line: We could never get to the present moment if we had to cross an actual infinite number of moments in the past. Yet since the present moment is real, it must have been preceded by a finite past that includes a beginning or first event. Therefore, the universe had a beginning. And if the universe had a beginning, it must have a cause. And by its very nature, that cause must be timeless, spaceless, changeless, powerful, and personal.⁴

So Who Made God?

This brings us back to the question “Who made God?” It is important to clarify that Christians do not believe *everything that exists needs a cause*. Rather, everything that *begins* to exist must have a cause. Many things that necessarily exist are uncaused, such as mathematical truths and the laws of logic. Even if our world had never been created, the law of non-contradiction would still hold. The universe had a beginning, so it must have a cause. But God by definition does not need a cause—he is uncaused.

William Lane Craig comments penetratingly, “And this is not special pleading in the case of God. After all, atheists have long maintained that the universe doesn't need a cause, because it's eternal. How can they possibly maintain that the universe can be eternal and uncaused, yet God cannot be timeless and uncaused?”⁵ A God who is uncaused is the most reasonable explanation.

2. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This is the argument for design. The point is made that life, the laws of nature, and the whole universe demonstrate immense specified complexity, the mark of design, and therefore the universe must have come from a Personal Designer. King David made this point when he said,

The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world (Psalm 19:1-4).

Several years ago, I (Sean) collaborated with Dr. William Dembski in writing a book titled *Understanding Intelligent Design*. In it we covered the many facets of the arguments for intelligent design. Some of the remaining portion of this section is drawn from that book.

If you have ever visited Disneyland or Disney World, you have probably noticed the bed of flowers laid out on a sloping bank. The colors, formation, and particular flowers form a clear resemblance to Mickey Mouse. No one would attribute that gardening marvel to mere chance. Why? First, flowers of that variety and color don't just grow by chance to form the shape and color of the famous Mickey Mouse. The numerous types of flowers and their multiplicity of placements clearly indicate *complexity*. Complexity in this sense is the same as saying it is highly improbable these flowers randomly grew there or were positioned so intricately.

Second, besides being complex, the floral arrangement is laid out in a very specific manner. Certain flowers make up the eyes, others the nose, and yet others the mouth and the renowned ears. The image exhibits an independently given pattern—it's therefore *specified*.

This combination of complexity (or improbability) and specificity (or independently imposed patterning) is called *specified complexity*. Specified complexity is a marker of intelligence. The huge flower bed at Disney exhibits specified complexity and leads us to believe an intelligent gardener was its cause.

What a Single Living Cell Declares

The more complex a thing is and the more its form obviously follows specific patterns, the more it points to an intelligent designer. Take, for example, the building block of human life—a single living cell. Does it have specified complexity?

Let's briefly look at a cell magnified a billion times. On its surface we find millions of openings, like portholes in a ship. But these are not mere portholes. They regulate the flow of materials in and out of the cell. Cells exhibit nano-engineering on a scale and sophistication that scientists have hardly begun to scratch. Francis Crick, one of the co-discoverers of DNA's structure, described the

cell as “a minute factory, bustling with rapid, organized chemical activity.” That was in the early 1980s. Scientists now think of the cell as an automated city.

Inside the cell we find a host of raw materials maneuvered back and forth by robot-like machines all working in unison. In fact, many different objects move in perfect unison through seemingly endless conduits. The level of control in these choreographed movements is truly mind-blowing.

And this is just *one* cell. In larger organisms, cells must work together for the proper function of organs such as hearts, eyes, livers, and ears, and these in turn must work together for the life of the organism.

If we peer further inside the cell, we find coils of DNA that store the information necessary to construct proteins. Proteins themselves are remarkably complex molecular systems. A typical protein is composed of a few hundred amino acids arranged in a precisely ordered sequence that then folds into a highly organized three-dimensional structure. That structure enables the protein to perform its function inside the cell.

Biologists today cannot even describe the activities inside the cell without comparing it to machines and other feats of modern engineering. The reason is that nearly every feature of our own advanced technology can be found in the cell.⁶

As we carefully observe the inner workings of the cell, one thing becomes apparent: There is complexity and sophistication that dwarfs human technological innovation today. This is why more and more scientists are concluding that the best explanation for the cell is intelligent design.

Life Requires Vast Amounts of Information

The key feature to life is information. Life, even the simplest of bacterial cells, requires vast amounts of information to function. Cellular information

is stored in DNA, and the DNA in one cell in the human body holds the equivalent of roughly eight thousand books of information. A typical human body has about 30 trillion cells, each of which contains DNA strands that, when uncoiled and strung together end to end, would be about two meters in length. Thus a conservative estimate is that if all the DNA in an adult human were strung together, it would stretch from Earth to the sun and back around two hundred times!⁷

Supposing there were no Intelligent Designer. How would the needed information for life be assembled? The typical answer materialist evolutionary scientists come up with is that given enough time, matter, and chance, anything can happen. But how much time, matter, and chance are actually available? As early as 1913, the French mathematician Émile Borel argued that a million monkeys typing ten hours a day would be exceedingly unlikely to reproduce the books in the world's libraries. The universe is very old and enormous, according to Borel, but it's not old enough and big enough for something that unlikely.

Let's narrow Borel's scope. Instead of focusing on many books, let's consider the works of Shakespeare. Here is the question: How many monkeys and how much time would be required to reproduce one of the works of Shakespeare, or even just a few lines?

Work has been done on this question by MIT computational quantum physicist Seth Lloyd. According to Lloyd, in the known physical universe, chance is capable of producing only 400 bits of prespecified information (this is equivalent to a string of 400 zeroes and ones). This amounts to a sequence of 82 ordinary letters and spaces. Therefore, the longest initial segment of Hamlet's soliloquy that the entire universe—given its size and purported multibillion-year history—could by chance produce is the following two lines:

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION.
WHETHER 'TIS NOBLER IN THE MIND TO SUFFER...

Clearly, the phenomenon of chance is limited in its ability to explain certain features of the universe. All the chance in the known

universe can't randomly type more than two lines of Shakespeare, much less an entire book.⁸

If chance over time cannot create enough information for two lines of Shakespeare, how could it ever create the complexity of even a single “primitive” cell? A single cell requires hundreds of thousands of bits of information precisely sequenced in its DNA. So those who deny an Intelligent Designer have the impossible task of explaining how the information stored in even a simple living organism could arise out of the process of chance and time. Life simply requires too much information to occur randomly.

This is why intelligent design best explains the information content of DNA. Imagine you are walking on the beach and notice the message “Sean loves Stephanie” inscribed in the sand. What would you conclude? You might think Sean, Stephanie, or some gossipy stranger wrote it, but it would never cross your mind to attribute it to chance, necessity, or some combination of the two. Wind, water, and sand simply do not generate meaningful information. The most reasonable inference is that it is a product of intelligent design. If we justifiably infer a mind behind a simple message of 15 characters, then inferring an intelligence for the origin of the cell—which requires hundreds of thousands of bits of specified information—is fully justified.⁹

3. THE MORAL LAW ARGUMENT

Every human culture known to man has had a moral law. While there is some variety regarding moral practices across cultures, there is a striking universal agreement about the validity of moral principles such as justice, courage, and fairness. Without appeal to a higher source, what could account for the moral sense that is common to the entire human race through all of history? An objective, universal, and constant standard of moral truth seems to point most convincingly to the existence of a personal and moral God.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky aptly observed, “If there is no immortality of the soul, there can be no virtue and therefore everything is permissible.” In other words, if God does not exist as the foundation of morality, then *anything goes*. If God does not exist, then we lose the right to judge the Nazis and anyone else with whom we disagree morally. They believed they were right. We think they were wrong. Without a higher law above humanity, who gets to decide moral truth? If there is no greater source above human beings, then the existence of morality is an inexplicable illusion.¹⁰

There are, however, those who would argue that objective morality can exist independently of God. Yet this assertion presents a problem: What is the source of objective moral values and duties if there is no God? Evil, for example, is best understood as the perversion of good. Just as crookedness implies a standard of straight, evil implies a standard of good. C.S. Lewis famously said that to complain a stick is bent makes sense only in light of the concept of straight. Similarly, there can be evil only if there is first a standard of good. But if there is no God to ground such goodness, then what defines the standard of good? Without God, morality becomes subjective, and the concept of objective good disappears. Moral good becomes a meaningless term, for it is simply whatever each of us wants it to be at a given moment, or whatever evolution has blindly wired us to believe.

The universally recognized existence of objective moral values is a strong reason for believing in God. Consider this simple argument:

1. If objective moral values and duties exist, God must exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties exist.
3. Therefore, God must exist.

We know objective moral values do exist. We don't need to be persuaded that, for example, torturing babies for fun is wrong. All reasonable people know this. Therefore, since objective moral values and duties do exist, then God must exist as well.

4. A PERSONAL-EXPERIENCE- WITH-GOD ARGUMENT

People have asked me (Josh), “How do you know you became a Christian?” “How do you know God is real?” For one, he changed my life. This transformation is one way I’m assured of the validity of my conversion and the existence of a real and personal God.

I’m sure you have heard people speak of the “bolt of lightning” that hit them when they had their first religious experience. Well, it wasn’t that dramatic for me. After I prayed, nothing happened. I mean *nothing*. In fact, after I made my commitment to God, I felt worse. I actually felt I was about to vomit. *Oh, no. What have I gotten sucked into now?* I really felt I had gone off the deep end (and I’m sure some people think I did!).

The change in my life was not immediate, but it was real. In six to eighteen months, I knew that I had not gone off the deep end. I had experienced God, and that changed everything.

A personal experience with God is evidence of his reality. Some might challenge this assertion, saying an experience with God could easily be an illusion or an emotional or psychological fantasy. But those who have genuinely experienced encounters similar to what Paul the apostle experienced on the Damascus road know better. They know it is real. Such experiences are one of many affirmations of Paul’s statement: “Now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you” (Galatians 3:29).

It is true that we who are followers of Jesus and children of God must accept our personal relationship with God by faith. But that doesn’t make the relationship any less real. As a Christ-follower you are one of “God’s very own children, adopted into his family—calling him ‘Father, dear Father.’ For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:15-16).

*Apart from an infinite, personal
Creator God we have no life or meaning.*

If you have had a personal encounter with the Creator God through Jesus Christ, you know he is real. The evidence of a personal experience with God cannot necessarily be sufficient proof to others, but it can be one of many convincing arguments to the one who knows God personally.

Many philosophers have tried to exclude God from their explanations of human existence and the meaning of life. But apart from an infinite, personal Creator God we have no life or meaning. Noted British atheist Bertrand Russell made this point perfectly clear when he declared it “nearly certain”

that man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms;...that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.¹¹

Either God is the “first cause” of life and of all things, or there is no lasting significance to our existence or to anything we accomplish. We and everything we do, as Russell says, will die in “a universe in ruins.”

To deny the existence of an infinite, personal God leaves us without hope, purpose, or meaning in life. It's as if we were all swept downstream in a swift river and must choose between climbing onto a rock or plunging over a waterfall. One option offers security and a solid grip on stable reality; the other ends with our hurtling into a void where nothing has objective meaning or purpose.¹² But the evidence surrounding our universe and life itself simply has too much specified complexity to deny the existence of our Intelligent Designer. That leaves us, as Paul said, “no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God” (Romans 1:20). And in knowing God and reflecting his image we find the joy and happiness he intended, both for this life and the one to come. Choosing to believe in God and having a relationship with him gives us a way to understand who we really are.

And that is the subject of our next section.

DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY

Imagine for a moment what it must have been like when the first man and woman were created. Adam, the first human, lived in the paradise called Eden. Everything was perfect. Grasses and flowers and animals of all kinds frolicking and grazing under a canopy of clouds and sky...everything painted a breathtaking canvas of beauty.

Each new morning must have brought with it an ever-varying combination of colors, textures, and movements that converged to bring pleasure to his senses. The sounds of musical birds and sparkling waterfalls filled the air. Lush tropical trees and plants grew delicious fruit whose taste and textures brought joy to the palate and satisfaction to the body.

The perfect beauty of his world must have captivated his soul with pure rapture. In harmony with his environment as Adam was, each enchanted evening must have resulted in such satisfaction and contentment that he thought nothing could ever surpass it.

While we have no record Adam complained about his condition in the pristine garden, something was in fact missing. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Even though he had God, Adam was not yet complete. Something was yet absent—a human relationship. Even in the perfect world of Eden before sin ever disrupted relationships, God declared human aloneness was not good. So God caused Adam to sleep, and while he slept God formed another human.

Imagine Adam's reaction when he awoke. Imagine how he might have gazed through softly waving palms to see a face so captivating that he thought he'd be content never to look at anything else again. He watches in rapt fascination as she emerges from a shroud of mist, gliding toward him with majestic elegance and grace. Her shape and form excite him like nothing ever has. As he reaches out to her, he discovers she is soft to the touch, and her fragrance fills his senses. He feels his heart beat faster; his breathing becomes deeper. He is in awe of this creature called woman. He has never experienced such beauty.

But he was intrigued by more than just her glorious face and form. There was a mystery to this attraction. Adam sensed an indefinable hunger to know more of this creature than what he could physically hold and caress and enjoy. And so did she. They were both drawn to a deeper intimacy than

their physical senses could experience. Each of these first humans had a longing for an emotional connection, a bonding of the inner spirit, an intimate attachment of the soul. In short, they experienced a desire for a loving relationship. *For God had planted deep within them an identifying marker or distinguishing character of his own likeness—the capacity for loving relationships.* It is this God-created reality that removes human aloneness and makes you, you. It is your capacity for relationship that provides all the meaning, happiness, and joy you could ever hope to experience.

YOUR MARK OF PERSONHOOD: GOD’S RELATIONAL DNA

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Then God went on to say, “Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves... So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them” (verses 26-27). So before there were humans, before Planet Earth or the universe or time as we know it, God existed eternally as a loving relational being.

He is a relational God by his very nature, three personalities blended in perfect harmony—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (More on the Trinity is covered in chapter 9.) While he is the infinite one and we as humans are finite, we bear his relational DNA. We have inherited his ability to love another being. Scripture says, “Love comes from God...for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

Along with the ability to be relational—to love God and other beings besides ourselves—we have also inherited a number of other traits related to God’s relational nature. We have inherited his ability to communicate our thoughts, intents, and feelings to others.

We have also inherited his sense of value for human relationships and for life itself. God said, “Honor your father and mother...Do not murder...Do not commit adultery...Do not steal...Do not testify falsely...Do not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Deuteronomy 5:16-21). From God’s giving of the law at Mount Sinai up through the early church and beyond, it was understood and taught that life is sacred at every stage. Promoting social justice, taking care of the poor, and defending human rights find their basis in each of us by

the fact that we are purposely created in God's image. In his book *The Faith*, Chuck Colson said it well: "When Christians today see life through God's eyes...we are compelled not only to care for the poor and vulnerable but to defend every human's God-given right."¹³ That is because we were created in God's relational image with value, dignity, and worth.

We have inherited God's sense of satisfaction and joy in accomplishing things through relationships. After each creative act in Genesis, this relational God "saw that it was good" (1:10). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit found joy in their collective creative acts as the Master of the universe.

We inherited from the Master of the universe the charge to "be masters over all life" (Genesis 1:26). God told the first humans that in relationship with one another they were also to live in proper relationship with their home—Planet Earth. God said to be stewards of the earth and "to tend and care for it" (2:15). So God instilled within his human creation an environmental responsibility to relate lovingly to the planet they inherited.

As you can see, God placed humans on a plateau above the rest of creation when he fashioned them in his relational image and likeness. But this relational dimension does more than just set us apart from the rest of God's creation. It also defines who we are and gives us our sense of identity.

DISCOVERING WHO YOU ARE

When you stop to think about it, you and I largely understand ourselves—our identity—in terms of relationships. We perceive ourselves and others around us as this person's son or daughter, that person's husband or wife, someone's mother or father, or as our neighbor, friend, or pastor.

While human relationships may provide insight into your identity, the basis of your true identity resides in the fact that you are uniquely fashioned in God's image. Because sin caused us to be born alienated and disconnected from God, we have lost that instilled sense of personal identity. Even after becoming a Christian, it does not automatically become easy to discover who we really are. Although I (Josh) trusted Christ and became a Christian as a university student, I had very little, if any, experiential and emotional context in which to understand the true meaning of a loving relationship. My

growing-up years were fraught with relational dysfunction, emotional pain, and chaos. Consequently, I didn't readily see myself as a one-of-a-kind person created to relate lovingly to God and others.

Yet each of us is an original. Just as no two snowflakes are ever alike, no two humans ever created are alike. Parents can certainly attest no two children are alike. Each of us, as a human child and as a child of God, has an original identity. You have been given distinct and special qualities that make you relationally unique.

Scripture recognizes our originality. One subtle but powerful indication of this is found in the familiar words penned by King Solomon: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NASB). Unfortunately, this verse is often misunderstood and misapplied. Some think it means, "Have family devotions, make sure kids attend church and youth group and a Christian school, and then when they are grown up, they will not depart from the faith." The real emphasis of this verse, however, centers on the phrase "the way he [or she] should go." The writer is referring to the *child's* way, his or her leaning or bent. The root meanings of these words suggest guiding each child according to his or her own uniqueness. In other words, parents must discern exactly who their child is—his or her abilities, interests, and talents—and then draw out and develop that uniqueness. Train the child to be the unique person God relationally created him or her to be.

The same Hebrew word used in Proverbs 22 is translated "bend" in two psalms and refers to the bending of the archer's bow (see Psalm 11:2; 64:3). Today, with precision manufacturing, almost anyone can pick up a bow with a 45-pound draw weight and do a fair job of hitting the target. But in biblical days, nothing was standardized. All archers made their own bows, and each archer had to know the unique characteristics of his own bow if he hoped to hit anything with it. God's Word is telling us that you have an inborn uniqueness your parents and caregivers are to identify and train accordingly.

My (Sean's) parents understood this truth and guided me to understand my "bent." My dad saw I had an inclination toward playing basketball. I'm not a tall person; neither is my father. But as a young person he excelled at basketball, and he sensed I had the same talent. He encouraged me to pursue

it, coaching me as I learned the game. And I eventually fulfilled my dream of being a point guard for Biola University.

My parents also picked up on my inquisitiveness. I wanted to know things; I enjoyed figuring out why this was true or that was true. And I enjoyed sharing what I was learning with others. Because they cultivated my natural inclinations in these directions, I ended up majoring in philosophy and theology and becoming an educator and speaker. All this resulted in my understanding of who I am—the unique person God created in his own relational image.

WHAT IS YOUR UNIQUE IDENTITY?

God intends for you to use the unique characteristics he gave you to relate not only to him but to others. “Just as our bodies have many parts,” Paul said, “and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others” (Romans 12:4-5).

There will never be another you. God has specially gifted you to fill a role—a purpose—no one else can fill. You and I want to know our place in this world. God has crafted us specifically for that place that only we can fill.

You have unique characteristics with which to love and live for God in a way that only you are empowered to do. And he wants to exercise his love and life in and through you in a unique and original fashion. Paul declares,

There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church... It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have (1 Corinthians 12:6-7, 11).

Some aspects of your uniqueness are readily apparent. Your personal identification is distinctly yours. Your fingerprints are unique; your retina scans are distinct; your face and body are at least slightly different from those of anyone else who ever existed on the planet. But it’s not always so easy to

understand the distinctiveness with which God created you and what gifts the Holy Spirit has distributed to you.

You can learn to identify your distinctiveness by paying attention to how your mind works and what draws your interest. God has instilled within you certain *passions*: things you feel strongly about, things you're fervently interested in, things that give you a special sense of joy when you talk about them or pursue them. Those passions direct you to who, where, and what God wants you to love in life...as only you can.

Just as Mac and PC computers have different operating systems, God has also given you distinctive built-in ways of processing information and making decisions. Do you tend to be emotional or rational? Reflective or outspoken? Creative or systematic? Artistic or mechanical? These tendencies, along with your passions and interests, make up your *distinct personality*. God's love is to be clearly expressed through your distinct personality, as only you can express it.

If your parents understood that you were a one-of-a-kind individual and sought to train you up in "the way you should go," you have, no doubt, come a long way in identifying your personality type, talents, special gifts, and passions. But if you are like most people, you have only a partial understanding of who you are. You could probably use some help in figuring it out. We suggest the book *Why You Do What You Do* by Bobb Biehl.

One other thought about our personal identities. Understanding that we are God's children with a special place in his body doesn't mean unbelievers don't have talents or natural gifts. It doesn't mean they can't come to understand themselves and their uniqueness to varying degrees. What it does mean, however, is that unless and until people come to know God as their Father through Christ, they will never understand their true place in this world. A non-Christian may exercise a talent or skill, but it will never be fully expressed as it was meant to be, or it will never bring maximum meaning to that life. God made us in his image, and when we live out his way, his truth, and his life, we find both our true identity and experience pure joy because we are being what we are created to be. We are reflecting his image. Knowing who we are and living as God designed us provides a sense of meaning and purpose to life.

LIVING OUT YOUR RELATIONAL IMAGE OF GOD

Knowing you are a relational being, created in God's image, is important. But how do you live out that image in relationship to others? As we stated earlier, reflecting the image of a relational God includes certain social responsibilities, moral and ethical choices, creativity, and so on. These responsibilities spring directly from the core characteristic that defines God best—love. “God is love,” John says, “and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect” (1 John 4:16-17). It is as if God wired into us a yearning to live out our relational nature, a yearning to love someone and have someone love us deeply enough to explore the depths of who we really are as people created in God's image.

THE RELATIONAL LOVE PROCESS

The relationships that are lasting and most meaningful are those in which we come to know another person intimately and allow him or her to know us equally. That is where the relational love process of knowing and being known comes in.

Know Others

One of the words Scripture uses for lasting intimacy is the Hebrew word *yada*, meaning “to know.” It denotes a deep and intimate acquaintance. A 16-year-old girl sent me (Josh) one of the best definitions of intimacy I've seen. She wrote, “It is the capacity to be real with another person...no façade, no barriers.” We all want to be real and be known. It's as if those around you had a sign hung around their necks reading, *Please know me!* In Jeremiah 1:5, God uses this word to say to the prophet, “I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb.” God knew us intimately before we were born, and he wants to teach us to know others intimately.

Being made in God's image means we are complex and intricately designed. Therefore, it takes time to explore the relational depths of those you love—to discover their likes and dislikes, probe their interests and desires, and begin to uncover the wonders of who they are. As a person feels someone desires to truly know them and love them for who they are, they begin to experience

relationship as God designed. And as you do, you will be replicating the DNA of God's image of love.

Be Known

King Solomon said that the Lord “offers his friendship to the godly” (Proverbs 3:32). Friendship in this verse is the Hebrew word *sod*, meaning vulnerable or transparent disclosure. In other words, God offers his friendship—a transparent disclosure of himself—to the godly. God wants us to know him intimately. The Lord said, “I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know God; that's more important than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

God is pleased to reveal himself to us, and he created us in his likeness to reveal ourselves to others. That is another dimension to experiencing deepened love relationships. It's not easy to open ourselves up and be vulnerable. It can be risky, and at times we may even get hurt. But it is a risk worth taking.

As you enter close relationships with others, it's important to let them get to know you for who you really are. Let them know your dreams and aspirations, your fears and hesitations, your hopes and expectations. As you learn to “self-disclose” you will be reflecting a likeness of God, and you will experience a deeper relationship with others.

Be Involved

King David wrote, “O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me...Every moment you know where I am” (Psalm 139:1, 3). The Hebrew word *sakan*, translated “know” here, means a caring involvement. God had much more than simply an informational knowing of David; he was caringly involved in David's life.

For us to do the same is to be involved in the lives of those we love. This means entering their world and becoming interested in what they're interested in. When you take a sincere interest in another and demonstrate you care, you are living out the image of God, and your relationship with the other person deepens.

When I (Sean) was around ten years old I was really into sports cars. I would cut out magazine pictures of cars like the Maserati, the Lamborghini,

and the Ferrari Testarossa. I pinned them up on my bedroom wall and thought they were so cool.

My dad noticed my newfound interest, and one day he really surprised me. He had looked through the Yellow Pages and picked out some of the top sports car dealerships in Beverly Hills. Then he sent each car dealer a letter that said:

I'm a desperate dad. I'll do anything to spend time with my son, and right now he's into sports cars. Would it be possible if I pulled him out of school and brought him up to your showroom so that we could take some test drives? I want to tell you up front, I'm not interested in buying a car.

Amazingly, he got positive replies from every dealer. He called and made appointments for us, and we drove up to Beverly Hills (a distance of some 150 miles) for a day in the sports car showrooms. And what a day it was! Dad waited in the showrooms while I went out on "test drives" with salesmen and "tried out" just about every big-name car you can think of. As I came by the showroom in each car, I would wave to Dad—I was so proud.

Along with the test drives, I got posters, some of which were autographed by famous race car drivers. It was an incredible day. On the way home we discussed which cars we liked the best and went over all the flyers, books, and posters I had collected. Then Dad gently switched the subject and started talking to me about looking at all this in the light of our Christian worldview.

"You know, Sean," he said, "all these cars are fun, but they cost huge amounts of money. What we should be thinking about is what God has called us to value as a family." He then explained, "Let's look at what we did today in light of God's love for us...what Christ did on the cross...what he created us for." And with that beginning he was able to communicate to me as a ten-year-old one of the best lessons on materialism he could have possibly taught. He didn't make it preachy, but he did make the point about how we may like certain things and enjoy them, but their cost downgrades them to a very low category compared to the importance of where we are as followers of Jesus.

I never forgot that lesson on materialism. But I'm convinced the lesson would never have stuck if my dad hadn't entered my world and demonstrated

he loved me by focusing on my interests. The real lesson that day that has molded and shaped me as a father and husband is that I am to enter the life of my wife and family in order to love and be loved.

TALKING ABOUT THE RELATIONAL CONTEXT OF LIFE

Everything around us and in us reflects that we were made for relationships. You can talk about moral values or the creation around us—whatever it is, it is based in God’s relationship with us.

Place God’s Commands Within a Relational Context

Whenever you talk with someone about God’s commands and rules, always put them within the context of his loving motivation to provide for us and protect us. This is important because so many people see his commands as restrictive and harsh. But the truth is, God’s commands come from who he is and his desire to bless us. Discover the loving provision and protection behind his commands, and you will find the love that reflects his character. This is what we must teach.

God’s commands are designed to bless us. For example, we are told not to steal from others nor lie or be a cheat (see Exodus 20:15-16). In other words, we are to live honest lives because God is true. “He is the Rock,” Moses declared, “his works are perfect...A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4 NIV). His nature is true—he doesn’t vary or deviate from his very essence of being holy and righteous. The reason the writer of Hebrews said, “It is impossible for God to lie” (6:18) is that God cannot deny his own nature. And when we live honest lives we reflect God’s true nature. By doing this we’re protected from guilt and enjoy a clear conscience. We’re protected from shame and enjoy a reputation of integrity. We’re protected from ruined relationships and enjoy relationships based on trust.

*When we place God’s commands within a relational context...
we can see that to be like him is for his glory and our benefit.*

When my (Josh's) daughter Kelly was in fourth grade, several students in her class swiped an object off the teacher's desk while the teacher was out of the room. The children only wanted to play with the object, but it soon broke. Then they returned it to its previous place on the teacher's desk.

When the teacher discovered the damage, she asked one of Kelly's classmates what had happened. The girl yielded to the pressure of the group and lied. Then the teacher asked Kelly. Kelly explained matter-of-factly what had happened.

The next day I took Kelly out for breakfast at a local restaurant. I told her she'd done the right thing in spite of any pressure or harassment she might get from her classmates.

"Honey," I then asked, "why is lying wrong?"

"Because the Bible says it's wrong," she answered.

"Why does the Bible say it's wrong?"

"Because God commanded it."

"Why did God command it?"

"I don't know," she admitted.

I took her hands in mine and locked eyes with her. "Because God is true. By his very nature he can't be dishonest. So what you did when you told the truth was to act like God. You reflected his nature." We went on and talked about the many benefits of being an honest person.

When we place God's commands within a relational context—that is, when we see ourselves as his creatures, related to him in love and designed to experience joy when we reflect his nature—we can see that to be like him is for his glory and our benefit. This enables us to avoid seeing his rules as restrictive or legalistic.

Place Your Own Instructions Within a Relational Context

As a parent you obviously don't need to give your children a reason or benefit for everything you instruct them to do. However, they need to understand that all your instructions and rules come out of your loving heart for them and a loving desire for their best interests.

Growing up I (Sean) remember how my dad or mom wouldn't always let me go everywhere I wanted to go or buy everything I wanted to buy. Of

course I'd be disappointed and even at times complain or argue with them. As I think back, what stands out to me about those times is not the arguments or disappointment I felt, but my parents' constant reminders of this one thing: They would say, "Sean, I hope you know it needs to be this way because I love you." That was the theme.

As a young person I certainly couldn't understand the depths of my parents' love. I understand it better now that I am a parent myself. But knowing they loved me and genuinely wanted my best kept me from making some costly mistakes. That doesn't mean I always listened. Like any kid, I made my share of poor choices. But knowing that my parents truly loved me was a powerful motivating force to take their wisdom to heart. None of us can be perfect parents, but we can be deeply loving parents. We can let our children know that what we do to correct them is because we love them.

Use the Fascinations of Nature to Praise God's Existence

Take advantage of our natural world to point to the existence and creativity of God. Watching a nature documentary or taking a trip to the zoo can serve as a great opportunity to wonder at the amazing design of God's world. You can pose questions like, "What does a rose tell us about God and what he likes?" or "Why did God make giraffes with such long necks?" We don't necessarily have to know all the answers in order to marvel at God's miraculous creation and praise him for it.

Some time ago the BBC produced a television series called *Planet Earth*. A lot of my (Sean's) friends were talking about it, so I decided to purchase the DVDs to see why all the commotion. I was completely blown away! The nature footage they captured was absolutely amazing. After I had shown a couple of episodes to our family, our young son, Scottie, started asking, "Can we watch *Planet Earth* tonight?"

In my favorite scene, a gigantic great white shark chases a seal. Sharks are swift and powerful; the seal is more agile. But despite its agility, the seal cannot escape earth's most feared predator. The chase ends when the shark explodes from the water and catches the seal in its jaws in midair. The slow-motion footage was worth the price. Incredible!

My wife and I took the opportunity presented by the series to celebrate

the powerful forces of God's creation with our son, using nature as a springboard to share a biblical worldview: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:3-4 NIV).

If you have an interest in astronomy, flowers, or gardening, or if you are fascinated with honeybees, ants, whales, or the hibernation of bears, you can use those interests to wonder aloud about the miracle of creation and what it might suggest about the nature of our Creator God. Physics and the study of gravity, light, atomic energy, or electricity are other fields rich in mystery that inspire wonder of the God of creation. You don't have to be a scientist or a botanist to see the natural world as a means to glorify God to those around you. Going on a hike and marveling at God's creation can be just as effective.

Use the Miracle of Birth to Praise God's Existence

Use the birth of a baby or remembering the day a person was born to marvel at the miracle of birth. King David said, "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it" (Psalm 139:13-14).

The fascinating aspects of our complex bodies can be used to praise God for this handiwork. You might remember from high school biology that the "double helix" shape of DNA resembles a twisted ladder. Each rung is a piece of your genetic code, and amazingly, every cell in your body contains a complete DNA blueprint for everything about you. The sequence of those rungs provides the pattern for the production of every building block of life. Not only that, but within each human being's reproductive cells lies the information that, when combined with genetic information from a mate, adds up to the genetic pattern handed down to a child.

DNA, in other words, is what determines not only *who we are* but *what our children look like*. Use fascinating information like this to stand in awe of our Creator God. Wonder aloud about "What would it be like to know everything there is to know?" "What does God look like?" "What if he has a favorite color?" "Why does he love us so much?" This exercise isn't meant to

humanize God, but rather to help those around you understand that while God is infinite and beyond our comprehension on one hand, on the other he is an approachable, relational God who takes notice even of how many hairs grow on our heads.

Teach Your Kids the Basics of a Biblical Worldview

As a professor, I (Sean) am constantly thinking of simple ways to teach my students a biblical worldview. I explain to them that every worldview answers three basic questions:

1. *Origin*—how did we get here?
2. *Predicament*—what went wrong?
3. *Resolution*—how do we fix it?

Since God created the world, everything was originally good (*origin*). But humans twist these good things and make them evil (*predicament*). God sent his son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins, so we could be restored in our relationship to him (*resolution*).

To apply this truth, I often ask my students a question such as “What gives human beings value?” The answer, of course, is they are made in the image of God (*origin*). Then I ask, “How has this truth been twisted?” Answers include the false ideas that our value comes from our possessions, appearance, success, and so on (*predicament*). Then I ask, “How do we get back to seeing ourselves as God sees us?” The answer is to replace the false ideas we accept from our culture with biblical truth (*resolution*). You can do this little exercise using anything God created, including art, sports, work, music, relationships, and more. By posing these questions on various issues, you can help young people form a biblical worldview.

SUMMARY

Because we believe the truth that a personal God exists and created us in his image, we can enjoy the benefits of his creation, especially loving relationships. Our ethics, morals, social and civic responsibilities, and the capacity to love and be loved come from the fact that we were made in God's relational image. We find our true identity in our Creator. And as we live out who we are within the context of God's image and likeness of love, it brings pleasure to him and purpose, meaning, and joy to us.