

A photograph of a person walking on a sand dune at sunset. The person is wearing a dark hoodie and pants, and is walking away from the camera towards the ocean. The sand dune is in the foreground, and the ocean is in the background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long shadows. The sky is a deep blue.

He is the God of Jacob

He is the God of Science

Dr. Magnolia Bekker

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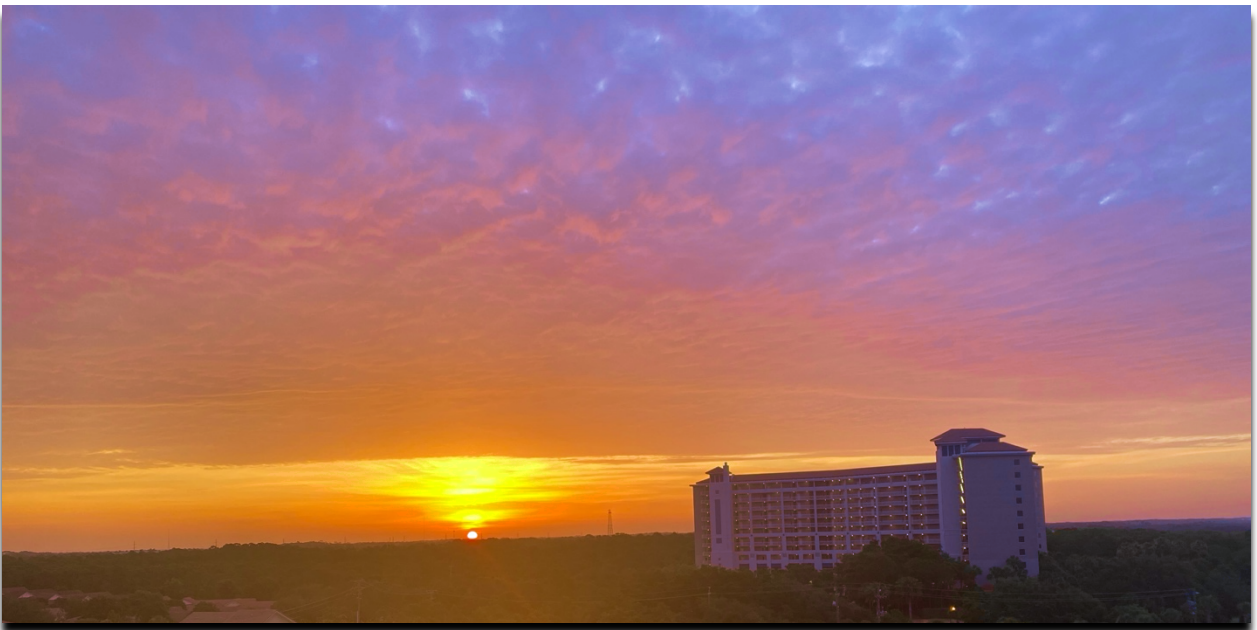
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Preface

The beauty, grace, and mercy of God are profound aspects of His divine nature that have captivated the hearts and minds of believers throughout history. While it is challenging to fully comprehend and describe the limitless attributes of God, we can explore these qualities as understood through philosophical perspectives. God's beauty refers not only to physical aesthetics but also encompasses spiritual and moral perfection. The concept of beauty in relation to God includes qualities such as harmony, perfection, radiance, and transcendence. God's essence is inherently beautiful, and creation reflects this divine beauty in various forms. From the beauty of nature to the intricacies of the human mind, we perceive glimpses of God's beauty in the world around us.

Grace is God's unmerited favor and divine assistance given to humanity out of love and benevolence. It is an expression of God's goodwill and compassion towards us, despite our imperfections and shortcomings. God's grace is a gift that brings spiritual transformation, forgiveness, and salvation. It is through God's grace that we may experience reconciliation, healing, and the opportunity to cultivate a deeper relationship with our Father. God's mercy is the compassionate and forgiving nature of our Father. It is an expression of God's willingness to withhold the punishment or consequences that we rightfully deserve. God's mercy is abundant and all-encompassing, extending to everyone regardless of our past actions or current state. It is through God's mercy that we find solace, hope, and redemption. Mercy emphasizes God's love and concern for humanity, providing comfort and support in times of struggle and adversity.

These qualities often intertwine, reflecting different aspects of God's nature. God's beauty, grace, and mercy are inseparable and complementary aspects of divine love, representing God's willingness to interact with the world and to extend compassion and forgiveness to all beings. The understanding of these qualities is shaped by our individual experiences, scriptures, philosophical interpretations, and theological teachings. Nonetheless, the concepts of God's beauty, grace, and mercy serve as sources of inspiration, guidance, and comfort for those seeking a deeper understanding of the divine.

In the vast journey of life, one of the most profound pursuits we can embark upon is the search for the divine, the quest to explore the existence and nature of God. This pursuit is as old as humanity itself, throughout history we have been yearning to understand the mysteries of the universe and our place within it. The search for God is a deeply personal and transformative endeavor. It is a quest that extends beyond the boundaries of religious traditions, philosophical perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. It is a universal pursuit that has the power to transcend differences and unite us in our shared inquiry into the nature of our existence.

This book is an invitation to explore the complexities and nuances of searching and finding God. I recognize that each person's journey is unique, with varying paths, insights, and experiences. I offer no singular route or dogmatic assertion but rather provide a map for contemplation, reflection, and exploration while also sharing my deeply personal journey with God and my struggle to find God throughout my life. Within these pages, you will encounter my journey of deep spiritual encounters, consideration of philosophical musings, and diverse perspectives from

scientists, thinkers, theologians, and ordinary individuals who have undergone their own personal quests for the divine. I try to offer both perspectives of people who has found God and those who have not. These perspectives serve as beacons, guiding us through the labyrinth of questions, doubts, and revelations that arise along the way.

The search for God is not limited to the realms of intellect or theology alone. It embraces the entirety of human existence, touching upon our emotions, intuition, and our capacity for awe and wonder. It invites us to delve into realms of spirituality, practice, and connection with the transcendent. It is crucial to approach this journey with an open mind, as the landscape of personal beliefs and insights is vast and diverse. As you immerse yourself in these pages, you are encouraged to explore the different perspectives, question assumptions, and engage in a thoughtful dialogue with the ideas presented. In your search for God, answers may come in unexpected moments, through serendipitous encounters, or in the depths of silence and solitude. It may be found in the richness of religious traditions, the wonders of nature, the compassion extended by others, unexpected coincidences or the profound depths of introspection. Often God is found in the depths of pain and hurt.

Above all, this book aims to inspire a sense of reverence for the mysteries of existence and the possibility of encountering the divine within us and around us. My intent with this book is to ignite the flame of curiosity to encourage you to embark on your own personal exploration, trusting your own intuition and inner wisdom on this extraordinary journey. May this book serve as a companion and a guiding light amidst the search for God, nurturing your quest for meaning, purpose, and a deepened understanding of the marvelous creation that surrounds us. This book is called the God of Jacob because God calls himself the God of Jacob, more than He calls himself the God of Israel. God loved Jacob before he was transformed into Israel. God loved the sinner, schemer, liar, cheater. He is the God of Jacob, He is the God of you and me.

With open hearts and curious minds, let us embark together on the adventure of searching and finding God.

-Magnolia Bekker

The great argument used now against any theological proposition is not that it is untrue or unthinkable or unedifying or unscriptural or unorthodox, but simply that the modern mind cannot accept it - Ronald Knox

The heavens declare the glory of God. Who is man that you are mindful of him – King David

Acknowledgements

All praise goes to my heavenly Father without whom I can do nothing



Chapter 1:

Is there even a God?



As a child I always believed in God. Growing up on a farm in Africa I went for long walks in the field, talking to God like He was a friend right next to me. For the first 40 years of my life, I didn't question the existence of God, I simply accepted it.

Then a couple of things happened. A boss G, who was an outspoken Christian, decided she didn't like me, and without a second thought she destroyed the life I had with meticulous and cold purpose through years of intense emotional abuse. Despite an impressive resume that outshone everyone in the laboratory I worked at the time, G managed to convince people that I was incompetent and useless. I fervently prayed for God to save my job and defend me against being unfairly treated. At the time I thought God was silent. When a restructuring occurred at our company my job didn't change and the law in South Africa protects workers' rights, yet G used the opportunity of the company reorganization with clear rules not to use the reorg to solve HR issues by very much jumping on the opportunity to do exactly that by claiming my job changed to get rid of me. I remember the night everyone in my group was called to let them know that they kept their jobs. One after the other was called and everyone rushed over to congratulate each other for keeping their jobs. Finally, it was just me left and after 20 minutes sitting in deafening silence it became evident that I would not be called. We all sat there, no-one saying anything, knowing that I will not be called. I eventually broke the silence and told everyone to go home. That experience was brutal and one of the most humiliating moments of my life and I drowned in the unfairness of it. In the moment it felt like God was silent. It was also hard for me to understand how someone who openly loved God would meticulously and intentionally work to destroy my life.

At the time I also had a Christian co-worker friend K who supported me at her own expense. She stayed up nights with me to pray and we had intense prayer sessions in her car in the parking lot in front of our laboratory. I thought nothing would ever change our friendship. I loved her deeply and I was sure she loved me. K turned on me when I finally broke into pieces and went to a mental hospital to recover, to find my breath again. K told me I was faking mental illness so that I could avoid a work meeting. Anyone who has ever been locked in a mental facility would know how unlikely it is and that anyone would willingly have themselves locked in for such a frivolous reason. You hand over the control of your freedom and can only be let out by someone else. You have no say in it. You have no power and no voice. It was very hard that someone who stood by me in the

fire and loved me held this view of me. That I would have my husband bring my two small children into the mental hospital for the frivolous reason to miss a meeting at work. My friend later told me that 'god' switched off a light in her head, that one moment she loved me and the next she despised me. That left a deep scar that has never really healed.

Later I had a colleague S who I thought was a real gentleman. He and his wife were incredibly supportive when we first moved to America. S treated me as an equal, which is not always the case for a female scientist. Yet one day out of the blue he put a statement on Facebook that 'people who believe in God must also believe in the easter bunny'. This statement coming from someone I respected shook me to my core. I felt insulted to my foundation. I reacted to defend my faith, but it made me question my belief. Was I really naïve to believe in God? Could a sophisticated and intelligent Scientist really believe in God?

Shortly after immigrating to the USA my marriage fell apart. I was surprised by how quickly it dissolved. In August 2016 I gave a testimony in my church in South Africa thanking God for the husband He gave me and I meant every word. I remember laying in bed awake at night during periods of high stress at work, being thankful that at least I was happily married. I was happy in a solid relationship. Within 2 months of immigration everything crumbled around me. I was drowning and at my lowest capacity to support my husband, and he was on the same low, while both of us needed the highest level of support and everything that kept us together shattered. I thought I was drowning in my marriage, when in fact I was just drowning, grasping at candy coated sin to save me. I found myself as a single mother immigrant. Having nothing, no support network, starting over in a country where the culture was foreign, and I didn't know things such as how insurance or banking worked. This trauma led me to question the existence of God. It felt like I was all alone. The God I knew and loved as a child seemed impossible to reach. God seemed to be a waste of the time and mental energy that I needed to simply survive. I could no longer trust in a made-up fairy tale when I needed to keep myself from drowning. Even if there is a God, I was unworthy, or He is not a personal, caring being. I was David who wanted Bathsheba not caring how it impacted anything or anyone, thinking my new, very wrong, relationship was the answer to a great new life. Before I wondered how my boss G could so coldly and unfeelingly set out to destroy me. This time it was me who was doing the destroying. How could God still want and love me?

I had a mix of an idyllic upbringing on a farm in Africa and deeply distressing and harmful experiences that I endured during my formative years, leaving lasting emotional, psychological, and physical scars. I was raised by parents who did their absolute best and yet I experienced severe childhood trauma. I'm still not fully at peace why God allowed things to happen to me when I was 6 and supposed to be in a protected environment. I still have questions about this time in my life.

Experiencing lifelong trauma, the unfair loss of jobs, facing rejection, suddenly losing everything that was familiar, questioning my deep childhood scars, living in constant fear and even losing myself made it challenging to maintain belief in God. During difficult times, I questioned the existence or fairness of God, wondering why we are suffering despite our faith. The intensity of emotional pain and feelings of abandonment led to doubts and a struggle to reconcile my personal experiences with my religious belief. Trauma challenged my sense of security, purpose, and the notion of a benevolent and just deity.

I followed the debate between Prof. Richard Dawkins and Dr. John Lennox that took place some years back.¹ During this debate Dawkins made a couple of interesting statements. Some of his statements are that faith can't be evidence based, since the word faith implies no evidence whereas science is solid as a rock. Dawkins claims that when he finally understood the Darwinian explanation for life, there was no good reason to believe in a creator. During the debate he talks about the privilege he has to be a Scientist and to be in a position to understand something of the mystery of why we exist. According to him religious explanations are now superseded and outdated and are petty and parochial. The understanding that we can get from science are better and grander and our existence is more elegantly explained by science. We don't need creationist lunacy. Dawkins said he sincerely believed in God until the age of 15, when he recognized that faith was determined where a person is born. People who are born in Afghanistan or India automatically have a different faith and this 'rightly' challenged his perspective and had him reevaluate the foundations of faith. Like my colleague S, Dawkins is arguing that only simple-minded people who do not have the ability to think critically and understand complex scientific concepts believe in God, and furthermore these people are abusive and forcing their faith on everyone else.

Dr. Lennox summarizes Dawkins's book 'The God delusion' as a crusade to free people from the oppression of religion and free them from the blanket of religious ignorance. The 'God delusion' is one of the early publications by the 'new atheists', taking an aggressive approach to condemn religion. Dawkins specifically approaches beliefs and faith in a disrespectful, scathing and demeaning manner. He makes sweeping generalizations and dismissive statements about religion. His perspective reflects the typical attitude of a closed-minded atheist. He aggressively pushes for atheism, attempting to forcibly impose and defend it and set it as the path that people with superior intellect will follow. As Dr. Lennox puts it, Prof. Dawkins's book illustrates a grim world, advocating to free us from the dragon of religion and allow people to reach their uninhibited self-fulfillment, unencumbered by an imaginary God. Believing in God puts you firmly in the category of the deluded sucking a religious pacifier. Religion builds a firewall against scientific truth. Religion teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding. Darwinism has aspects of not understanding and aspects such as irreducible complexity not fully addressed by the theory, yet Dawkins embraces it without question. Is his problem then really with the unknown, mystical aspect of religion – or is his problem with religion itself? Is it rebellion against the reality of having a God that is higher than us? Wanting everyone to believe like he does? Hoping that if everyone does believe the same and rejects God then God will somehow cease to exist? Is this maybe what drives the aggressive new atheists? At their core they don't want God to be true.

Stepping back and considering what the new atheists like Dawkins says this view oversimplifies religious concepts and theological arguments, portraying them as literal and fundamentalist rather than acknowledging the nuance and diversity within religious traditions. It is setting up strawman arguments by selectively focusing on extreme or outdated religious beliefs while ignoring more sophisticated and nuanced theological perspectives that engage with modern philosophical and scientific discussions. New atheists tend to focus on literal interpretations of religious texts and beliefs, disregarding the fact that many religious individuals and scholars interpret religious writings metaphorically or as symbolic representations of moral or philosophical truths. Dr. Dawkins's approach to primarily focuses on disproving the existence of a deity, is limiting, as it doesn't fully

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF5bPI92-5o>

engage with the philosophical, ethical, or existential aspects of religious belief that go beyond the question of God's existence.

Professor Lennox experienced Eastern Europe during period of the cold war, and he describes his experiences in the region shortly after the fall of communism. He experienced first-hand the systematic effects of atheist indoctrination. He describes the effects of suppression of Religious Freedom where churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious institutions were subjected to strict controls, closures, and confiscation of property. Clergy members were targeted, arrested, or executed, and religious practices were severely restricted. The attempt to erode traditional religious practices and beliefs, led to the loss of cultural and historical heritage. Religious artifacts were destroyed, and centuries-old traditions were suppressed or eradicated. The suppression of religion weakened well-established moral and ethical frameworks that had been historically influenced by religious teachings. This had a destabilizing impact on societal values.

Stalin and his regime vehemently promoted atheism as part of their ideology. Stalin's regime, which was known for its repression, violence, and disregard for human rights, systematically targeted religious institutions and persecuted believers of various faiths. This persecution was not a direct result of atheism itself, but rather a reflection of the regime's aim to eliminate rivals to its power and establish state control over all aspects of society.

Christianity or any other religion, including Atheism, as a singular belief, does not inherently lead to any specific political ideology or conduct. belief or lack thereof, does not inherently lead to these negative consequences or oppressive behaviors. It is essential to differentiate the actions and agenda of individual leaders or regimes from the diverse beliefs and perspectives held by atheists.

Contrary to what Darwin presents as his ace card to discredit religion, the place where someone is born does not necessarily dictate their religious beliefs. While cultural and societal factors may influence one's initial exposure to a particular religion or lack thereof, the ultimate decision to adopt, practice, or reject a specific faith is influenced by a multitude of personal, social, intellectual, and spiritual factors. Therefore, the place of birth influencing religion choices cannot be considered negative evidence for the existence or non-existence of a higher power or the validity of any religion. Belief in God or adherence to a religious belief system is a deeply personal and complex matter that goes beyond the circumstances of one's birth.

Darwinism, as a theory of evolution through natural selection, has provided significant insights into understanding the diversity and adaptation of species. However, it has limitations. As Lee Strobel argues, one limitation of Darwinism is that it primarily focuses on material explanations for the development and variation of life, neglecting potential non-material factors.² It fails to account for the origin of life itself or the complex emergence of consciousness and intelligence. Additionally, the explanatory power of natural selection is reduced in cases where rapid or sudden adaptations occur, such as in punctuated equilibrium. The rock strata of the earth do not provide evidence of the gradual chain of small biological modifications that support a non-guided natural process. The availability of fossil records present gaps and incomplete snapshots of evolutionary history that raises doubts about the evolution theory and rather suggest a sudden explosion of complex life in

² Is God Real?: Exploring the Ultimate Question of Life, Zondervan publishers, Lee Strobel, 2023

a geological instant. The ability of random mutations to explain the complexity of life is nowhere near a robust, rock solid, irrefutable scientific theory. Presently, Darwinism mainly exists as an imposition of the mind due to a lack of sufficient fossil evidence to support it. Moreover, its reliance on observable and testable evidence limits its ability to address aspects of human behavior, culture, and social dynamics. Therefore, recognizing the limitations of Darwinism encourages us to explore other theories, adopt interdisciplinary approaches, and appreciate the complexities of life's many facets.

I found it perplexing that Dawkins refers to Darwin's theory as the greatest and most supreme achievement of the human intellect to finally explain the natural causes of existence. Dawkins states the beauty of the world instills a natural desire in us to worship something. That we have a natural religious reference related to the complexity and beauty of life. This led us to translate that feeling of worship to an agent. We live in a world where everything is created and therefore, we want to attribute the world to a creator. He claims that modern science has achieved an emancipation from a creator. According to Dawkins it was a supreme achievement of the human intellect to realize that there is a better explanation and that our existence can come about by purely natural causes. No one ever questioned God as a creator before Darwin? Darwin's theory was written over 330 years ago when we thought about the self as a blob of plasma. Darwinism is not the supreme scientific achievement of human history. Yes, it demonstrates Darwin's intelligence and keen observation capabilities, but it is far from a perfect theory that is supported by incorruptible evidence.

Irreducible complexity is a concept that was put forth by the biochemist Michael Behe as an argument against the idea of evolution by natural selection.³ According to Behe, irreducible complexity refers to certain biological structures or systems that are said to be composed of multiple interdependent components, all of which are necessary for the system to function properly. Behe argues that these complex structures could not have gradually evolved through a series of small, incremental steps, as proposed by evolutionary theory. He claims that if any one component of an irreducibly complex system were absent or nonfunctional, the entire system would cease to function and provide no selective advantage, making it unlikely to have evolved through natural processes.

Behe's examples of irreducible complexity include complex molecular systems like the bacterial flagellum that is a whip-like, long appendage responsible for the movement of many bacteria. It consists of several distinct parts that work together to enable the flagellum to rotate and propel the bacterium through its environment. These parts include a filament that is the long, helical structure that forms the visible tail of the flagellum. It is composed of a protein called flagellin and extends outward from the cell surface. It also contains a hook that is a curved, flexible segment that connects the filament to the motor complex embedded in the cell membrane. It acts as a flexible joint, allowing the filament to rotate. It contains a basal body that is the complex structure that anchors the flagellum in the cell membrane and is responsible for its rotation. The basal body spans the inner and outer membranes of the bacterium and consists of several rings, including the MS ring, P ring, L ring and C ring. The MS (membrane and stator) ring is embedded in the cell membrane and acts as a base for the flagellum. The P ring (peptidoglycan ring) is present in the periplasmic space, and it provides stability to the basal body. The L ring (lipopolysaccharide ring) spans the outer membrane of Gram-negative bacteria and helps anchor the flagellum. The C ring

³ https://www.lehigh.edu/~inbios/Faculty/Behe/PDF/Behe_chapter.pdf

(cytoplasmic ring) is situated in the cytoplasm at the base of the flagellum. It interacts with the motor proteins to generate rotational movement. Finally, the motor complex is located in the cytoplasmic membrane and powers the rotation of the flagellum. It consists of several proteins known as the stator complex, which span the cytoplasmic membrane and interact with the C ring. These parts work together in a coordinated manner, the basal body anchors the flagellum while the motor complex enables the rotation, and the filament and hook provide the structural framework and propulsion necessary for bacterial movement.

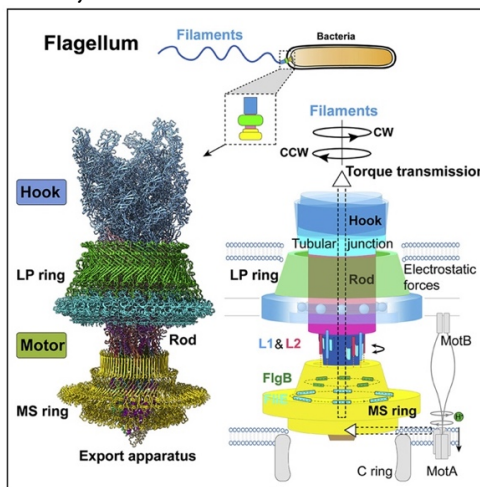


Figure 1: The bacterial flagellum structure ⁴

The bacterial flagellum is "irreducibly complex" because its structure and function rely on multiple components that are interdependent. ⁵ In other words, it is a system that cannot function or be built through gradual, incremental changes, one function depends on the other to work and for two interdependent parts to function they need an origin occurring at the same time. The flagellum's various parts, including a filament, hook, and basal body, each with specific functions, appears to be planned and engineered to work together. If any of these components were missing or not properly functioning, the flagellum would be rendered useless or less efficient. This is what makes it irreducibly complex - removing any piece would result in a loss or reduction of its function. Furthermore, the flagellum exhibits a remarkable degree of specificity and precision, with different proteins and structures working together in perfect coordination. These components are highly specified in terms of their size, shape, and function, indicating that they have been carefully engineered to work together as a functional unit. Critics of evolutionary theory argue that it would be highly improbable for the flagellum to have evolved gradually through random mutations and natural selection because the individual components would have had no survival advantage on their own. It is unlikely that the entire system could have come together through a step-by-step process. It looks designed because it was designed. Simple as that.

⁴ Structural basis of assembly and torque transmission of the bacterial flagellar motor, Jiaxing Tan, Xing Zhang, Xiaofei Wang, Caihuang Xu, Shenghai Chang, Hangjun Wu, Ting Wang, Huihui Liang, Haichun Gao, Yan Zhou and Yongqun Zhu, <https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com/272196/>

⁵ From *The Origin of Species* to the origin of bacterial flagella, Mark J. Pallen, Nicholas J. Matzke, *Nature Reviews Microbiology* volume 4, pages 784–790 (2006)

The concept of irreducible complexity is a subject of debate within the scientific community. Some scientists argue that the bacterial flagellum evolved through a process called co-option or gene duplication, where pre-existing components or structures were repurposed for a new function. Others suggest that intermediary structures or functions of the flagellum could have provided some selective advantage. In scientific research, the bacterial flagellum continues to be investigated as a fascinating example of complex biological systems, and the study of its evolution is an active field of research.

Behe also gives the example of the blood clotting cascade (a system involved in stopping bleeding).³ The blood clotting mechanism, also known as the coagulation cascade, is a complex process that helps control and stop bleeding. It involves various components and interactions, including platelets which are small, cell-like structures present in the bloodstream. When an injury occurs and blood vessels are damaged, platelets form a plug at the site of the injury to initiate clot formation. Clotting factors are proteins produced by the liver and other tissues that circulate in the bloodstream. They play a crucial role in the coagulation process and are sequentially activated to form a clot. The key clotting factors include:

Factor I (Fibrinogen): Fibrinogen is a soluble protein that is converted to insoluble fibrin during clot formation. Fibrin forms a mesh-like network that traps blood cells and forms the basis of the clot.

Factors II (Prothrombin) and X: These factors, along with calcium ions, work together to activate thrombin, an enzyme that converts fibrinogen to fibrin.

Factors VIII and IX: These factors, along with calcium ions, play a role in the activation of factor X, thereby amplifying the clotting process.

d. Factors XI, III (Tissue Factor), V, VII, XII, and XIII: These factors also contribute to the clotting process by interacting with and activating other factors in the cascade.

Furthermore, Calcium ions serve as cofactors for various steps in the coagulation cascade, facilitating clot formation. The Von Willebrand Factor is a protein that plays a role in platelet adhesion and clot stabilization. The cells lining blood vessels, known as endothelial cells, release substances that regulate clot formation and prevent excessive clotting when the vessel is intact. The clotting process involves a series of enzymatic reactions that activate clotting factors in a carefully orchestrated sequence, ultimately leading to the formation of a stable blood clot. The clot serves to seal the injured blood vessel and prevent further bleeding.

The clotting system involves various components and biochemical reactions that work together in a precise sequence. It relies on the interaction of platelets, proteins, enzymes, and other factors present in the blood plasma. This interdependence of components and the sequential nature of the clotting process is what makes it irreducibly complex. Each step is necessary for the next step to occur, and removing or altering any of the essential components would prevent the system from working properly. Again, some evidence suggests that some components of the clotting system may have originated from precursor molecules involved in different biological functions. This suggests that the clotting system may have evolved through a process of co-option or gene duplication, where pre-existing components were adapted for a new role.

Behe's conclusion is that such systems are too intricate to have arisen through random mutations and selection, asserting that they must have been designed by an intelligent agent. Critics argue that Behe misunderstands the process of evolution and fails to account for plausible transitional

forms or other potential functions that the components of an allegedly irreducibly complex system may have had. They contend that gradual evolutionary pathways, where components are repurposed or co-opted for new functions, can explain the development of complex systems. Behe responded that for a complex, interdependent system to evolve through natural selection, each intermediate step must provide a functional advantage.⁶ Critics have suggested that some allegedly irreducibly complex systems may have evolved through simpler, functional precursors. However, Behe contends that in certain cases, the necessary intermediate steps would not have conferred any advantage, rendering gradual evolution implausible. Behe employs mathematical and probabilistic arguments to assert that the number of required coordinated mutations for specific biological systems is unlikely to have occurred within the available time frame. He maintains that the probability of these systems arising through random mutations is extremely low. Behe has cited experimental studies and examples from scientific literature to support his claims. He argues that experimental results, such as failed attempts to evolve certain molecular systems in the laboratory, are indicative of the difficulty in evolving irreducibly complex systems. Darwinism evolution was much more plausible over 200 years ago when we thought of the cell as a blob of plasma.

For me all this means that although intellectually I reject the view that only stupid or naïve people belief in God when it comes my way from someone like Darwin or my colleague S, their statements also resonates with me on a deep level, touching my insecurities. It gets under my skin and makes me feel small. But I know that God can be found through critical thinking.

While individuals may hold different beliefs and perspectives, it is crucial to promote a culture of inclusivity, tolerance, and open-mindedness. Jesus was above all tolerant. He did not reject those who struggled to believe, he did not judge sinners and brokenness. Above all He hated arrogance and religious fakeness. Engaging in thoughtful dialogue and mutual respect can foster a better understanding of diverse worldviews and help cultivate a more accepting and harmonious society. It is always more beneficial to focus on finding common ground and promoting empathy rather than resorting to demeaning or derogatory remarks about any group of individuals based on their faith. We want to belief in what is true and each one of us has to find the truth.

This is the one thing that we have to get right since it will determine our eternity. This life is a fleeting moment and then it is over. We have an eternity to spend in the presence of God or away from Him. The eternal significance of this choice is the most important that we can ever make in our lifetime.

Science, while an invaluable tool for understanding and explaining the world around us, does have inherent limitations. One notable limitation is that science operates within the boundaries of empirical observation and measurable evidence. It focuses on explaining how phenomena occur and discovering patterns and laws governing the natural world. Science cannot address questions related to subjective experiences, such as human consciousness, emotions, or morality, which are deeply influenced by personal and cultural factors. Additionally, science cannot provide answers to questions of philosophical or existential nature, such as the meaning or purpose of life. Furthermore, scientific knowledge is constantly evolving and subject to revision as new evidence

⁶ A Mousetrap for Darwin: Michael J. Behe Answers His Critics, November 17, 2020

emerges, making it impossible to establish absolute or universally applicable truths. Acknowledging these limitations allows for a broader appreciation of other disciplines and perspectives in our quest for understanding the complexities of the human experience and the broader universe.

It is unfortunate that in some instances, individuals resort to talking down to Christians to defend their atheism. While it is important to have respectful and open discussions about different belief systems, it is equally crucial to approach these conversations with empathy, understanding, and a genuine desire to learn from one another. Patronizing or belittling Christians based on their faith is not productive and fosters division rather than constructive dialogue. Engaging in respectful conversations, listening to differing viewpoints, and seeking common ground can lead to greater understanding and harmony between those with different belief systems, fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Experiencing childhood sexual abuse, abandonment and rejection has profoundly impacted my faith journey, shaping my understanding of myself and my relationship with spirituality. The pain and trauma inflicted upon me have instilled deep wounds that have challenged my ability to trust and feel safe in the world. It's hard to reconcile the idea of a loving and caring higher power with the suffering and betrayal I endured. The shame and self-blame that followed those experiences have cast doubt on my worthiness of love, both from others and from a divine presence. It has been a complicated and often painful process to navigate, questioning the fairness of the world and the presence of a protective and loving God in the face of suffering. Rebuilding my faith has required me to embark on a journey of self-discovery, seeking support, understanding, and healing to restore my trust, heal my wounds, and find solace in a spirituality that acknowledges the complexity of human suffering while nurturing a sense of love, acceptance, and resilience.

Above all I want you to take away that the intelligence level of a person does not determine their faith. God can be found through critical thinking and complex nuanced evaluation of concrete evidence. New atheists do not want God to be true and we all deep down believe that if we have enough collective faith then we can change reality. The complexity and precision and appearance of design is the fingerprints of God all over our world. Science points us towards God, not away from Him.

As a trained Scientist considering the evidence of design in complex biological systems containing working parts that require each other to function, it seems implausible that we are here only because of time and chance.

Chapter 2: The cosmological argument



The Kalam cosmological argument:

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

This argument is rooted in logical reasoning and has been refined and defended by various philosophers and scholars. Let's expand on each premise to understand the argument better:

1. *Everything that begins to exist has a cause:*

This premise is based on the principle of causality, which is widely observed and accepted in our experience of the natural world. Within the known realm, events or entities come into being due to causes or reasons.

2. *The universe began to exist:*

This premise is informed by scientific and philosophical inquiries into the origins of the universe. Scientific evidence from fields such as cosmology, particularly the Big Bang theory, suggests that the universe had a finite beginning at a specific point in time. Philosophers argue additionally that an infinite past would entail a series of events leading up to the present, which is conceptually challenging.

3. *Therefore, the universe has a cause:*

Given that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and if we acknowledge that the universe began to exist, it follows logically that the universe must have a cause or explanation for its existence.

Breathtaking in its elegance and powerful in its simplicity.

The cosmological argument is attributed to philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, and others who have developed variations of this argument over time. It provides a rationale for the existence of an uncaused, necessary being that serves as the foundation or source of all contingent realities. The cosmological argument is a simple, yet powerful pointer towards the existence of God. The Kalam cosmological argument is named after the Arabic word "Kalam," which means "speech" or "discourse." The argument traces its origin to medieval Islamic philosophy and theology.

The Kalam cosmological argument is centered around the concept of causality and the beginning of the universe. It posits that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and since the universe had a beginning, it must have had a cause as well. This cause must be God.

The argument gained prominence in contemporary philosophy and apologetics largely through the work of William Lane Craig, a prominent Christian philosopher and theologian.⁷ He popularized and formulated the Kalam cosmological argument by drawing upon the contributions of medieval Muslim thinkers, such as Al-Kindi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd.

Given its historical association with Islamic philosophy and its modern revival and adaptation within Christian apologetics, the Kalam cosmological argument retains its name as a nod to its Islamic intellectual heritage. Although the Kalam cosmological argument does not explicitly define the cause of the universe as God, the cause of the universe must possess certain characteristics that is associated with God, such as being timeless, immaterial, and powerful enough to bring the universe into existence. A cause aligns with the concept of a transcendent, necessary being.

Why is there something rather than nothing? Everything that exists has a cause, a reason for its existence. The universe, as we observe it, is contingent, meaning it does not necessarily have to exist. It came into being at a specific point in time and could have been different and not hospitable to life or it could have not existed at all.

A century ago, scientific understanding did not propose a definitive beginning for the Universe, which diverged from the Genesis account that suggests a starting point. From ancient Greek to 19th-century materialism, the dominant belief was that the universe existed eternally and had no discernible beginning. During the debate with Lennox, Dawkins dismissed the significance of the Bible accurately reflecting this notion, claiming that there were only two possibilities and it's not significant that the Bible got it right. However, this diminishes the profound implications associated with a definitive beginning for the universe and the fact that the Bible got it right and Science did not. Dawkins also uses the argument that we want to attribute everything to a creator because we live in a world where everything is created, just because Dawkins doesn't like it, doesn't make it untrue.

Both Genesis and modern scientific theories recognize the idea of an ordered creation process. Genesis describes God bringing forth the universe and Earth in a deliberate and structured manner. Similarly, scientific theories propose processes such as the Big Bang and natural laws governing the formation of galaxies, stars, and planets. Genesis outlines a sequence of events during the creation of the Earth, including the separation of light and darkness, the formation of the

⁷ Reasonable Faith, William Lane Craig, 1994, Crossway Books

atmosphere, the emergence of land and seas, and the development of plant and animal life. In broad terms, these align with scientific theories that explain the formation of planets, the development of Earth's atmosphere, the evolution of life, and the interplay of geological processes. The major difference between Genesis and scientific accounts lies in the timescales involved. Genesis depicts creation in a relatively short time span, with specific periods assigned to different stages. Scientific understanding, on the other hand, suggests a gradual process over billions of years for the formation of the Earth, the development of life, and the evolution of species. Genesis uses symbolic and metaphorical language to convey spiritual and theological truths. Its purpose was not to provide a scientific explanation but to express faith understandings about the divine creative power.

The Bible, a book written over 2,000 years ago, contains passages that align with scientific concepts, indicating a remarkable consistency. For instance, Isaiah 40:22 mentions the shape of the earth, while Job 26:7 refers to the concept of gravity. Ecclesiastes 1:6 alludes to atmospheric circulation, while Psalm 8:8 mentions ocean currents. Furthermore, Ecclesiastes 1:7 and Isaiah 55:10 describe the hydraulic cycle, and the second law of thermodynamics is highlighted in Psalm 102:25-27 and Romans 8:21.

The advent of Einstein's mathematical equations and the theory of relativity challenged the notion of an eternal universe by suggesting the existence of a moment of origin for the universe. Special relativity, proposed in 1905, challenged the classical concepts of space and time.^{8,9,10,11} It introduced the idea that the laws of physics are the same for all observers moving at a constant velocity relative to one another. It postulates that the speed of light is constant and acts as a fundamental limit throughout the universe. Special relativity also gave rise to concepts like time dilation, length contraction, and the equivalence of mass and energy ($E=mc^2$).

General relativity, published in 1915, extends the principles of special relativity to include gravity.¹² It presents gravitation not as a force, but as the curved geometry of spacetime caused by the presence of mass and energy. According to general relativity, objects with mass or energy create curvature in spacetime, and other objects are influenced by this curvature, leading to the effects we perceive as gravity. Einstein's theory of relativity revolutionized our understanding of space, time, and gravity by introducing the concepts of spacetime curvature and the constancy of the speed of light, allowing for a deeper understanding of the physical laws governing the universe.

⁸ Einstein, Albert (1905). "Über einen die Erzeugung und Verwandlung des Lichtes betreffenden heuristischen Gesichtspunkt" [On a Heuristic Point of View about the Creation and Conversion of Light] (PDF). *Annalen der Physik (in German)*. **17** (6): 132–148.

⁹ Einstein, Albert (30 June 1905). "Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper" [On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies] (PDF). *Annalen der Physik (in German)*. **17** (10): 891–921.

¹⁰ Einstein, Albert (1905). "Ist die Trägheit eines Körpers von seinem Energieinhalt abhängig?" [Does the Inertia of a Body Depend Upon Its Energy Content?] (PDF). *Annalen der Physik (in German)*. **18** (13): 639–641.

¹¹ Einstein, Albert (1905). "Über die von der molekularkinetischen Theorie der Wärme geforderte Bewegung von in ruhenden Flüssigkeiten suspendierten Teilchen" [Investigations on the theory of Brownian Movement] (PDF). *Annalen der Physik (in German)*. **322** (8): 549–560.

¹² <https://einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol6-trans/110>

Albert Einstein's views on God and religion has been widely discussed and have been a topic of curiosity for many. Einstein's beliefs about God were complex and evolved throughout his life, making it challenging to provide a definitive answer as to what he believed. In his early years, Einstein expressed a philosophical perspective that was heavily influenced by the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza's concept of God as synonymous with the universe, equating God with the totality of existence, resonated with Einstein. He often referred to this kind of pantheistic view where God represented the underlying order and laws of the universe.¹³ Einstein was known for rejecting the idea of a personal, anthropomorphic God. He criticized traditional religious conceptions of a personal deity who intervened in human affairs or answered prayers. He regarded these notions as anthropocentric and incompatible with his scientific worldview. While he did not subscribe to a traditional religious belief in a personal God, Einstein often expressed a deep sense of awe and wonder at the beauty, harmony, and elegance of the natural world. He saw this reverence for nature as a form of religious or spiritual experience. Einstein frequently emphasized the importance of understanding the natural laws governing the universe. For him, the pursuit of knowledge and exploration of the mysteries of the universe were deeply spiritual endeavors. Einstein's beliefs about God and religion were nuanced and did not align with conventional religious doctrines. While he rejected the notion of a personal God, he held a reverence for the natural world and a deep appreciation for the underlying order and beauty in the universe. His perspective can be characterized as a blend of pantheism, rationalism, and awe-inspired spirituality. Even if Einstein didn't fully embrace God, he was still merely a man, albeit it extraordinary, still fully human.

Einstein's theory of general relativity primarily focused on describing the relationship between gravity and the curvature of spacetime, rather than providing a specific explanation for the origins of the universe. Einstein's views on the beginning of the universe were shaped by ongoing scientific discoveries and developments, and his perspective evolved over time. While he initially proposed a model of a static universe, he later modified his views to accommodate the concept of an expanding universe, in line with emerging astrophysical evidence.

Modern scientific understanding validates that the Universe indeed had a beginning. It was the physicist Fred Hoyle who coined the term "the Big Bang" even though he refused to accept that the Universe had a beginning.¹⁴ Approximately 14 billion years ago, all of space, time, matter, and energy came into existence. The expansion of the Universe was observed by astronomer Edwin Hubble, who noticed that galaxies were moving away from each other, indicating that they were once closer together at a single point in the past.¹⁵ Scientists have gathered compelling evidence to support the Big Bang theory.¹⁶ They predicted the amounts of hydrogen and helium in the Universe, the temperature of the Universe, and the presence of leftover heat from its early stages. The discovery of cosmic background radiation, a faint remnant of the initial stages of the Universe, further supports the idea. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, formulated in 1915, indicated that the Universe should be expanding. Stephen Hawking and colleagues demonstrated that Einstein's

¹³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>

¹⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00894-z>

¹⁵ <https://science.nasa.gov/mission/hubble/science/science-highlights/discovering-a-runaway-universe/>

¹⁶ <https://www.astronomy.com/science/the-science-behind-the-big-bang-theory/>

calculations suggested space and time had a beginning.¹⁷ Scientific observations, calculations, and discoveries over the years have led to the general acceptance in the scientific community that the Universe indeed had a starting point.

If we trace back the causes of contingent things, we encounter a chain of causes. This chain of causes cannot regress infinitely because an infinite series of causes would have no explanation. There must be a first cause that initiated this chain of causes. This first cause is necessary, uncaused, and self-existent. The first cause needs to exist beyond the bounds of time, space, and causality. Something transcendent that goes beyond the physical realm. It implies something existing beyond the limitations of the material world. Beyond human experience, understanding, or comprehension.

Some critics argue that the claim that an infinite regress of causes is impossible is unfounded. They propose the possibility of an infinite causal chain with no need for a first cause. Others argue that a specific interpretation of God as the first cause requires further justification. Another objection raised is the possibility of multiple first causes rather than a singular God. More justification of God as a single Creator is reasonable in my view and looking at other factors such as design and fine tuning, irreducible complexity, the rare earth that we will cover later in this book, all points towards an immensely powerful Personable Creator that created the Universe with us in mind. Some suggest that causality, as we observe it in the natural world, may not be an accurate framework for understanding the origins of the universe. Why would the universe be different? It is material and needs a cause.

I recently had a Christian friend challenge me on the value of the cosmological argument, saying that the cosmological argument is simply a 'god of the gaps' argument, because science don't know the cause of the universe (yet) we simply put god as an explanation. I disagree and for me the cosmological argument is much more than the god of the gaps and seeks to provide a rational explanation for the existence of God based on logical reasoning, whereas the god of the gaps was a theological approach to fill gaps in scientific knowledge with the notion of a divine explanation.

The cosmological argument does not rely solely on gaps in scientific understanding, but rather on philosophical principles and logical reasoning. It is not an attempt to explain phenomena that science has yet to understand or that fall outside current scientific knowledge. Instead, it aims to establish the existence of a first cause or ultimate explanation for the universe based on philosophical premises rather than gaps in scientific knowledge. Modern science tells us that the universe had a beginning and everything that has a beginning has a cause. That the cause for the universe is outside of time and space and immensely powerful and this points towards God. In combination of the bigger picture of design and fine tuning, and how rare the earth is to support carbon-based life points in the direction that this universe is engineered and fine-tuned to support carbon based intelligent life. These factors point towards a universe that was planned and built to sustain life, to sustain us.

The god of the gaps approach, arises when there is a lack of scientific explanation for a particular phenomenon, and it is attributed to the intervention of a divine entity by default. It is a way of

¹⁷ Hawking, Stephen W. (28 February 2006). *The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe*. Phoenix Books

invoking God as an explanation for gaps in scientific understanding. The cosmological argument, while not immune to criticisms aims to address fundamental questions about the nature of existence, causality, and the origins of the universe. By examining the logical necessity of a first cause, it points out the necessity of a cause. The argument does not rely on gaps in scientific understanding or try to fill those gaps with a divine explanation. Certain versions or interpretations of the cosmological argument could potentially fall into the god of the gaps category if they are solely based on the premise that God is the only possible explanation for phenomena that science has not yet explain without further philosophical or logical justifications.

It is crucial to approach the cosmological argument, or any argument for that matter, with critical thinking and evaluate its premises, logical coherence, and coherence with scientific knowledge. By doing so, we can distinguish between a robust cosmological argument founded on rational inquiry and a god of the gap's argument based on gaps in scientific understanding. The cosmological argument holds significant importance in the realm of philosophical and theological discussions about the existence of God. It presents a logical and rational line of reasoning that seeks to establish a cause or explanation for the existence of the universe. By looking at the nature of the universe and the fact that it has a beginning, the argument suggests that there must be a necessary being or cause that initiated its existence.

The cosmological argument presents a way to counter the notion of an infinite regress, proposing that there must be an ultimate cause or explanation behind the chain of causes and effects in the universe. It opens discussions about the concept of an initial "first cause" or a necessary being that transcends time and space. The argument has been debated and refined by numerous philosophers throughout history, contributing to the development and understanding of various cosmological models and theories. It encourages critical thinking and inquiry into the nature of reality, existence, and the potential existence of a higher power. Additionally, the cosmological argument intersects with other aspects of theology and worldview, such as questions about the nature of time, causality, and the origin of the universe. It can be seen as providing support for the idea of a creator or a prime mover, as well as offering a framework for exploring the relationship between science and religion.

While the cosmological argument does not provide conclusive proof for the existence of God, it remains an important topic of discourse, generating thoughtful dialogue and promoting contemplation on fundamental questions about the nature of our existence and the potential presence of a divine entity. The argument holds a unique and profound beauty in its attempt to unravel the mysteries of existence. It invites us to contemplate the vastness and complexity of the universe and consider the possibility of a transcendent cause underlying it all. This argument reminds us that our human intellect has the capacity to seek understanding beyond the confines of our immediate experiences. It resonates with our innate curiosity as we gaze at the stars, pondering the origins of the cosmos and our place within it.

The power of the argument lies in its logical and rational approach. It presents a reasoned line of thinking that moves from observations about the nature of the universe to the philosophical concept of a necessary being or ultimate cause. By examining the existence of contingent beings and the need for an explanation for their existence, the argument propels us to consider possibilities beyond the realm of the material world. It challenges us to confront the limits of our human

comprehension and embrace the concept of a higher power that transcends our earthly understanding.

Moreover, the cosmological argument inspires us to reflect on the nature of time and causality. It invites us to contemplate the significance of the universe having a temporal beginning and the implications this has for its origin. The argument suggests that there must be a first cause, an initial mover, that set the wheels of the universe in motion. By contemplating the existence of this prime mover, we confront the question of what lies beyond our temporal reality and whether there is a timeless and eternal realm underlying our own.

The argument also carries transformative potential for our worldview and perception of reality. It challenges us to expand our consciousness and consider the existence of something greater than ourselves. It invites us to contemplate the interplay between science and faith, encouraging us to explore how our understanding of the universe can coexist with the concept of a supreme being. This powerful argument sparks intellectual curiosity, encouraging us to engage in thoughtful dialogue and potentially deepen our understanding of the mysteries of existence.

The beauty and power of the cosmological argument lie in its ability to provoke deep contemplation and elevate our understanding of the universe. It reminds us of the inherent wonder and awe in existence, urging us to explore the realms beyond what our senses can perceive. It invites us to embark on a philosophical exploration that encourages humility, curiosity, and a search for meaning. The cosmological argument serves as a testament to the intricacies of the cosmos and the inherent human desire to seek understanding and connection with the transcendent.



Chapter 3: The Teleological argument



Isaac Newton said “the rational reflection on the orderliness of nature had convinced me that there must be a being, incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent. “

The Teleological argument, also known as the Argument from Design, presents a compelling perspective on the existence of God by reflecting on the apparent order, complexity, and purpose found in the natural world. The observation that the physical laws and constants of the universe seem to favor conditions suitable for life. This argument asserts that the intricate design and harmony observed in the universe imply the presence of an intelligent designer. The beauty of the Teleological argument lies in its ability to inspire awe and appreciation for the intricacies of the natural world. As we behold the wonders of nature, from the delicate symmetry of a flower to the intricate complexity of the human eye, we are captivated by the inherent beauty and functionality of these creations. The argument suggests that such intricate design and purpose cannot be a result of chance or random processes but rather indicate the work of an intelligent and purposeful creator.

The power of the Teleological argument lies in its grounding in empirical evidence. It draws upon scientific observations and discoveries to highlight the compelling evidence for design in nature. Through fields such as biology, astronomy, and physics, we continue to unravel the intricate web of interdependencies and finely tuned mechanisms that make life and the cosmos possible. This argument reveals the delicate balance and precision that underlies the natural world, suggesting the presence of an intelligent guiding hand behind it. Furthermore, the Teleological argument invites us to consider the implications of design for our understanding of human existence. Just as an intricate watch implies the existence of a skilled watchmaker, the complexities and interconnections in the natural world suggest the existence of a purposeful creator. This argument speaks to our inherent desire for meaning and purpose while also further opening avenues for dialogue between faith and science.

The Teleological argument not only prompts us to marvel at the evidence of design but also encourages us to reflect on our role and responsibilities within the greater tapestry of creation. It invites us to contemplate our stewardship of the natural world and the ethical implications of recognizing the beauty and purpose found within it. This argument challenges us to consider the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of fulfilling our own unique purposes within the grand design of the cosmos. The Teleological argument carries immense beauty and

power as it leads us to appreciate the intricate design and purpose evident in the natural world. It sparks curiosity, encourages dialogue between philosophical and scientific realms, and nurtures a sense of wonder and awe. By contemplating the evidence of design in nature, we are inspired to reconsider our place within the complex tapestry of existence and explore the profound questions of life's meaning and the presence of a creator.

The entropic principle, also known as the principle of maximum entropy production, is a concept within physics that suggests that systems tend to evolve towards a state of maximum entropy. Entropy is a measure of disorder or randomness in a system. According to the entropic principle, physical systems, including the Universe, tend to move towards a state where entropy is maximized. In the context of cosmology, the entropic principle is often discussed in relation to the anthropic principle, which explores the idea that the fundamental properties of the Universe are fine-tuned to allow the existence of life. The entropic principle extends this idea by suggesting that the Universe's physical laws and initial conditions are set in a way that maximizes the generation of entropy. The entropic principle has been the subject of debate and discussion within the scientific community, as its implications and explanatory power remain topics of ongoing research. The order observed in a universe that tends to move to a state of disorder is further evidence of an intelligent, purposeful Creator.

Over 100 parameters in the Universe appear to be planned and engineered. Knobs that are fine-tuned to allow the Universe to support complex life, including the strength of the strong nuclear force that holds the nucleus together gives us the periodic table, if it was slightly different, we would not have the different elements. The amount of matter in the universe is finely tuned to allow it to expand and not collapse. The primary way God works is by mechanisms. The properties that are exactly in balance, so many odd coincidences that some explanation is required. Modern Science points to a designer. The fundamental constants and parameters of nature appear to be precisely set for life to exist. Even slight changes were made to these values, the conditions necessary for life would be drastically altered or rendered impossible.

It is important to acknowledge that alternative scientific theories and explanations also exist. Some propose the concept of a multiverse, suggesting that there may be multiple universes with different physical parameters, so the existence of one suitable for life would not be unexpected. The concept of a multiverse remains speculative and has not been empirically confirmed. Since there is currently no direct evidence or observational data supporting the existence of other universes, it is challenging to make definitive claims about their properties and how they could explain the fine-tuning of our universe. If the multiverse exists, it is typically posited to be beyond our ability to observe or interact with. This makes it difficult to test or verify the hypothesis scientifically. As a result, it falls more into the realm of theoretical speculation rather than a well-established scientific explanation. A scientific explanation is typically expected to provide testable predictions or at least illuminate phenomena that can be observed or measured. The multiverse hypothesis, as it stands, does not make specific predictions that can be tested and confirmed through empirical data. Consequently, it does not offer much in terms of providing a concrete and empirically supported explanation for the fine-tuning of our universe. The multiverse hypothesis does not eliminate or explain the undeniable fact that the fundamental laws and constants of the universe still appear fine-tuned for the emergence of life. Instead, it shifts the question from why our universe is fine-tuned to why our universe is one among many in a hypothetical multiverse, where the conditions for life may be varied or differ across different universes.

There are several more examples of fine-tuning that are often discussed in scientific and philosophical discourse:

1. The fine-tuning of the cosmological constant, which represents the energy of empty space, is a commonly discussed example. If this constant were slightly different, the universe's expansion rate would be dramatically affected, making it inhospitable for the development of galaxies, stars, and ultimately life.
2. If the strength of the electromagnetic force or the gravitational force were slightly altered, it could have significant consequences for the stability of matter, the formation of stars and galaxies, and the ability of planets to sustain life.
3. The precise masses of subatomic particles play a role in the formation of chemical elements and the structure of matter. Slight modifications to the masses of neutrons and protons could disrupt nuclear reactions, making it unlikely for elements like carbon and oxygen (essential for life as we know it) to be formed.
4. The balance between gravity and the expansion rate of the universe, the abundance of elements necessary for life, and the stability of fundamental forces.
5. The precise values of certain fundamental constants determine the stability of atomic nuclei and the strength of nuclear reactions. Slight variations in these values could hinder the synthesis of crucial elements required for life, such as carbon and oxygen.
6. Various physical parameters, such as the strength of gravity and the electromagnetic force, influence the process of star formation and the stability of planetary systems. Fine-tuning these parameters is crucial for the creation of environments conducive to life.

In summary below are 200 factors often discussed within the fine-tuning argument¹⁸ :

1. Gravitational constant
2. Strong nuclear force
3. Weak nuclear force
4. Electromagnetic force
5. Cosmological constant
6. Expansion rate of the universe
7. Initial entropy of the universe
8. Ratio of proton to electron mass
9. Fine-structure constant
10. Mass density of the universe
11. Ratio of matter to antimatter
12. Repulsive dark energy
13. Orderliness of the universe
14. Speed of light
15. Ratio of electron to proton mass
16. Planck constant
17. Neutron-proton mass difference
18. Atomic energy level ratios
19. Nuclear reaction rates
20. Abundance of primordial elements
21. Stellar fusion rates
22. Existence of stable atomic nuclei
23. Stability of stars
24. Supernova events
25. Formation of galaxies

26. Galactic habitable zone
27. Position of the Solar System within the galaxy
28. Solar luminosity
29. Earth's distance from the Sun
30. Earth's tilt and spin rate
31. Axial tilt and stability of other planets
32. Earth's magnetic field
33. Plate tectonics
34. Atmosphere composition
35. Oxygen and ozone levels
36. Carbon dioxide levels
37. Greenhouse effect
38. Water cycle
39. Earth's water-to-land ratio
40. Liquid water availability
41. Albedo (reflectivity) of Earth
42. Atmospheric transparency
43. Distance to the Moon
44. Lunar cycle and tidal effects
45. Earth's magnetic field and cosmic radiation
46. Atmospheric pressure and oxygen levels
47. Earth's magnetic field and protection from solar wind
48. Earth's magnetic field and auroras
49. Stable climate over long periods
50. Stable climate for photosynthesis

¹⁸ <https://cfc.sebts.edu/faith-and-science/michael-strauss-the-scientific-evidence-for-god/>

51. Existence and stability of carbon-based molecules
52. DNA double-helix structure
53. Genetic code and protein synthesis
54. Existence of amino acids
55. Chirality (handedness) of molecules
56. Oxygen's ability to support life
57. Role of nitrogen in metabolism and DNA
58. Stability of hydrogen bonds
59. Complexity and information content in DNA
60. Ribosomes and protein synthesis
61. Role of enzymes in cellular processes
62. DNA repair mechanisms
63. Communication within and between cells
64. Complexity and interconnectedness of cellular processes
65. Central dogma of molecular biology
66. Respiratory system in organisms
67. Photosynthesis and energy production
68. Ozone layer and protection from UV radiation
69. Anatomy and structure of the human eye
70. Complexity and precision of the brain
71. Cognitive abilities and consciousness
72. Neuroplasticity and learning capacities
73. Sensory systems and perception
74. Digestive system and nutrient absorption
75. Reproductive systems and propagation of life

76. Immune system and defense against pathogens
77. Blood clotting and wound healing
78. Balancing of procoagulant and anticoagulant systems
79. Complexity and adaptability of ecosystems
80. Biodiversity and interdependence within ecosystems
81. Food chain and energy flow in ecosystems
82. Pollination and preservation of plant species
83. Symbiotic relationships and mutualism
84. Carbon cycle and regulation of greenhouse gases
85. Nitrogen cycle and regulation of soil fertility
86. Water purification processes
87. Climate regulation by ocean currents
88. Earth's magnetic field and navigation in animals
89. Migration patterns in birds and marine species
90. Pollen dispersal and plant reproduction
91. Seed dispersal and plant colonization
92. Precise timing of biological events (e.g., bird migration, flowering)
93. Impact of gravity on organisms and biomechanics
94. Homeostasis and regulation of internal conditions
95. Sensing and response to external stimuli in organisms
96. Evolutionary adaptations and genetic diversity
97. Beneficial mutations and genetic variation
98. Ecosystem resilience and self-organization
99. Conditions for the emergence of life
100. Human capacity for curiosity, wonder, and exploration.

101. Formation of spiral galaxies
102. Existence of planetary systems
103. Time required for star formation
104. Quasar activity and its impact on galaxy formation
105. Stability of white dwarf stars
106. Stellar nucleosynthesis and element production
107. Magnetic field strength and stability of stars
108. Variability of Cepheid variable stars
109. Supernovae as stellar factories
110. Carbon resonance levels in stars
111. Effects of variability of fundamental forces on star formation
112. Anomalies in the cosmic microwave background radiation
113. Density fluctuations in the early universe
114. Ratio of baryons to photons in the early universe
115. Existence of globular clusters
116. Angular momentum distribution in galaxies
117. Timing stability of millisecond pulsars
118. Flatness of the universe
119. Dark matter and its impact on the structure of the universe
120. Primordial magnetic fields and their effect on structure formation
121. Vacuum energy density in inflationary cosmology
122. Gravitational waves and their prediction by general relativity
123. Existence of stable atomic orbitals

126. Mass difference between neutrons and protons
127. Range and strength of electromagnetic interactions
128. Formation of stable and long-lived stars
129. Expansion rate of the universe and galaxy formation timescale
130. Formation of black holes and their impact on galactic evolution
131. Impact of dark energy on cosmic structure formation
132. Impact of gamma-ray bursts on star and planet formation
133. Proportion of helium to other elements synthesized in stars
134. Conditions for the formation of habitable planets
135. Plausibility of simultaneous presence of atmospheric gases necessary for life
136. Stability of the Moon's orbit and its influence on Earth
137. Orbital stability of other planets in the Solar System
138. Synchronization of planet and moon orbits
139. Formation of stable asteroid belts
140. Existence and stability of comets and impact events
141. Absence of nearby supernovae and their potential harm to life
142. Stability of the Solar System over long timescales
143. Formation and stability of planetary atmospheres
144. Tidal forces and their influence on habitable environments
145. Existence of Jupiter and its role in protecting inner planets from asteroid impacts
146. Formation of gas giants and their effect on planetary systems
147. Presence and stability of water on Earth
148. Atmospheric pressure and its impact on water's phase changes
149. Role of the Moon in regulating tidal effects and stabilizing the axial tilt

151. Biochemical properties of water and its suitability for life
 152. Structure and stability of DNA and RNA molecules
 153. Regulatory networks and gene expression in biological systems
 154. Thermoregulation and temperature stability in organisms
 155. Sensitivity of living organisms to environmental conditions
 156. Formation and stability of cell membranes
 157. Role of homeostasis in maintaining cellular equilibrium
 158. Control of cell division and replication
 159. Complexity and adaptability of immune systems
 160. Evolutionary constraints and the limits of adaptation
 161. Coordinated growth and development of multicellular organisms
 162. Role of mutations and genetic variation in evolutionary processes
 163. Reproductive mechanisms and transmission of genetic information
 164. Role of sex and sexual reproduction in genetic diversity
 165. Complexity and efficiency of physiological systems (e.g., circulatory, nervous)
 166. Oxygen transport and utilization in biological systems
 167. Sensory systems and their adaptation to the environment
 168. Role of learning and memory in the survival and adaptation of organisms
 169. Mutualistic relationships and symbiosis in ecosystems
 170. Detoxification mechanisms and response to harmful substances
 171. Diversity of ecosystems and their resilience to environmental changes
 172. Protection and regeneration mechanisms in organisms (e.g., skin, tissue repair)
 173. Constraints and self-organization in biological systems
 174. Regulation of population growth and ecological balance
 175. Duration of stable climate periods on Earth

176. Role of geomagnetic field in protecting against solar radiation
 177. Stability of Earth's orbit and climate over long periods
 178. Geological stability and the preservation of fossil records
 179. Influence of tectonic activity on the emergence of land masses and continents
 180. Evolution of ecosystems and ecological niches
 181. Impact of ecological interactions on species diversification
 182. Pollination mechanisms and genetic exchange in plant populations
 183. Adaptive coloration and mimicry in organisms
 184. Energy efficiency and metabolic balance in organisms
 185. Molecular recognition and specificity of enzymes
 186. Role of ATP as an energy currency in living systems
 187. Evolution of neurotransmitter systems and signaling in the brain
 188. Enzymatic repair mechanisms for DNA damage
 189. Genetic code and translation mechanisms
 190. Role of endosymbiosis in the evolution of eukaryotic cells
 191. Pathogen-host interactions and evolution of immune responses
 192. Structure and properties of cell membranes and their role in cellular function
 193. Optimal pH balance for cellular processes
 194. Regulation of cellular metabolism and energy production
 195. Defense mechanisms against oxidative stress in cells
 196. Sensory adaptation and response to environmental stimuli
 197. Role of social interaction and cooperation in human communities
 198. Aesthetic appreciation and creativity in human nature
 199. Ethical and moral frameworks guiding human behavior
 200. Existence of conscious experience and subjective awareness

The list is not exhaustive nor universally agreed upon, but it certainly raises questions about why and how we are here. Random chance is impossible. Paul Davies wrote – physics is the product of design, and it suggests strongly to me that universe has a purpose and that the purpose includes us.

Not only is our Universe designed but Earth is rare and uniquely suited to support intelligent life. Several factors and conditions must align in a very specific way. Below are a few reasons why Earth is considered rare in this sense:

1. Earth resides in the "habitable zone" of our solar system, also known as the Goldilocks zone. This refers to the region around a star where conditions are just right to support liquid water, a crucial ingredient for life as we know it.

2. Earth maintains a stable, nearly circular orbit around the Sun, providing a consistent and stable climate over long periods. This stability plays a significant role in supporting the development and sustenance of life.
3. Earth has the right combination of size and composition, with a solid surface, sufficient gravity to retain its atmosphere, and a protective magnetic field that shields us from harmful solar radiation.
4. Earth boasts an abundance of liquid water, which is a vital resource for the emergence and survival of life. Water plays a crucial role in various biochemical processes and provides a medium for facilitating interactions between molecules.
5. Earth possesses an active tectonic system, which helps regulate its climate, recycle nutrients, and maintain a stable geosphere. Plate tectonics also leads to the formation of diverse landscapes and the creation of continents and ocean basins.
6. Earth's atmospheric composition is oxygen-rich, which supports the development of complex, oxygen-dependent organisms, such as humans. This level of oxygen is the product of biological processes, primarily photosynthesis by plants and other photosynthetic organisms.
7. Earth boasts an exceptional level of biodiversity, with an immense variety of species and ecosystems. The interconnectedness and interdependence within these ecosystems contribute to the overall stability and resilience of life on Earth.
8. Earth has experienced relatively stable climatic conditions over millions of years. This stability has allowed for the evolution and development of complex life forms, including humans, as they could adapt to environmental changes over time.
9. Earth is estimated to have formed around 4.54 billion years ago, relatively late in the history of the universe. This timing allows for the accumulation of heavy elements necessary for the formation of terrestrial planets like Earth.
10. Earth is fortunate to be orbiting a stable and long-lived star, the Sun. Our Sun's steady energy output has provided a consistent and favorable environment for life to thrive over billions of years.
11. Earth is situated within a region of our galaxy that is conducive to the development and sustainability of complex life. This zone offers a favorable balance of radiation, metallicity (abundance of heavy elements), and the absence of disruptive cosmic events.
12. Carbon is the foundation of organic chemistry and the basis of life as we know it. The ability of carbon to form stable and complex molecules, combined with its abundance in the universe, is considered rare and significant for the emergence of life.
13. Earth has experienced a history of significant impact events, such as asteroid and comet impacts. While these events can be catastrophic, they have also played a role in providing the necessary ingredients for life, such as water delivery and the mixing of organic compounds.
14. Earth's continents are thought to have a stable arrangement that allows for diverse ecosystems and the evolution of complex life forms over long periods. This stability has provided opportunities for species diversification and ecological interactions.
15. The Moon's gravitational pull has helped stabilize Earth's axial tilt, resulting in relatively stable climates and seasons. This stability has been crucial for the development and persistence of life.
16. Earth has experienced several mass extinctions throughout its history. While devastating, these events have also created evolutionary opportunities and led to the emergence of new species and adaptations.
17. The emergence of crucial genetic events, such as the evolution of eukaryotic cells, multicellularity, and complex organ systems, are considered rare occurrences that have played a significant role in the development of intelligent life.

18. Earth's geological history includes unique events like the emergence of oxygen in the atmosphere, the formation of supercontinents, and the occurrence of ice ages. These events have had a profound impact on shaping Earth's habitability and promoting the evolution of life.
19. Earth possesses a magnetic field generated by its molten core, which shields the planet from solar winds and cosmic radiation. This protection has been crucial in preventing the stripping away of our atmosphere and the erosion of our ozone layer.
20. Earth's history and the progression of human civilization have shaped the development of complex cultures, languages, art, technology, and scientific knowledge. These cultural aspects, along with the cognitive abilities of humans, distinguish Earth in supporting intelligent life.

The intricate nature of DNA, often referred to as the blueprint of life, is awe-inspiring. It is a language, composed of sequences of nucleotides, that encodes the instructions necessary for the development and functioning of living organisms. The complexity and precision embedded within this coded language not only reveal the remarkable sophistication of biological systems but also provide compelling evidence for the existence of a transcendent creator.

DNA serves as an information storage system, encoding genetic instructions in its sequence of nucleotides. These instructions determine an organism's physical characteristics, development, and functioning. The complexity of this storage and processing capacity is staggering. The vast amount of information contained within a single DNA molecule, capable of directing the entire life cycle of an organism, defies explanation through purely naturalistic processes. The inherent design and efficiency of this complex system point towards an intelligent creator, best explained by the existence of God.

The specificity and precision required for DNA to successfully function as a language of life are remarkable. The sequencing of nucleotides must be precise and accurate to ensure the proper functioning of genes and the synthesis of proteins. The probability of these sequences arising randomly is overwhelmingly low. The complexity and interconnectedness of DNA's components and processes, such as gene regulation, replication, and protein synthesis, necessitate an intelligent design capable of orchestrating such intricate systems.

An essential feature of DNA is its irreducible complexity. The interdependence of multiple components within the DNA molecule makes it impossible for it to have evolved gradually through natural selection alone. Any alteration to its structure or function would render it non-functional. This irreducible complexity raises questions about the plausibility of a purely naturalistic origin for DNA. The existence of a designer, who carefully crafted this system to function, offers a more reasonable explanation.

The information encoded within DNA exhibits characteristics comparable to human-made languages, such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. It follows specific rules and conventions, comparable to a written or spoken language. Moreover, the functionality of DNA relies on a semiotic system of meaning, with codons representing amino acids and the translation of the genetic code into functioning proteins. Such semiotic systems, indicating the presence of purposeful communication, are typically associated with intelligent agents, further supporting the argument for a divine creator.

The complexity of our DNA language undeniably presents compelling evidence for the existence of a transcendent creator. The immense amount of information, precision, irreducible complexity, and presence of semiotic systems within DNA are all hallmarks of an intelligent design. While the scientific attempts to explain the origin of life continue, the remarkable complexity of DNA points towards a superior, orderly, and purposeful mind: God. The study of DNA further deepens our appreciation of the intricate beauty and the divine nature of life itself.



Chapter 4

The Ontological Argument



The ontological argument for the existence of God is an argument for the existence of God based on the nature of existence and the concept of God. This argument has been hard for me to conceive because of its abstract nature. It was first formulated by philosopher and theologian St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century.

The core of the ontological argument can be summarized as follows:

1. The concept of God is that of a perfect being, characterized by qualities such as omnipotence, omniscience, and supreme goodness.
2. God is defined as a being that possesses all perfections, including the quality of existence.
3. Existence is a perfection. A being that exists is greater than a being that only exists in the mind or imagination.
4. Therefore, if we conceive of a perfect being (God), we must attribute existence to that being.

Another way to summarize it is as follows:

1. The concept of God is the concept of a being than which none greater can be conceived.
2. It is greater for a being to exist in reality than to exist only in the mind.
3. Therefore, if God exists only in the mind, then we can conceive of a greater being - a being that exists both in the mind and in reality.
4. But we cannot conceive of a being greater than God, for it is contradictory to think of a greater being than a being than which none greater can be conceived.
5. Therefore, God must exist not only in the mind but also in reality.

In other words, the argument suggests that the concept of a perfect being necessarily includes the attribute of existence. If God is the greatest possible being, then existence must be a part of His essence. Critics of the ontological argument raise various objections. Some argue that existence is not a property like other attributes (such as power or knowledge) that can simply be ascribed to an entity. Others claim that the argument relies on an overly simplistic understanding of the concept

of "perfection" or mistakes the logical possibility of something existing with its actual existence or the argument relies on assuming a particular definition of "greatness" or misunderstands the nature of existence. The very idea of God as a perfect being implies that God must necessarily exist. If something exists only in the mind, it is not as great as something that exists both in the mind and in reality. Since God is defined as the greatest possible being, the argument concludes that God must exist in reality.

Different philosophers have provided various rebuttals and counterarguments over the centuries. The ontological argument remains a subject of philosophical debate, and its persuasiveness depends on an individual's perspective and philosophical inclinations. The ability to imagine or conceive of the idea of God is evidence or an indication of God's existence. A few ways in which the ability to imagine God can be seen as providing evidence for God includes the fact that humans have the cognitive capacity to conceive of a being beyond their immediate experience, a being that transcends the physical world, can be seen as suggestive of the existence of such a being. The ability to imagine God is an innate inclination or an inherent awareness of something greater than us. Throughout history and across cultures, human beings have developed ideas and concepts of higher powers or divine beings. This widespread belief in a higher power, that has been built into us, can be seen as evidence for the existence of God. The human capacity to imagine or conceive of the idea of God implies that there must be a source or origin for this ability. They contend that the ability to conceive of God could only exist if there is an actual God from whom this ability is derived. The ability to imagine God is a causal argument for God's existence. If there were no God, it could be argued, then the capacity to imagine or conceive of such a being would not exist. Therefore, the very fact that human beings can imagine God points towards the existence of God.

The ontological argument's strength lies in its elegance and simplicity. It starts with the concept of a perfect being – a being greater than which nothing can be conceived. By definition, such a being would possess all perfections, including existence. This argument beautifully illustrates that if we conceive of a being that is perfect but lacks existence, we can conceive of another being that is more perfect—one that possesses existence. Through this line of reasoning, the ontological argument presents existence as an essential quality of a perfect being.

Unlike many other arguments for the existence of God that rely on empirical evidence or observations, the ontological argument takes an a priori approach. It seeks to reason purely through abstract thought, independent of any concrete or sensory experience. This philosophical nature of the ontological argument gives it a distinct strength, as it attempts to establish God's existence through pure reason and concept analysis. The ontological argument highlights the concept of necessary existence. It argues that if a perfect being is conceivable, then it must exist necessarily, as it would be more perfect to exist than to not exist. This concept of necessity adds a powerful dimension to the argument by asserting that God's existence is not a contingent matter but rather a logical necessity. Moreover, the ontological argument also addresses the impossibility of a perfect being not existing, establishing that the non-existence of a perfect being is logically inconceivable.

The ontological argument intricately weaves together various attributes of God, such as perfection, necessary existence, and maximal greatness. These attributes are deeply rooted in theological and philosophical discourse and resonate with individuals seeking to understand the nature of divinity. By centering the argument on these profound qualities, the ontological argument captivates minds

and prompts contemplation about the essence of a supreme being. The ontological argument has sparked centuries of intellectual debate and discussion among philosophers, theologians, and academics. It has inspired critical analysis, innovative counterarguments, and creative interpretations, generating a rich and dynamic tapestry of thought. Its continued presence within philosophical discourse serves as a testament to the enduring power and appeal of this argument, even as scholars explore alternative perspectives and challenges to its validity.

The ontological argument carries a unique beauty and power in its logical elegance, a priori approach, that invites individuals to engage in intellectual reflection on the concept of God and contributes to an ongoing dialogue in pursuit of understanding ultimate truths. While the ontological argument has both proponents and critics, its enduring significance as a pillar of philosophical reasoning showcases its lasting impact and enduring appeal.

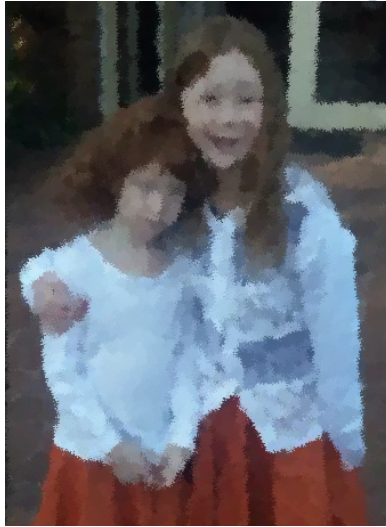
The way I understand it is that the fact that we exist and have the ability and intelligence to conceive God is evidence that He exists. Its inherent beauty lies not only in its logical structure but also in its ability to provoke profound reflections on the nature of being and the existence of a supreme being. The idea of a supremely perfect being is such that to lack existence would entail a contradiction. In other words, if we conceive of a being that possesses all perfections except existence, then this being would lack a crucial intrinsic quality: existence itself. Therefore, by definition, God must exist.

This argument extends an invitation to delve deep into the realm of reason and metaphysics, encouraging contemplation on fundamental questions of existence and the nature of reality. As an a priori argument, the ontological argument harmonizes with the human intellect's boundless capacity for abstract reasoning. It provides an intellectual framework through which individuals can explore the existence of God, engaging in critical analysis and logical deduction. By using reason and intellect, individuals can appreciate the depth and complexity of the perfect necessary being and establishes a profound connection between the realm of ideas and the reality of existence. This viewpoint invites individuals to consider the intrinsic relationship between abstract concepts and the physical world, challenging them to explore the interconnectedness between the realm of thoughts and the actuality of existence.

The ontological argument speaks to the inherent human longing for meaning and purpose. By contemplating the existence of a perfect and necessary being, individuals are compelled to reflect on broader questions concerning their place in the universe, the origins of existence, and their own significance. The ontological argument provokes a search for deeper understanding and provides a framework through which individuals can contemplate the ultimate purpose of their existence.

Chapter 5

Morality as evidence for God and the problem of evil



The moral argument asserts that objective moral values and duties exist in the world. Objective moral values are considered universal principles that are true regardless of personal opinions or cultural norms. Examples include beliefs that certain actions, like kindness or honesty, are inherently good, while others, like murder or theft, are inherently wrong. The existence of objective moral values requires a foundation. This foundation must be something beyond subjective human opinion or societal conventions. God is the best explanation for the existence of this objective moral foundation. For objective moral values to exist, there must be a transcendent, moral lawgiver responsible for establishing these values.

God is the source of objective moral values, providing a framework for what is right and wrong. The existence of moral values implies an underlying moral order or purpose in the universe. A moral law and its associated values are best explained by the existence of a divine being who establishes and upholds this moral order. This is not saying that Atheists can't be moral, it is saying that an unguided Chemical reaction doesn't have morality. If we are just here by chance, then why is stealing wrong? Survival of the fittest means that it can be justified to steal from others to benefit yourself. Yet we inherently know stealing is wrong.

Critics of the moral argument raise alternative explanations for the existence of morality, such as evolutionary psychology aimed at promoting social cohesion and survival or cultural and societal influences. Some argue that moral values can be accounted for through secular ethical frameworks that don't require the existence of a divine being. These explanations fall short in fully accounting for the nature and origin of objective moral values. Ultimately, these perspectives do not undermine the plausibility of a divine source for morality. Evolutionary explanations primarily focus on descriptive accounts of morality (how it has developed) rather than prescriptive accounts (why it is objectively binding). While evolutionary factors shape our moral intuitions, they do not provide a solid foundation for objective moral values. Evolutionary explanations cannot explain why certain actions, such as murder or theft, are universally regarded as inherently wrong regardless of cultural or situational factors.

The argument that morality is a product of cultural and societal influences assumes that moral values are ultimately subjective and socially constructed. While it is true that cultural norms and societal influences play a role in shaping moral frameworks, they do not establish a firm basis for objective moral values. Different cultures can possess sharply contrasting moral codes, making it difficult to ascertain which set of values is objectively correct. Furthermore, fundamental moral intuitions and principles persist across cultures, suggesting a deeper, universal foundation for morality that transcends cultural relativism.

Other critics propose secular ethical frameworks, such as utilitarianism or social contract theory, as alternative explanations for morality without the need for a divine being. However, these frameworks, although valuable in certain contexts, ultimately rely on subjective criteria and do not provide a compelling basis for objective moral values. Utilitarianism, for instance, prioritizes the maximization of happiness as the basis for moral decision-making, but different individuals may have conflicting views on what constitutes happiness or on how to weigh competing interests. Without an objective standard to ground moral values, secular ethical frameworks often lack the necessary foundation for moral objectivity.

The social contract theory is a philosophical concept that proposes that morality and ethical principles stem from an implicit agreement or contract among individuals within a society. It suggests that moral rules and responsibilities are established through a mutual agreement or understanding to benefit the overall well-being and functioning of society. The theory posits that moral obligations and rules are not imposed by any higher authority or external force but arise from a voluntary agreement among individuals. In this hypothetical agreement, individuals mutually consent to abide by certain moral principles and rules to maintain social order and harmony. This voluntary aspect of the social contract implies that individuals are free to negotiate and modify the terms of the contract based on changing circumstances and societal needs.

Central to the social contract theory is the idea of reciprocity. By following agreed-upon moral principles, individuals can expect others to do the same, creating a reciprocal relationship of trust, cooperation, and fairness. By upholding moral principles, individuals can experience the benefits of a functioning society, including security, protection of rights, and the pursuit of individual and collective well-being. The theory suggests that moral obligations arise from the implicit consent of individuals within a society. By living in a community, individuals accept the obligations and responsibilities that come with it, including adhering to societal norms, laws, and moral principles. The legitimacy of these moral obligations is derived from the voluntary participation in the social contract.

The social contract theory emphasizes the importance of individual rights and justice. It proposes that the consent-based agreement in the social contract includes the recognition and protection of fundamental rights, such as life, liberty, and property. These rights set the foundation for ethical principles, ensuring that individuals are treated fairly, impartially, and justly within the societal framework. The theory acknowledges the importance of collective decision-making processes within a society. It implies that the creation, modification, and enforcement of moral rules and laws should involve the active participation of the members of society. This collective decision-making ensures a fair and democratic representation of the interests and values of individuals within the social contract. The social contract theory recognizes that the failure to uphold moral principles and responsibilities may lead to social consequences. When individuals breach the terms of the

social contract by engaging in immoral or unethical behavior, it disrupts social cohesion, trust, and harmony. Consequently, individuals may face social sanctions or loss of societal benefits.

The social contract theory is a hypothetical construct that lacks historical evidence to support its claims. There is no concrete evidence to substantiate the idea that society was formed through a literal agreement or contract among individuals. The theory depends on a fictional scenario rather than empirical evidence. The theory assumes that all individuals willingly participate and have equal representation in creating and shaping the moral principles of society. However, this assumption overlooks the historical context of power imbalances and social hierarchies that have excluded marginalized groups from participating in or benefiting from the creation of social contracts. It does address issues such as systemic oppression, discrimination, or the disproportionate influence of certain individuals or groups within the social contract. It fails to address the question of how society's moral rules should consider the interests and needs of marginalized groups who are coerced into complying with social norms. Furthermore, the theory focuses primarily on society and morality at the local or national level, neglecting the complexities of moral obligations and responsibilities in a global context.

The social contract theory rests on certain assumptions, such as rational decision-making and voluntary consent. However, in reality, individuals may have limited information, cognitive biases, or different interests that may impede their ability to make fully rational choices. The social contract theory has an absence of Pluralism and assumes a uniform agreement on moral principles and values within a society. However, societies are diverse and composed of individuals with different cultural, religious, and moral beliefs. It is unrealistic to assume that a single social contract can encompass and satisfy the diverse perspectives and ethical frameworks present in a complex society. The social contract theory is often presented as a fixed and static framework, which does not account for changing societal dynamics over the centuries, in changing values and circumstances.

Objective moral values and duties are best explained by the existence of a transcendent, moral lawgiver - God. Objective moral values are rooted in God's nature and are binding irrespective of human opinion or cultural context. Unlike naturalistic explanations, the existence of God as the foundation of morality provides a coherent and objective basis for moral values, ensuring their universality and objectivity. While critics of the moral argument for God present alternative explanations rooted in evolutionary psychology, cultural influences, and secular ethical frameworks, these explanations fail to fully account for the nature and origin of objective moral values. The existence of a divine being such as God provides a more compelling explanation for the objective nature and universality of moral values, offering a solid foundation that transcends subjective human perspectives and cultural relativism.

In contrast, the problem of evil, when examined in relation to the existence of God, raises difficult questions about the compatibility of an all-powerful and all-good God with the reality of evil and suffering in the world. It can be summarized in the following way:

1. God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and perfectly good.
2. Evil and suffering exist in the world.
3. If God is all-powerful, He can prevent evil.
4. If God is all-knowing, He knows about the existence of evil.

5. If God is perfectly good, He would want to eliminate evil.
6. Therefore, the coexistence of the existence of evil and suffering with an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God seems contradictory.

The presence of Evil in our world is hard to understand in the context of a loving Father. Why would a loving Father allow an innocent baby to be raped and murdered? In my own life I struggle understanding where God was when I was 6 and being severely damaged by sexual misconduct. I'm able to forgive the people who did this to me and allowed it to continue, I know that they did it within the context of their physical and mental limitations, but where was God when this was happening to me? Severe damage that would impact me for the rest of my life and lead to a lot of brokenness and hurt, coloring my sexual identity as an adult. Where was God and why was He allowing it, if He loved me?

We live in a broken world affected by sin, pain, and suffering. Although God originally created the world in perfection, the consequences of human rebellion introduced brokenness into our existence. This brokenness manifests itself in various forms of evil and suffering, including the traumatic experiences I and you endured. God may not have intervened in the moment of our suffering, but it is important to remember that God grieves with us and empathizes with our pain. God understands our brokenness and is there to provide comfort, healing, and restoration as we navigate the effects of our traumatic experience. While it may be challenging to see through the lens of our pain, it is possible to find solace and strength in seeking support from others, professional counseling, or support groups.

While it may seem incomprehensible, God can bring something good out of even the most horrendous situations. He did for me. Through your journey of healing and personal growth, there may arise opportunities for you to use your experiences to reach out to others who have undergone similar ordeals, offering empathy, understanding, and support. Your ability to forgive those who harmed you is a remarkable testament to your strength and resilience and can potentially inspire and encourage others who may be struggling. It is important to acknowledge that there may be unanswered questions that we may never fully understand in this lifetime. Our human perspective is limited, and we cannot grasp the entirety of God's plan or the reasons behind specific events. Embracing the mystery and acknowledging the limitations of our understanding may be a part of this journey of faith. Remember that you are not alone in your journey, and may you find comfort, healing, and renewed strength as you navigate your path towards healing and wholeness.

Evil exists because of the free will given to human beings. The existence of evil is a byproduct of human misuse of freedom. God, in His love and respect for human autonomy, allows the possibility of evil. I would not prefer a world where I had no choices. The existence of evil and suffering can be used by God for our personal growth, character development, and the formation of moral virtues within us. Through our challenges, we can develop and refine their souls. As finite beings, we do not comprehend the complexities of God's plan or the ultimate reasons for the existence of evil and suffering. God's ways are beyond our complete understanding, and there may be a greater purpose served through hardships. We have eschatological hope. Our hope is in an ultimate future state where there will be the absence of evil, which is God's ultimate plan for redemption and reconciliation.

The concepts of morality and evil, rooted in our intrinsic sense of right and wrong and how it affects us, raises profound questions about the origin and nature of ethical standards. The existence of objective moral values and duties strongly suggests the presence of a divine being. The existence of objective moral values, which hold true regardless of individual beliefs or societal norms, presents a compelling argument for God. Moral values such as honesty, fairness, and respect appear to transcend cultural, historical, and geographical boundaries. Our recognition and agreement upon these values suggest a universal standard that originates from a transcendent moral lawgiver - God. In addition to objective moral values, the existence of moral duties and obligations further underscores the case for God. Our experiences reveal moral obligations that extend beyond mere choices or preferences. We feel compelled to act in accordance with these obligations, as if they were externally imposed upon us. This sense of duty implies a higher authority, a moral legislator, from whom these obligations emanate. The existence of a moral order, characterized by the inherent structure and coherence of moral standards, reinforces the argument for God. Moral principles interconnect with one another, forming a comprehensive framework that guides human behavior. The intricate nature of this order suggests a source of wisdom and intelligence beyond the human realm, pointing to a divine design.

Despite the persuasive case that morality suggests the existence of God, the problem of evil is a significant challenge. The presence of evil and suffering in the world contradicts the notion of an all-powerful and benevolent God. Human free will allows for the possibility of moral evils, such as violence and injustice. God's gift of free will enables us to make genuine choices and possess moral responsibility. However, the misuse of this freedom can result in evil actions. Therefore, the existence of evil is not contradictory to the existence of God but rather a consequence of human agency.

Also consider the concept of theodicy, which as we already discussed, seeks to provide a plausible explanation for the coexistence of God and evil. The presence of evil serves a greater purpose, such as personal growth, moral development, or the opportunity for individuals to demonstrate virtues like compassion and courage. Evil is not inherently contradictory to God's existence but rather a means to achieve a higher good, even if we may not fully comprehend the purposes. Our perception of evil and suffering is limited by our human perspective. What may seem evil or unjust in the immediate context may not be so in the broader scheme of existence. Our understanding and judgment of events are restricted within our temporal existence, while God's knowledge encompasses all of eternity. Therefore, arguments based solely on our limited understanding might not negate the possibility of a just and loving God.

While the problem of evil presents a challenging argument, the existence of objective moral values, moral duties, and a coherent moral order within human experience still strongly suggest the presence of a divine being. Despite counterarguments regarding the problem of evil, the concepts of free will, theodicy, and the limitations of human perspective offer plausible explanations to reconcile the presence of evil with the existence of God. Ultimately, the recognition of morality as evidence of God encourages us to contemplate the origin and nature of ethical principles, fostering thoughtful reflection on the existence of a higher moral authority.

Chapter 6

Is the God of the Bible and Christianity, right?



The existence and impact of Jesus Christ as a historical figure has been a topic of extensive discussion and examination for centuries. While religious texts provide insight into his life and teachings, there are also credible historical sources that contribute to the evidence for Jesus. The primary sources of information about Jesus come from the New Testament of the Bible, specifically the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These texts document Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection. While these accounts are considered religious texts, they also serve as historical documents, providing valuable information about the life of Jesus and the early Christian movement.

Some claim lack of concrete historical evidence to support key events and figures in Christianity. Critics argue that the accounts of Jesus' life and teachings, as well as the events described in the Bible, lack empirical evidence and rely heavily on faith. They argue that without concrete evidence, it is reasonable to consider Christianity as a myth or a product of human imagination.

The Gospels display several characteristics that lend credibility to their historical value. Firstly, they were written by individuals who claimed to be eyewitnesses or who gathered information from eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry. This direct connection to the events increases their authenticity. Moreover, the Gospels include specific details about individuals, geographic locations, political contexts, and customs of the time, establishing a sense of historical accuracy. Furthermore, the role of faith, personal experiences, and the transformational impact of the teachings of Jesus on individuals and communities' points towards its authenticity. There is overwhelming evidence of the impact of Jesus on people's lives throughout history, including in mine. There are numerous testimonies and stories of individuals who have experienced personal transformation through faith in Jesus, and this transformation is evidence of His divinity.

Apart from biblical accounts, several non-Christian historical sources from the first and second centuries also mention Jesus and his impact. These sources provide evidence that goes beyond Christian writings, offering corroborating evidence for Jesus' existence. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish

historian of the first century, mentions Jesus in his work "Antiquities of the Jews." While scholars debate the degree of authenticity of certain passages, the consensus recognizes that Josephus provides crucial evidence for the existence of Jesus as a historical figure. Tacitus, a Roman historian, also refers to Jesus and early Christianity in his work "Annals," providing additional independent confirmation as does early Christian opponents such as Lucian of Samosata. These sources confirm the existence of Jesus and the movement that developed around Him. Other sources, like the letters of early Christian leaders and writers such as Paul, Clement of Rome, and Ignatius of Antioch, offer further insights into the historical Jesus and the growth of the early Christian movement. These writings not only attest to Jesus' existence but also provide details about his followers and the development of Christian beliefs.

The historical context surrounding Jesus provides additional evidence for his existence. The accounts of Jesus' life fit into a broader historical and social framework of first-century Palestine under Roman rule. The religious, political, and cultural dynamics of the time contribute to the plausibility of the events and societal impact attributed to Jesus. When analyzing the evidence, both biblical and non-biblical, it becomes apparent that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure who had a significant impact on his contemporaries and subsequent generations. The biblical accounts, supported by non-Christian sources and the historical context, offer a coherent picture of Jesus' life, teachings, and the subsequent rise of the Christian movement.

The evidence points to the existence of Jesus as a historical figure rather than a mere mythological construct. The combination of biblical and non-biblical sources, along with their consistency and correlation with the historical and cultural context, provides a compelling case for the existence of Jesus. Ultimately, debates may persist on specific details and interpretations, but the cumulative evidence supports the conclusion that Jesus Christ was indeed a real person who shaped the course of history through his teachings and the subsequent growth of Christianity. God has revealed himself in the universe. God is the God of all truth, Jesus claimed that He is truth. The New Testament Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or individuals closely associated with eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection. These firsthand accounts provide historical authenticity to the events described.

The Gospels tell us that women were the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. The society in which Jesus lived was patriarchal, with men generally occupying positions of authority and women often being marginalized. In this context, the fact that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection could be seen as counter to the expected social order. Their testimonies might have been less valued and considered less reliable than those of men. In ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures, the legal testimony of women was often regarded as less credible than that of men. Women were generally not seen as authoritative witnesses, so having women as the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection might have been viewed with skepticism by some.

The Gospels also tell us that the disciples ran away and deserted Jesus when He needed them most. If you are making up a compelling story for a sinister reason surely you would leave these parts out? Then consider the transformation and dedication exhibited by early Christians, despite facing persecution and even death. These individuals were willing to endure hardships indicating that something significant happened in their lives, such as witnessing the resurrection.

J. Warner Wallace is a former cold-case homicide detective, and a Christian apologist who confirms this conclusion his book *Cold-Case Christianity*, that generally eyewitnesses do not make up stories that embarrasses them or paint them in a poor light. Wallace maintains that based on his training and experience as a detective he finds that the Gospel accounts exhibit the characteristics of reliable eyewitness testimony.¹⁹

The Gospels have remarkable consistency while not being exact copies, with small, natural differences in the text which is typical of different eyewitness reports. Each Gospel writer brings unique perspectives and highlights different aspects of Jesus' life and teachings, there is a remarkable congruence in the core details. This consistency suggests that the Gospel writers were committed to accurately recounting the events they witnessed. In his book Wallace underscores the importance of corroboration through multiple independent sources if the details are 100% the same it indicates collusion on the facts. The Gospels were written by different authors, who were likely referring to various earlier sources, such as oral tradition and written documents, thereby adding weight to the claims made in the Gospels. The authors highlight the transformation and dedication exhibited by early Christians, despite facing persecution and even death. They argue that the willingness of these individuals to endure hardships and maintain their faith in Jesus is indicative of something significant happening in their lives, such as witnessing the resurrection.

Furthermore, there are "undesigned coincidences" within the Gospel accounts. These are coincidences and harmonies discovered when details from one account shed light on details from another, often inadvertently supporting the overall reliability of the Gospel narratives. The Gospels were written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, allowing for possible correction or clarification if inaccuracies were present. The time gap between the events and the writing of the Gospels makes it unlikely that these events are legend but rather it is the truth. The interval between Jesus' crucifixion and the accounts' recording makes the likelihood of substantial alteration unlikely. The Gospels were not subject to significant embellishment or distortion over time. There was not enough opportunity for significant alteration of the original accounts. The gospels contain specific and detailed information with accuracy of small, seemingly insignificant details, they show consistency with other historical sources, and were transmitted in a relatively short time span. These specific details lend credibility to the accounts, as they would be difficult to fabricate and serve as markers of reliable eyewitness testimony. I encourage you to engage critically with the evidence, examine the Gospels with a detective's mindset and determine the reliability of the New Testament Gospels for yourself.

Jesus demonstrated exceptional communication skills. The Gospel accounts contain lengthy and detailed speeches attributed to him. These speeches are evidence of Jesus' teaching abilities and historical reliability. The best explanation for the rise of Christianity and the rapid growth and spread of Christianity in the first few centuries and the transformation of Jesus' disciples is their belief in the resurrection. The resurrection account provides a coherent and plausible explanation for the events that followed Jesus' death. Jesus disciplines ran away in fear and went into hiding, and then something happened that made them willing to die for what they believe. Would you be willing to die for what you know to be a lie? The movement's expansion indicates substantial belief

¹⁹ *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* J. Warner Wallace, 2013, Google Books

in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as individuals would not have risked their lives for something they did not truly believe in.

Saul was killing Christians and then became the most profound defender of the faith, the apostle Paul who wrote most of the New Testament. The evidence supporting the reality of Paul as a historical figure is extensive and compelling. Numerous writers from within a generation of his death, including Christian sources, provide attestations to his existence. We find references to Paul in the writings of Clement (AD 95), Peter (AD 60), Ignatius, Polycarp, and other authors from the late first century and early second century. These writers would have been contemporaries or close to the time when Paul was alive. Their consistent mention of Paul as a real person lends strong support to his historical reality. That these early Christian writers, along with others alive during Paul's lifetime, could have been deceived about Paul's existence is highly improbable. It would require an enormous collective conspiracy or delusion, one that extends beyond the realm of rational belief. Indeed, there is no record of any opponent of Christianity in the first two or three centuries who doubted the reality of Paul. Such doubt would have been like questioning the existence of well-known figures like Seneca, Ovid, or Cicero. Therefore, based on the multitude of references from various authors, including contemporaries and those writing shortly after his death, the historical reality of Paul as a prominent figure in early Christianity is well-established.

I had a therapist who helped me tremendously. He pointed out to me that I was not present in my life. That stress and fear caused me to not be there for my kids. He pointed out that I was using alcohol to escape. His words made the penny drop for me, it made me see that yes, I was just functioning and not present in the moment. He then went on to say that my Christian world view was causing me damage and that several books have been written that claim that the New Testament was written 150 years after Jesus lived and is based on legend rather than truth is a controversial assertion.

Strict interpretations or cultural expectations within Christianity can sometimes lead to feelings of guilt and shame, particularly related to aspects such as morality, sexuality, or personal failings. Feeling judged or rejected by others within Christian communities, can significantly impact mental health and well-being. When your personal beliefs and values conflict with the teachings or dogma of their religious tradition or community, it can create internal tension and contribute to distress. Certain theological beliefs or interpretations within any religious framework can be harmful or detrimental to mental health, particularly if they perpetuate harmful stereotypes, prejudice, or fear.

The belief in God's forgiveness and His willingness to redeem and restore is Central to Christianity. Christian teachings emphasize that through faith in Jesus Christ, we can find forgiveness for our mistakes and wrongdoing. Recognizing our shortcomings and seeking forgiveness leads to transformation and a sense of liberation from guilt and shame. Christianity teaches us that God's love is unconditional. Regardless of our flaws or past mistakes, the Christian message is rooted in the understanding that God loves and accepts us as we are. God's unconditional love provides us a basis for self-acceptance and a release from feelings of shame.

Christianity encourages personal growth and transformation. Rather than focusing solely on guilt or shame, Christianity emphasizes learning from mistakes, making amends, and striving to become more Christ-like. The emphasis is on growth and improvement, rather than dwelling solely on past wrongs. Being part of a Christian community can provide support and encouragement. Fellowship

with other believers offers the opportunity for sharing struggles and finding empathy and understanding. In such communities, the focus is often on supporting one another, providing a space to heal from guilt and shame through open dialogue and acceptance.

Christianity emphasizes the concepts of grace and mercy. Understanding that we can receive God's grace and mercy encourages us to extend the same grace and mercy to ourselves. This reminds us that we are not defined by our mistakes but rather by God's love and our potential to grow more in His image. The experience of guilt and shame can be complex and multifaceted, varying from person to person. The Bible should be approached with a contextual and interpretive lens, considering the context of the culture at the time. The Bible is an incredible collection of ancient texts written by different authors in diverse historical and cultural settings. Instead of viewing the Bible as a rigid rulebook, we should critically engage with the text, considering the cultural context and the different genres present within it. We should approach the Bible as a conversation rather than a fixed set of rules. We should wrestle with the text, ask questions, and seek to genuinely understand its overarching message of love and liberation. We have to engage with the Bible contextually and interpretively, recognizing its diversity and complexity to achieve a deeper understanding of the Bible's message of love, grace, and liberation.

The dating and authorship of the New Testament texts are subjects of extensive scholarly debate, but the consensus among historians is that the New Testament documents were written within a few decades of Jesus' death. The New Testament consists of numerous writings, including the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), as well as the letters of Paul and other apostles. While exact dating is not always possible, most scholars place the writing of these texts between the first and second century CE, generally within 40 to 70 years after Jesus' crucifixion. The Gospels, which narrate the life and ministry of Jesus, are traditionally believed to have been written between approximately AD 50 and AD 90. The letters (Epistles) written by various apostles, such as Paul, Peter, and John, were composed during the first century CE, with dates ranging from approximately AD 50 to AD 90. The Book of Revelation, attributed to the Apostle John, is typically dated to around the end of the first century CE (around AD 90-95).

Regarding the claim that the New Testament is based on legend, most scholars do not view the New Testament as pure mythology or legend. While there are elements of religious language, symbolism, and theological interpretation within the texts, they are rooted in historical and cultural contexts. Scholars use various methods, such as textual analysis, historical research, and comparison with other ancient sources, to understand the historical reliability and authenticity of the New Testament. While it is essential to approach historical documents with critical inquiry, it is important to distinguish between historical analysis and sweeping generalizations that disregard the significant body of research done by scholars across the centuries. The New Testament is recognized as a valuable source for understanding the historical Jesus, early Christian communities, and the development of early Christian beliefs and practices. However, interpreting the New Testament requires careful consideration of its genre, cultural context, and theological purposes.

Some argue that Christianity shares similarities with other ancient mythologies, such as the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the concept of a divine savior figure. Critics argue that these similarities suggest that Christianity borrowed heavily from earlier mythological traditions, therefore making it a myth. However, it is important to acknowledge that while there may be some common elements across different religious traditions, Christianity developed within a unique historical and cultural context, with its own theological and philosophical framework.

Jesus represents an all-inclusive message of love, grace, and liberation for humanity. Jesus was a compassionate teacher who challenged social norms, empowered the marginalized, and emphasized the importance of love and justice. Jesus' primary message was centered around the kingdom of God, where everyone, regardless of their background or beliefs, is welcomed and included. Rob Bell, a prominent figure in progressive Christianity, offers a unique perspective on Jesus and the Bible.^{20,21} He emphasizes that the Bible should be seen as a library, containing various genres such as poetry, history, and mythology, each with its own unique purpose and style. Rob Bell presents a view of Jesus as a messenger of love and inclusivity, challenging social norms and advocating for justice. For Bell, the Bible is not meant to be a simplistic roadmap for life, but rather a diverse and complex collection of texts that invites ongoing exploration and interpretation.

One of the main contentious points in Bell's teachings is his exploration of universalism. Bell suggests that everyone will ultimately be saved and reconciled with God, regardless of their belief or faith. This challenges traditional Christian doctrines of salvation and the belief in the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ. Bell has also presented alternative interpretations of hell, suggesting that it might be temporary or that the concept of eternal punishment is not consistent with a loving God. These views are different to the traditional understanding of hell as a place of eternal separation from God for those who reject Him. Controversy, disagreement, and differing interpretations have always been present within Christianity. While some find Bell's perspectives refreshing and thought-provoking, others have voiced concerns about potential departures from orthodox Christianity. We tend to judge the religious leaders of antiquity for rejecting Jesus. I don't think it would be any different today. People who say they stand for Jesus today may not recognize Him if He returned today and reject Him as false.

Jesus' own claims about his divinity, such as when he says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), and when he accepts worship from his followers, contribute to the Christian understanding of his divinity. Additionally, the Resurrection of Jesus is the profound affirmation of his divine nature, symbolizing victory over sin and death. God exists as three persons, the Trinity: The Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. While the Trinity is a complex theological concept, it reflects the understanding that Jesus shares the same divine nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was the "Son of God" and the "second person of the Trinity." Jesus is the unique and unparalleled embodiment of God's love and grace, with the power to forgive sins and bring salvation. Jesus' claims about himself, including the claim to be God, were radical. Jesus' teachings were both profound and challenging. Jesus was a moral exemplar, presenting a way of life that reflected high moral standards and selflessness. Jesus' taught love, compassion, forgiveness, and the importance of a personal relationship with God. Jesus willingly sacrificed himself on the cross to atone for humanity's sins and offer redemption, ultimately triumphing over death through his resurrection. Jesus was not merely a historical figure but a person whose life and teachings provide profound meaning and relevance for us. C.S. Lewis, a renowned Christian author and theologian, wrote Jesus can only be one of 3 things a megalomaniac, delusional or true.²²

²⁰ Love wins, Rob Bell, 2011, Google Books

²¹ What is the Bible, Rob Bell, 2017, HarperCollinsPublishers

²² Mere Christianity, CS Lewis, 1952, various publishers

Archaeological discoveries support the historical context of the New Testament with findings that verify the existence of individuals and places mentioned in the biblical accounts, providing support for the historical reliability of the Gospels.^{23,24} The book *More than a Carpenter* by Sean and Josh McDowell addresses the reliability of the New Testament Gospels as historical documents, examining factors such as manuscript evidence, early dating, and the consistency of the Gospel accounts.

Consensus is that the first translation of the Jewish Bible, known as the Hebrew Bible or the Tanakh, into another language happened in the 3rd century BCE, before Christ was born. This translation is known as the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), and it was rendered into Koine Greek. According to tradition, the Septuagint was commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the ruler of Egypt, who wanted a Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures for the Alexandrian Library. Seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars were said to have worked on the translation, hence the name "Septuagint," which means "seventy" in Latin. The Septuagint played a significant role in the development of early Christianity. Many New Testament authors quoted from the Septuagint, and it became the primary Bible used by Greek-speaking Jewish communities and early Christian groups.

The existing copies of the New Testament are remarkably close in time to the original writings, providing confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the biblical texts. There are several mentions of historical figures in the New Testament, including Herod who was a king of Judea, appointed by the Roman Empire during the time of Jesus' birth. He is known for his grand building projects, including the expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea during the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and ruled over parts of Galilee and Perea during the time of Jesus' ministry. Caiaphas was the high priest in Jerusalem during Jesus' trial. John the Baptist was a Jewish preacher and prophet who baptized Jesus and played a significant role in preparing the way for Jesus' ministry.

These individuals, among others mentioned in the New Testament, are widely recognized as historical figures, with their existence and roles affirmed through various historical and literary sources outside of the biblical accounts. Their inclusion in the New Testament narratives adds historical context while confirming the timeline of when the document was written.

We know the date the Old Testament was written; we know the date the New Testament was written. Jesus fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies, pointing to His role as the long-awaited Messiah. Peter Stoner was an author with a PhD in mathematics who conducted a calculation to determine the probability of eight specific Messianic prophecies being fulfilled in the life of Jesus.²⁵ These estimates were intentionally conservative.

1. The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Estimate: 1 in 280,000 (based on the average population of Bethlehem divided by the average population of the earth during that time).

2. A messenger will prepare the way for the Messiah (Malachi 3:1).

Estimate: 1 in 1,000.

²³ Evidence that demands a verdict, Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell

²⁴ *More Than a Carpenter*, Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell

²⁵ "Science Speaks" by Peter W. Stoner: Published in 1958

3. The Messiah will enter Jerusalem as a king riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
Estimate: 1 in 100.
4. The Messiah will be betrayed by a friend and suffer wounds in His hands (Zechariah 13:6).
Estimate: 1 in 1,000.
5. The Messiah will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
Estimate: 1 in 1,000.
6. The betrayal money will be used to purchase a potter's field (Zechariah 11:13).
Estimate: 1 in 100,000.
7. The Messiah will remain silent while He is afflicted (Isaiah 53:7).
Estimate: 1 in 1,000.
8. The Messiah will die by having His hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16).
Estimate: 1 in 10,000.

By multiplying all these probabilities together, the result is approximately 1 in 10^{28} . Dividing this number by an estimate of the total number of people who have lived since the time of these prophecies (88 billion) produces the probability of all eight prophecies being accidentally fulfilled in the life of one person to 1 in 10^{17} or 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (one in one hundred quadrillion). Stoner provided an insightful illustration to help understand the magnitude of the probability. He invited readers to imagine filling the entire State of Texas knee-deep with silver dollars, with one coin marked with a black check. Then, imagine blindfolding a person and releasing them into this vast sea of silver dollars. The odds of them picking up the marked coin on their first attempt would be equivalent to the probability of eight prophecies being accidentally fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

When faced with these statistics, skeptics may argue that Jesus purposely fulfilled the prophecies. It is undeniable that Jesus was aware of the prophecies and played a role in their fulfillment. For example, when He prepared to enter Jerusalem for the last time, He directed His disciples to find a donkey for Him to ride, specifically fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9: "Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey" (Matthew 21:1-5).

Many prophecies concerning the Messiah could not be intentionally fulfilled. These include specific details such as the town of His birth (Micah 5:2), the nature of His betrayal (Psalm 41:9), or the manner of His death (Zechariah 13:6 and Psalm 22:16).

One of the most remarkable Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures is the prediction of the Messiah's death by crucifixion. This prophecy is found in Psalm 22, where David foretold that the Messiah would have His hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16). This prophecy was written 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, when the Jewish method of execution was stoning. Crucifixion, as a Roman method of execution, was not yet perfected at that time. These instances demonstrate the astonishing accuracy of Messianic prophecies and highlight how Jesus fulfilled them, including those aspects that could not have been intentional on His part.

Furthermore, in the book of Ezekiel, a prophecy is given concerning the city of Tyre, containing seven specific prophecies written in 590 BC:

1. Nebuchadnezzar will conquer the city (verses 7-11).
2. Other nations will assist Nebuchadnezzar (verse 3).

3. The city will become like a bare rock (verses 4 and 14).
4. It will be a place for fishing nets to be spread (verses 5 and 14).
5. The stones and timbers will be thrown into the sea (verse 12).
6. The fall of Tyre will cause great fear in other cities (verse 16).
7. The old city of Tyre will never be rebuilt (verse 14).

Four years after the prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre, and after a 13-year long siege, the city fell in 573 BC. It was then discovered that all valuable possessions had been moved to a nearby island. Over two centuries later, Alexander the Great arrived, concerned about the Tyrian fleet being used against him. To conquer the island, he built a causeway using the materials from the ruined city, which prompted neighboring cities to surrender. Since then, Tyre has remained in ruins, with fishermen spreading their nets in the area.

Every aspect of this prophecy was fulfilled precisely as predicted. Peter Stoner calculated the odds of such a prophecy being fulfilled by chance to be 1 in 75,000,000 or 1 in 7.5×10^7 . Stoner further calculated the probabilities of other prophecies coming true, including those concerning Samaria, Gaza and Ashkelon, Jericho, Palestine, Moab and Ammon, Edom, and Babylon. Additionally, he calculated the odds of prophecies related to the Eastern Gate closing, the plowing of Mount Zion, and the enlargement of Jerusalem according to a prescribed pattern. When combining all these prophecies, Stoner concludes that "the probability of these 11 prophecies coming true, if written in human wisdom, is 1 in 5.76×10^{59} ." Clearly, this probability is beyond what can be considered possible. The Bible is not just another book. It is the Word of God.

In the Bible, the supreme deity portrayed and revered as God is known by various names, including Yahweh (often translated as "LORD" in English versions), Jehovah, and Elohim. The God depicted in the Bible is the creator and sustainer of all things, possessing attributes such as omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), and omnibenevolence (infinitely good and loving). The God of the Bible is eternal and existing beyond the confines of time and space. Throughout the Bible, the nature and character of God are revealed through divine self-disclosure, relationships with humanity, and the actions attributed to God. God is depicted as loving, just, merciful, compassionate, faithful, and holy. The Bible also emphasizes God's involvement in human history, including the establishment of covenants with chosen people, the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and the sending of Jesus as the savior of humanity.

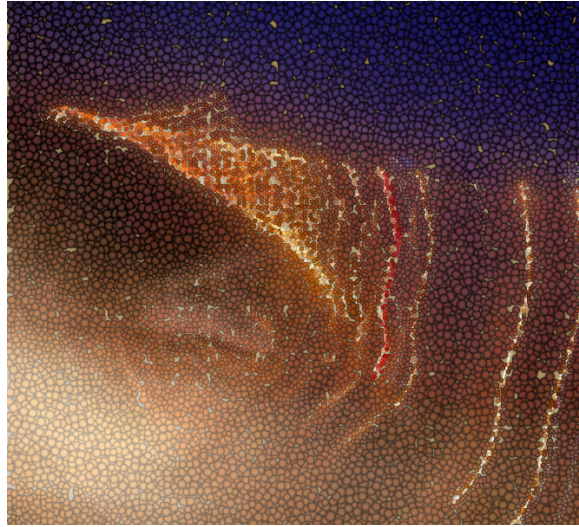
Take time to reflect on your own beliefs and explore what draws you towards Jesus as a savior. Consider reading the New Testament and learning about Jesus' life, teachings, and the message of salvation. Learn more about the core principles of Christianity and the concept of salvation. For Christians, salvation is receiving forgiveness for sins and entering a loving relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Engage in Bible study, join a church community, or seek the guidance of a spiritual mentor or pastor to deepen your understanding. Reflect on your own experiences and consider how the teachings and example of Jesus can positively impact your life. Think about how embracing Jesus as a savior might offer hope, meaning, and redemption in your personal circumstances. Engage in prayer and open communication with God. Express to God your desire to embrace Jesus as your savior and ask for help and guidance in your spiritual journey. Consider seeking spiritual guidance in prayer or through acts of worship and devotion.

Embracing Jesus as a savior involves more than intellectual belief; it includes actively living out the principles and teachings of Jesus. Seek to embody love, compassion, forgiveness, and service in your interactions and relationships with others. Embracing Jesus as a savior involves an act of surrender, where you trust in God's saving grace and relinquish control over your life to a higher power. This is a personal decision that requires genuine faith and trust in God's love and plan for your life. Remember, this is just a general guide, and everyone's spiritual journey is unique. It may be helpful to seek support from a Christian community, where you can engage with others who share your beliefs and learn from their experiences.



Chapter 7

Would a good God send people to hell?



The Bible provides various descriptions and references to hell, which is depicted as a place of punishment or separation from God. Different translations and interpretations may vary, and the concept of hell is depicted differently in different parts of the Bible. Some notable descriptions found within biblical texts include the Hebrew word "Sheol" used in The Old Testament that is often associated with the realm of the dead. While it can refer to the grave or death in a general sense, it is sometimes described as a place of darkness and silence where all people go after death, regardless of their actions in life. Jesus used the term "Gehenna" in the New Testament, drawing from the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. In his teachings, Gehenna is depicted as a place of punishment, often associated with fire and eternal separation from God. It represents the consequences of rejecting or living apart from God. In the book of Revelation, a vision is presented where the wicked, along with the devil and his angels, are cast into a "lake of fire." This fiery lake symbolizes eternal punishment and separation from God. Jesus also used the imagery of "outer darkness" to describe a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This description emphasizes the sense of isolation, despair, and anguish that await those who reject God's love and salvation. Paul, in his writings, refers to a future judgment and punishment where those who do not know God or obey the gospel will suffer "eternal destruction." This destruction implies a permanent separation from God and the loss of eternal life.

These descriptions are symbolic and metaphorical, reflecting the biblical authors' attempts to convey profound spiritual truths. Interpretations of these descriptions can vary among different Christian denominations and theological traditions. The nature and specifics of hell remain matters of theological debate and personal interpretation within the framework of faith. The concept of hell and the idea of a good God sending people there is a topic that has sparked philosophical, ethical, and theological discussions for centuries. It raises questions about the nature of God's justice, compassion, and the purpose of punishment. The existence of hell as a place of eternal punishment is an enigma and theological challenge. It raises profound questions about the nature of a good and loving God allowing individuals to suffer in such a manner for eternity. This chapter aims to explore some potential perspectives on why a good God would allow for the existence of hell.

One perspective is that a good and just God must hold individuals accountable for their actions. If humans possess free will and can make choices that lead to harm, injustice, or the suffering of others, then a perfect God would not ignore or allow these actions to go unpunished. Hell, then, could be seen as the necessary consequence of individuals' rejection of God's goodness, an affirmation of divine justice.

A good God respects human free will, even to the point of allowing individuals to reject him and face the consequences of their choices. For genuine love, goodness, and moral responsibility to exist, humans must have the ability to choose between good and evil. God desires a genuine and authentic relationship with humans, and forcing faith upon them would undermine the very essence of free will. The existence of hell, in this context, could be understood because of the consequences of individuals knowingly and willfully rejecting God and a life aligned with divine principles. It is the ultimate consequence of their choices, reflective of the significance of free will.

Individuals who reject God are self-imposing their separation from him, and hell represents this self-chosen separation rather than an arbitrary punishment imposed by God. Some theological perspectives propose that hell serves as a means of purification and redemption. In this view, people may enter hell because of their actions, but the suffering experienced therein has the potential to lead to transformation, growth, and eventual reconciliation with God. The suffering acts as a purgative process that purifies the soul, enabling redemption and a renewed connection with the divine. The belief that a good God sends people to hell can also be understood within the context of the ultimate restoration of justice and goodness. It is argued that hell serves as a temporary state and that ultimately, God's love and mercy will prevail. Some theological frameworks suggest that even in hell, God's redemptive power and love continue to reach out, providing opportunities for reconciliation and eventual release from hell's torment. Some religious traditions emphasize the redemptive nature of God. They believe that hell is not necessarily eternal punishment but rather a temporary state where individuals have the potential to learn and seek reconciliation with God. This perspective highlights the opportunity for redemption and emphasizes God's mercy and forgiveness. I would treat carefully with this view, although this to me is the most attractive option, that even after this life we and our loved ones get another opportunity, but I am not sure if it is so.

The question of why a good God would send people to hell is one of the profound mysteries of religious and philosophical thought. While different explanations have been proposed, it is important to approach this topic with humility and acknowledge the limits of human understanding. Various perspectives seek to reconcile the existence of hell within the context of divine justice, respect for free will, purification, and the ultimate restoration of goodness. Ultimately, the nature of God and the concept of hell reminds us of the complexity and profundity of contemplating divine mysteries.

The nature of God's judgment and the concept of hell exceed human comprehension. We have finite understanding and limited perspective make it challenging to fully comprehend the precise ways in which divine justice operates. Jesus is needed to reconcile humanity with God. Humanity is born with original sin, the inherited spiritual condition from Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. This original sin results in a separation from God and a broken relationship between humanity and the divine. Jesus is necessary to overcome the effects of original sin. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb who willingly offered himself as the ultimate atonement for humanity's sins.

His death on the cross is believed to have paid the price for sin, satisfying God's sense of justice and making reconciliation with God possible. God is love and grace. God offers salvation and forgiveness to humanity through Jesus.

Jesus' sacrifice exemplifies God's profound love for humanity, providing an avenue for forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity, acting as a bridge to restore the broken relationship. As both fully divine and fully human, he is uniquely qualified to bridge the gap and reconcile humanity with God. Jesus' resurrection from the dead demonstrated his victory over sin and death. Through faith in Jesus, believers are assured of the hope of eternal life and a restored relationship with God both in this life and the next.

Jesus made several claims about being the way to God and Heaven. Jesus claimed to have a unique, divine relationship with God as the Son of God. He asserted that he was sent by God to express God's will and to reveal the path to salvation. Jesus declared that he himself is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and that no one can come to God except through him. He taught that belief in him, repentance, and following his teachings are the means to attaining a restored relationship with God. Jesus said that He did not come to condemn the world but to save it.

Jesus emphasized the importance of faith in him as the means of salvation. He taught that eternal life is a gift from God and that it is received through faith and God's grace, rather than through personal merits or works alone. Jesus taught that following God's commandments, including the commandment to love God and love one's neighbor, is central to finding favor with God and inheriting eternal life. Jesus spoke of his impending death as a sacrificial act that would provide atonement for the sins of humanity. He claimed that through his death and resurrection, he would reconcile humanity with God and offer forgiveness for sins.

Jesus's blood is red that we need to get to God. God is purple, He is God is perfect goodness, showing immense love, compassion, and mercy towards humanity and all of creation. God exists beyond the physical realm and beyond human understanding or comprehension. God is justice and judgment, and God will ultimately hold all people accountable for their actions. God is without sin. We are sinful and can't be in the presence of God. On our own we are blue, the color of death. Jesus must color us with his blood to make our way to God. But we must accept it. God created us with free will because he wants us to make the choice to be with Him. It is not loving to force someone into your home when they don't want to.

But why did God make it so difficult to find Him? It seems unfair that this the most important decision of our lives is made in ignorance. Surely if we could see God and truly understood the consequences everyone would make the choice to be with Him.

God desires a genuine, willing relationship with humans. Allowing humans the freedom to choose whether to believe in and seek God is seen to foster a sincere and authentic connection. If God were to make his existence undeniably evident, it could potentially infringe upon human free will, as people may feel compelled or coerced into believing in him without truly engaging with their own moral and spiritual choices.

The journey of seeking and finding God is considered an essential part of personal spiritual growth. It is believed that struggles, doubts, and searching can lead individuals to develop a deeper

understanding, a stronger faith, and a more profound connection with God. The challenging nature of the search can push us to explore and question our beliefs, leading to personal and spiritual growth.

God's infinite nature and transcendence make it inherently difficult for finite human minds to comprehend him fully. If God was entirely knowable and easily accessible, his divine nature would be diminished or reduced to something within the confines of human understanding. The inherent mystery and depth of God are qualities that inspire awe, reverence, and a continual quest for knowledge and understanding.

The challenges and difficulties in finding God serve as a test of faith. The pursuit of God in the face of obstacles or uncertainty demonstrates a person's dedication, commitment, and perseverance in seeking a deeper spiritual connection. Encountering and overcoming obstacles can lead to personal growth and strengthen an individual's relationship with God.

The mystery of finding God is simply the way the world is that God created. And we need to find our way in it. It is not exclusive or unkind to tell people that Jesus is the only way. During a plane crash the Air Hostess is not unkind when she says the only way out is this way, follow me. Letting people go the other way where the plane is burning is the unkindness.

It is incredible for me that Jesus chose the woman at the well to be the first missionary. The first person to tell the message outside of His inner circle that He is the Christ, the Messiah. He chose a broken, sinful adulteress to tell His message to the world.

We already live in a type of hell where Humanity has been separated from God. This life is brutal and hard as nails, and there are people who would shoot you and then laugh while they pick up the bullets. People will rip you to pieces and trample on the remains. Yet God is still present here, His Holy Spirit softening the blows. Imagine when He is not. I know God has protected and been with me throughout my life. I don't want to live without Him.



Chapter 8

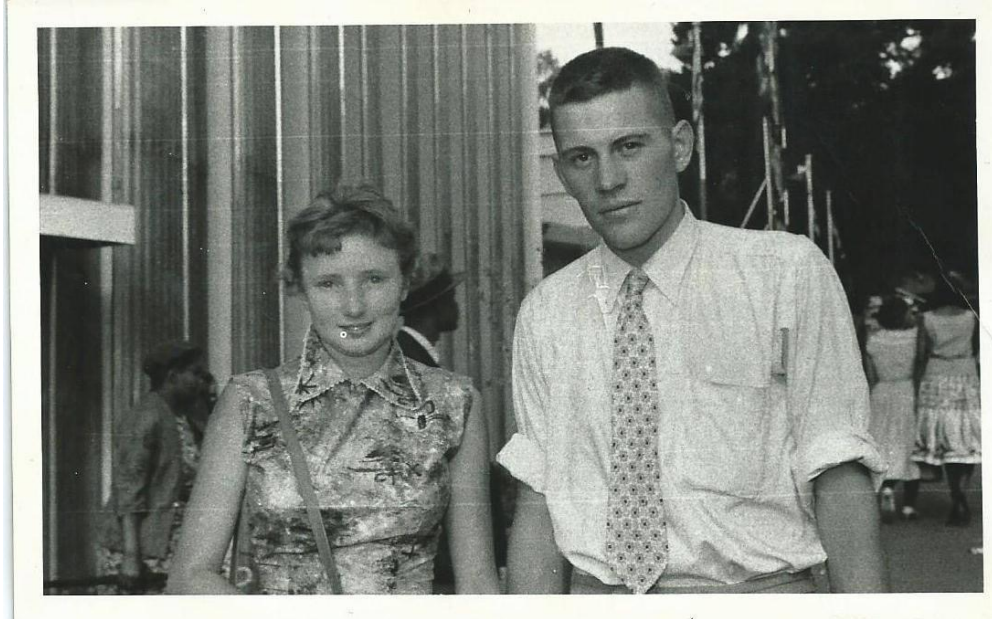
My personal journey



I know that I know that I know that God is real. I know Jesus is real. I experienced Him. Five years ago, I lost my job for the second time. This was the job that brought me to the United States. South Africa is an amazing, beautiful country with amazing warm caring people. God's country. It also has a lot of challenges. When I was given the opportunity to move here for a startup company that needed my unique Science skills my family knew that we had to take it. Unemployment in South Africa is a staggering 35%, one of the highest rates in the world. For kids under 25 unemployment is estimated to be 50%. Even a college degree does not guarantee you a job. Opportunities are very limited. For the future of our children, we had to look elsewhere.

I was happy living in South Africa. We had a beautiful house with a huge incredible lush garden, a heated swimming pool, 5 bedrooms, 2 studies, 2 living areas, 4 bathrooms. We renovated the house to be our dreamhouse and added everything we ever wanted. We had a small group of friends that we had Bible study with every Thursday. We had dinner together at each family's house for alternating weeks. Linda was a caterer and dinner at her house was always the highlight of the month. This group of friends were closer than family. My husband and I both had good jobs. Our kids went to a good school. We were relatively unscathed by the rampant crime in South Africa. Close friends who lived a block from us, woke up in the middle of the night with armed assailants pointing guns at them. The wife was sexually assaulted in front of her tied up husband. By the grace of God their beautiful teenage daughter did not wake up and slept through the whole ordeal. We were spared the violent crime. We went to church every Sunday. The solid, perfect family.

I grew up in a dysfunctional family. My parents did the best that they could, but there was a lot of violent screaming matches. Almost daily, for as long as I can remember. Two beautiful people who I am sure loved each other at one point.



When you look at the pictures from their wedding there is a softness and mutual admiration in their eyes. By the time I was born 12 years after they got married, I never saw that softness.

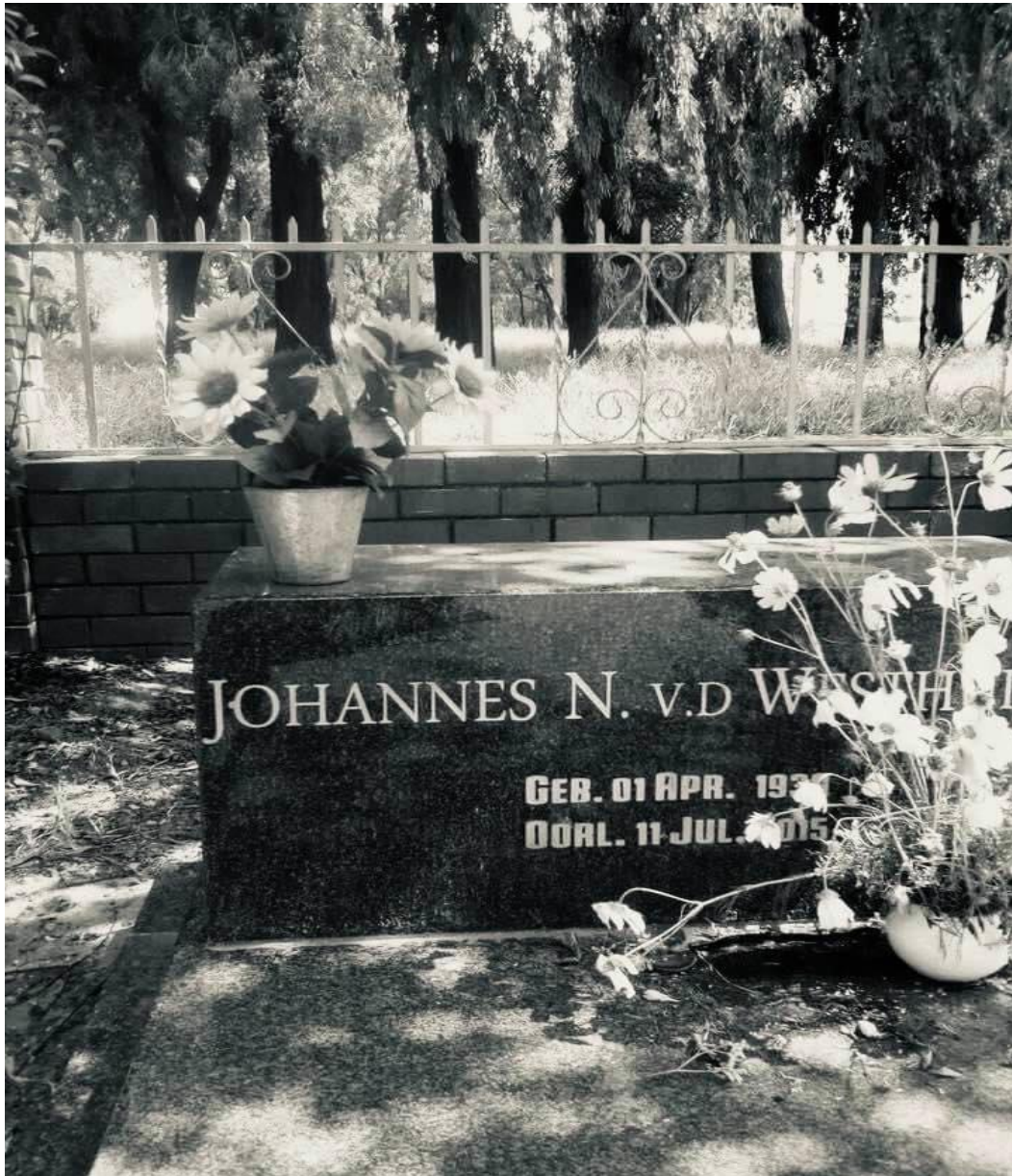


I remember my mother being locked out of the house by my father and sleeping in the dog kennel. She was not allowed to have her own car. My dad was a good, hardworking man. He never saw me, and he didn't seem to value my mother. The atmosphere in the house was heavy with daily resentment between my parents. I didn't know him. I never knew if he valued me, really valued me or cared about me. He had no interest in anything that was important to me. I know that he did his best as a father and my mom gave her best, but I came out of childhood severely damaged.



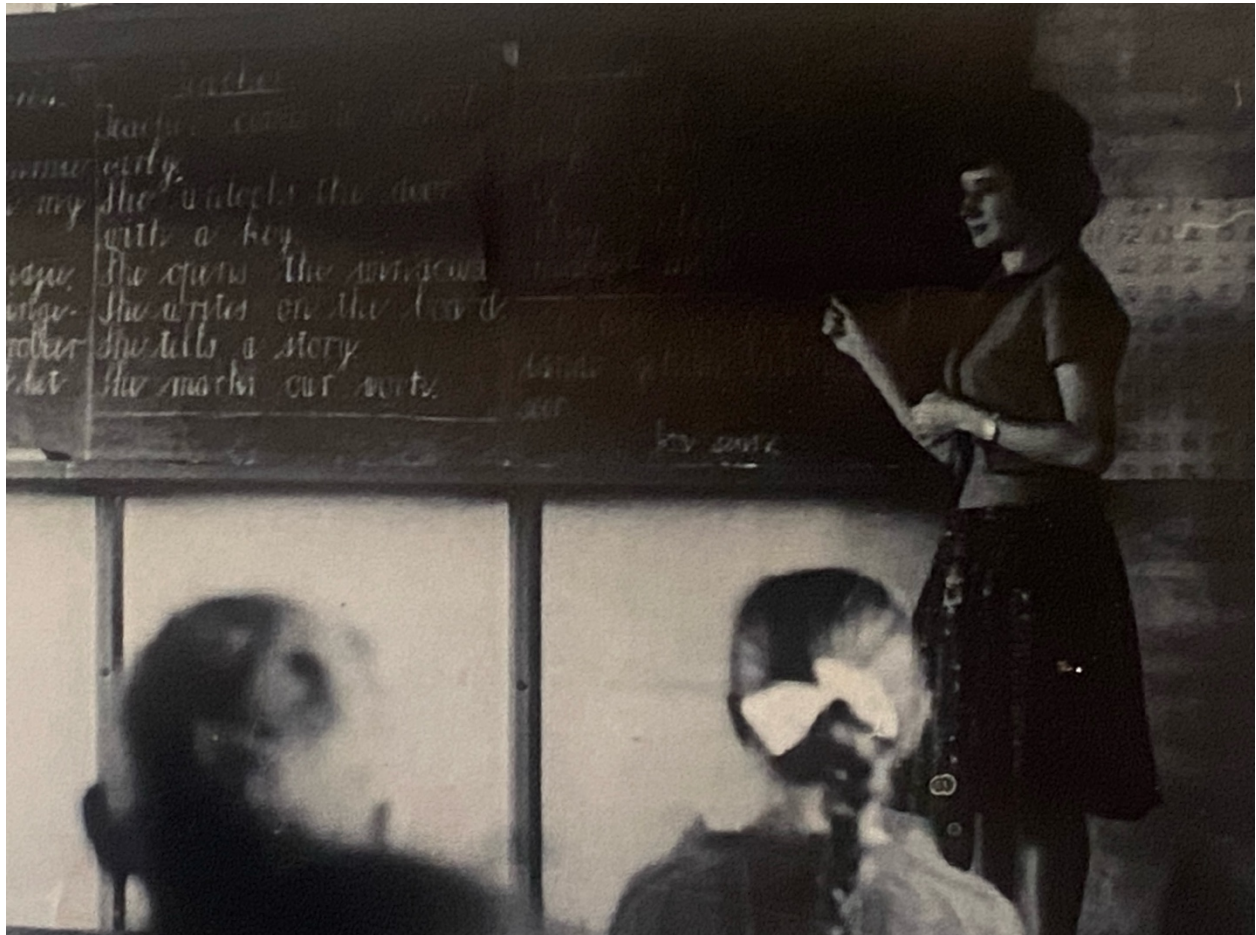
When I was 6 years old, I told my mom about sexual damage that was being done to me. Nothing changed for another 6-7 years, and I was finally able to step out of it age 13. My mom still blames me for this, even today. I have empathy for her and for my father. They were good people in a

severely unhappy marriage. My mom did the best she could in an impossible situation in her family without having the ability to discuss it with her partner. My dad had his own issues growing up with a clinically depressed mother and a father who died suddenly when my dad was 15. My dad also struggled with crippling depression that made him unable to be present with his family. The last 5 years of his life he was non-functional. He rarely came out of his room, didn't eat and became thin as a skeleton, didn't shower and hardly talked to anyone. We found letters in his room after he died, that he wrote to God, pleading for help. I don't know that my father ever found the help he was begging for or ever managed to escape the hell he was in here on earth. I know that he has found it now, safe in the arms of Jesus.



My mother is dedicated and giving. Her life revolved around her children. She was a beautiful woman with striking good looks. I loved and still love both, and I am grateful for the opportunities

that they gave me, such as paying for my studies. I'm grateful that they did their best for me. I know God gave them to me and where their human nature failed me, he uses even that to my benefit, like he will use my human failures to my children's benefit.



My childhood left me severely dysfunctional, with no sense of my value. Never feeling loved or seen or appreciated. It was like I was invisible in the house that I grew up in. I remember as a teenager begging my father for curtains for my bedroom. When I had to get dressed with the light on anyone could look in and I felt exposed. We lived in the middle of nowhere and my father blatantly dismissed my request. This made me feel unworthy of his protection. He had his reasons, but his chauvinistic worldview meant he didn't explain them to me. When I was 6 years old, I went to the only person alive who I trusted to protect me, my mother, and asked her to help stop sexual damage being done to me. I had to stop it myself at age 13 after years of it ongoing.

My life was a strange mix between an idyllic upbringing on a serene farm, owning a horse and a pony and being rejected and missed by the people who should have loved and protected me the most.



I grew up in a small town that started in the 1950's to support the apartheid government's solution to provide fuel to the country. South Africa does not have any natural oil resources, but they have a lot of coal. The country was in the grip of the unfair, dehumanizing, evil apartheid system and the skunk of the world at the time. They realized that they were not going to get oil from anyone, so the government started an oil and gas company that commercialized the Fischer- Tropsh process developed by the Germans during WWII for the same reason, to provide fuel from coal for the Nazis who didn't have access to oil. The farmland that the company SW, was built on was in my family for generations. I felt a deep connection to SW because of this. In high school the cool, popular, rich kids that I envied were the kids whose parents worked for the company.

In my mind working for SW was the pinnacle of success. I never dreamed that I could work there. I didn't think I was good enough or had what it takes. I didn't really have a plan of what I wanted to do after school. My sister went to medical school and my parents were in awe of this achievement. For my parents there were 3 important people in the world, the pastor, the doctor and the bank manager. Those were the people who counted. Because I wanted my parents to see me, I also applied to medical school. One night my mom came into my room and from her face I knew that something was terribly wrong. With a grave face and solemn voice, she said we just heard that you were not accepted into medical school. I almost burst out laughing, the situation felt comical. I didn't really care; my heart was not set on becoming a medical doctor.

I studied Science with the intent to re-apply for medical school after my first year, but my heart was not really in it. Halfway through my first year of studies I got my first job as a restaurant server and the freedom of making my own money overwhelmed me. I stopped going to class and just partied. I failed miserably in school and wasted my parents' money. Calling them to let them know I will not be passing was an incredibly difficult phone call to make, but they remained supportive and understanding. They continued to pay for my studies even after this failure.

I always liked Science and had a teacher who made it a lot of fun during high school. I loved learning and did have ambition and passion driving somewhere deep inside me. I wanted to succeed but never believed that I could accomplish anything significant. To my surprise I completed my master's degree Cum Laude followed by a PhD in Organic Chemistry, Natural Products elucidation. We studied a tree that grows in Southern Zimbabwe and managed to identify and synthesize novel components from this tree. A PhD in Chemistry is a major achievement, since it's not an easy subject matter. God was guiding my steps. If it was up to me, I would be a minimum wage waiter for the rest of my life. God protected and kept me. I was doing a lot of things wrong, drinking, sex and partying. God still stayed by my side, calming the demons surrounding me that were threatening to consume me. God held me up back then 30 years ago and He is still upholding me today.

The day my sister received her medical degree my father was overwhelmed and shaking from head to toe. You could see the excitement and pride pouring out of him. He could hardly contain himself when her name was called. When I received my PhD, he was much more subdued. It wasn't the same level of achievement in his eyes. He was still happy for me and drove the 180 miles to celebrate with me, but his eyes were not shining the way it was with my sister.

I don't know why there was this complete disconnect between me and my earthly father, I just remember it always being there. As a young child I knew he liked my sister more than he liked me and I would test it. She would ask something of him, and I would wait a few days and ask the same thing, testing his reaction. He always responded positive to her and negative to me. This happened when I was 3 or 4 years old. Intuitively back then I didn't feel completely loved or treasured. It reinforced to me that I didn't matter as much to him. He absolutely adored my older brother who they adopted when they couldn't have children. They then conceived me and my sister naturally. My brother was my father's life. He took him everywhere on the farm and probably dreamed of handing the farm over to his son one day to have his legacy live on. My dad held that view of the world, that men were the head of the household and mattered a bit more. My brother suffered a stroke as a baby shortly after they got him. He was sick with a high fever, and they took him to the

doctor who prescribed medicine. They went to a county fair after the doctor, it was the height of summer and they bundled up their sick baby in a stroller and spend the day walking in the blazing sun. That lead to my brother having a stroke. My dad never forgave himself for that and spend the rest of his life making it up to my brother. It consumed him from inside.

My sister was popular in high school, she was South Africa's version of the prom queen. She had several boyfriends. I did not. Looking back, I believe I had an aloof aura around me. Everything about me screamed leave me alone, yet I wanted nothing more than to be seen and loved. As a teenage girl I spent many, many hours on the farm walking in the field pouring out my teenage heart to God. I was so intense, and everything felt so critically important back then. One afternoon I stumbled over a rock and went tumbling down a little hill. At the bottom of the hill, I sat for a few seconds with a bruised ego. In that moment I felt God chuckling with me, saying child chill a bit, you are so serious. None of these things that are so critically important to you right now really matters. I got you in the palm of my hand. I am with you. 30 years from now when you are sitting in your office in Texas reflecting on this moment you are not every going to remember what you were so worried about. OK, God didn't say that last part in the moment, but I felt Heaven's calming and soothing presence.

I continued to fervently pray for a boyfriend almost every day. I believed that if I had a boyfriend everything will be perfect, and all my insecurities and brokenness would just disappear, and life would not hurt so much anymore. I spent many hours begging God to send me someone. One night sitting on my bed in my room with the blue carpet I opened my Bible and the first thing I saw was a date. In that moment I knew that God was answering me and giving me confirmation that he would send me someone. I knew the date was significant in some way to the boy God would send me. On that warm summer night in 1992 I underlined the date. 7 years later in 1999 I met the boy who would go on to become my husband. He was not the type of man that I was attracted to. My 'type' were successful, strong, confident men who just strides trough life, men who had it all figured out. The type of man that you feel safe with, that you know will have a solution for every problem. My husband was not like that, he was reserved and quiet. He was also not overwhelmed by me. We met and started dating and 6 months later we were sitting on a rock in Bloemfontein, the college town we both studied and said to each other that maybe we should get married. I was not pursued by someone who felt they could not life without me. We were both very unsure. I recalled the date that God gave me 7 years prior. I couldn't remember exactly what date it was and went back to look. The date underlined in my Bible 7 years before was my husband's birthday. We were sitting on the grass in the courtyard in front of the Chemistry building when I told him about my prayer and how God answered, and he looked at me and said we should not doubt anymore. We got married and were happy for 16 years. I still didn't feel completely accepted and treasured. I was still searching for acceptance. I wasn't even the most important woman in my husband's life. I remember us having a huge argument when we found out we were pregnant for the second time, because he was more concerned about his mother's reaction than mine.

I saw the whisper of God's presence around me, working in my life. Shortly after I found out I was pregnant for the first time I went to my doctor for confirmation. He conducted a routine pap smear that caused some bleeding. He sent me for an ultrasound at a gynecologist who saw something on the ultrasound that he did not like, and he told me to come back a week later to confirm his negative finding. It was a very stressful time. A friend and her husband came to my house, and she asked if

she could pray for me. She stood behind me and prayed in a language that I did not understand, and I could feel warmth flowing down my back where she was touching me. The following week nothing was wrong on the ultrasound.

When I first moved back to my hometown shortly after getting married, I really wanted to work for SW but there were no openings. I got a job 60 miles away in Johannesburg and had a 2-3 hour commute every day. I was on a business trip when God gave me a message 'your feet will return' and to me that meant that I would have the job that I had been praying for. A job opened at the company, and I started working there in 2006.

The downslide started in 2013. I got into the war with my female boss G. She meticulously and ruthlessly got rid of me. Being out of job in South Africa doesn't leave you with many options. Although God did not answer my prayers to protect my job, it's not accurate to say that He was silent. When the victimization first started, I would often sit at my desk in the open area of our lab and emotion would just get the better of me. The rest of my team ignored me and pretended that they didn't see my pain. But the uneducated cleaner sent me scripture text messages and he would walk past my desk and ask how I am doing. We developed a close friendship, and we would often sit outside the building to pray together. He was a rock for me. In his free time, he was a pastor who was on fire for the Lord. The shack that was his church was in a community that was unable to support him financially in any way. Therefore, he took this minimum wage job that paid the South African equivalent of \$250 per month. But he was on fire for the Lord.

I sometimes wonder about this discrepancy in wealth, and why I grew up privileged with opportunities that came my way, while someone like my pastor friend struggles in extreme poverty. I don't think God loves me more than He loves my friend. We all have struggles and pain. God's primary concern is not to make us comfortable and happy in this life. That would not be the most loving thing, His main concern is preparing us for eternity. And refining us. I heard the story about the parody in the Bible comparing our journey in faith with silver being purified by the silversmith. The silversmith keeps a close eye on the silver purification process when it is put in the fire, because it can be destroyed by the heat. And how does the silversmith know when the silver is ready? When he can see his reflection in it. This is exactly how God works with us, He allows His children to be purified in pain and struggles, but He is always close by keeping a watchful eye. Remember that even death is a gain, because then we spend eternity surrounded by love and peace the likes we never experienced here on earth. For we suffer now but a moment, but this does not compare to the beauty and joy that we will experience for eternity.

God does also bless us in this life. He does step in and fight on our behalf, I have seen it. He is present and helping us as His children. He gives us gifts in this life. Prayer is an immensely powerful weapon that shapes our reality. Prayer changes things. Just remember that our temporary happiness and comfort is not His primary will, but even the crumbs that fall off the table from God is more amazing a gift than what we can accumulate in a lifetime of our own effort.

I went through two very unfair disciplinary actions at work in South Africa. The first one, G was off work for 6 weeks and had a person standing in for her. I was leading a team that developed a new product that was revolutionary for the company and generated a lot of attention, we were awarded accolades during fancy company dinners. I remember flying to Hamburg, Germany for a day just to meet with the advertising team to support the launch of the product. We planned to

have the launch at In Cosmetics in Paris in 2013 and I was asked to lead the presentation. I committed to have our data published and peer reviewed so that we could claim our product is not only good because we say so, but our claims were scrutinized and endorsed by industry experts. I had a very tight timeline to deliver with a lot of eyes from the company executives on me. And G was not available. While she was out, I pushed for the publications to be approved by her substitute so that we could meet our deadline for the presentation in Paris. The launch and presentation were a resounding success. I knew she was not going to like me pushing for the publication in her absence, but naively thought she would approve the result of a successful launch. That her team performing well would reflect on her well and that would make her happy.

G was livid when she returned and found the work had progressed in her absence. I received data that supported the benefit of our novel cosmetic product and had a long chain of back-and-forth email communication during the due diligence process to determine the authenticity and ownership of the data, including from the company IP advisor confirming that the data belonged to our company, and confirmation that I am free to use it in whichever way I needed to. It turned out that we did not have copyright for the data. A relatively minor oversight at the time it was discovered. Because the oversight was caught early, I was able to easily rectify it by just adding the reference for the previous publication. G called me into her office where she gave a scathing lecture and referred to my article that was just accepted for publication in a prestigious American journal for Cosmetic products as mediocre and that she was ashamed that her name was associated with it. I told her that the article has been scrutinized during the peer review process and the mishap of a team of people missing the reference for the data was already corrected. That was not good enough for her. She was angry that I pushed through the publication when she was off sick. She was jealous of the attention that my work was getting, and this was her typical *modus operandi*. Before and after me she got rid of several people that she didn't get along with or who outshone her in any way. People who like me then went on to have stellar careers at other companies.

G tried very hard to get me fired for that mishap that my team made. And in South Africa getting fired is a career death sentence. In the USA resilience and rebounding from failure is seen as positive traits, in South Africa failure is not tolerated. Furthermore, there is only a handful of specialty chemical companies in the country that a Scientist could work for. I remember the shock when I received the notification for my disciplinary that may end my career. A career that was at the top of the world at the time, with patents, publications and world-stage presentations and leading the launch of a patented groundbreaking product just a few months before.

At the same time my subordinate was blatantly sexually harassed by our shared supervisor when she accompanied him on her first ever business trip. When I reported the blatant sexual harassment to G, she told me that she was glad that this happened in our 'family'-group who love each other so we could protect his 'small mishap'. He cornered his subordinate in an elevator after they had dinner and started caressing her arm and kissing her. He made inappropriate suggestions to have her come to his room. She said no and called her husband. All this was ok to G, who said that we needed to protect him. She called him into her office and had a 30-minute private and confidential, stern talk with him. That was the sum of the consequence for him. I had a team of people assist me with due diligence on a data source. Our IP advisor missed the reference and recommended to me that I was free to use the data. It was discovered and corrected in time before the final publication. Even after publication we could still have published a correction. But I

deserved to be axed. My line manager blatantly sexually harassed several females in the group, but he was loyal, and G liked him.

My Christian friend K who worked with me as a Scientist supported me because she knew about the sexual harassment that was swept under the carpet. K put her own job on the line to publicly advocate for me. We spent many afternoons praying in her car.

I was found guilty. I remember crying for the whole 20 minutes that the chairman was reading my 'sentence'. I could not believe it. I did not understand where God was. Why he allowed this unfairness to happen. I was humiliated, hurt, frustrated, angry, confused. So many emotions. I was so broken that my job was my value and it felt like it was stripped away from me. The foundation that I was building was slipping under my feet and there was absolutely nothing that I could do about it. I felt powerless. In the background I also think that God was healing me from finding my identity in my job.

I fought back and appealed the finding and had an amazing older gentleman from the trade union that I belonged to support me. He worked hard on my case and was supportive and caring. I remember before the appeal hearing I had a very vivid dream about an older gentleman who would be the chairman of my appeal and in my dream, he said because you were unfairly treated and because all this was done to you out of spite I am overturning your conviction.

When I walked into the actual hearing I was surprised and hopeful to see that the chairman was the older gentleman from my dream. It was so weird that the stranger I didn't know but saw in my dream was now before me. I felt that God was with me and caring about the small details that I worried about. My dream was God's way of saying that I see you suffering unfairness, I see how you were treated, and I am fighting for you.

My case worker and I worked extremely hard on my appeal. I spent an hour emotionally advocating for the unfairness of the process that I was found guilty of during the first hearing. I had a stack of documentation showing that my team ensured me through due diligence that we owned the data and told me I was free to use it. That the charge against me that I recklessly used data and put the company at risk intentionally had no basis. After my hour-long emotional appeal, the chairman calmly crushed my enthusiasm and hope. He said that he felt too bad to interrupt my emotional appeal, but the intent of an appeal hearing is not to rehear the case. He said we only discussed items that were already considered during the original hearing and that he is only able to consider new evidence introduced during this new hearing, and we didn't introduce any new evidence. He said he will provide his decision in a week's time. I was completely deflated and fell into a deep depression.

A lot of stress and praying followed during that week. I remember the afternoon that we sat in my friend K's car begging God that if this process was unfair, that He should step in and direct the outcome. We asked God to bother the chairman so much that he simply could not ignore my case. The decision was supposed to come out Friday morning. I was at home Thursday morning when my union caseworker called. He said the chairman called him and told him that he just couldn't get my case out of his head, and it was keeping him awake. When the almighty God who created the Universe by speaking it into existence hears you and acts on your behalf, nothing can change it. The God who breathes stars. Even though no new evidence was introduced during the appeal

hearing, the chairman said he could not in good conscience uphold the original decision. He overturned it. I remember dancing around the house in relief. My two sweet toddler girls who were 3 and 5 at the time were dancing with me. They were not sure what we were celebrating but knowing we were happy about something. That was such a poignant, sweet moment. I had hope in that moment that everything was going to be good now. I naively thought work would go back to how it was before the negativity. I was sure things would work out. Things did work out, but not at all how I expected. It worked out so much better than I could have ever dreamed or expected or planned. I was heading to the United States. Never in my wildest dreams could I have thought that I had anything to offer the most advanced, richest and sophisticated society in the world.

I know God was with me. I know he heard my pleas and the pleas of the people who supported me, my friend K and the dear sweet cleaner/pastor D. I know that I had a vivid dream before the appeal meeting. I know I saw the chairman in my dream, a chairman I never met before. I know that he said he heard me and the evidence I presented convinced him but unfortunately his hands were tied by bureaucracy and there was nothing he could do. I know we begged God that if this was unfair that He should step in. I know God bugged that chairman. I know that when the almighty Creator of the universe bugs someone on your behalf, they will not sleep. They will go outside of bureaucracy and change things. God is in control of this world. I have felt and seen Him work powerfully in my life. I know He can and will do the same in your life.

After this victory things did not get easier. It got worse. G launched a second attempt to fire me. I used a tool that I found in one of the drawers in the laboratory to do an experiment. The tool didn't have a tag, but I needed a knife to scrape some adhesive off a plate and a lot of tools in our lab didn't have tags, so I used it. It was a safe minor process that anyone doing arts and crafts would routinely do at home. The safety inspector just happened to come to my lab to do their inspection right at the moment that I was using the tool, and this was cited as a safety incident. Again, I was targeted. My second disciplinary. During my second hearing I submitted evidence and photos showing that untagged tools were everywhere in the lab. A reluctant colleague friend E who frequented the same church as me never forgave me for calling her to testify to confirm that untagged tools was a common occurrence. I lost another friendship that day. For some naïve reason I thought E would be ok with confirming the truth. She was not and felt that I unfairly exposed them and dragged them into my problems. This chairman found me guilty and said that even though others are guilty of the same offences, that is not an excuse. I was guilty of breaking the rule and he recommended that steps should be taken against the other people who also broke the same rule. I'm sure G was happy about the outcome but unhappy about the recommendation that others also needed to be punished for breaking the same rule, because these were her friends. And despite the recommendation, nothing happened to anyone else for breaking the same rule I did. The chairman was at least merciful and didn't fire me- which is what G asked for, he just gave me a final warning. This time I didn't appeal and just accepted it. It felt a little fairer, because I did break a lab rule and deserved some consequences.

Something inside me could not just sit back and accept the blatant mismanagement and abuse. I fought against the unfairness of victimization and abuse from G with every ounce of energy and mental capacity that I had. I poured everything I had into fighting the severe consequences of my relatively minor mistakes compared to my line manager who blatantly used his position of power to sexually harass subordinate/s to only get a slap on the hand and a wink to wish him well. I was very passionate in my effort, and I was on my knees begging God to be with me every step along

the way. I built and submitted a strong case and made life very uncomfortable for G. She didn't really have any defense. What saved her was that the subordinate who was sexually harassed refused to testify.

Then came the company restructuring. The restructuring to lay off a significant percentage of the company. In South Africa this is a career death sentence. Once you lose your job, you don't have many other options. Game over. The rules of the restructuring process were very clear. Three strict criteria had to be followed, the only consideration was whether the job description significantly changed, the number of years of specific experience and qualification level. My husband's job did not significantly change, and he was given a 'green' job. My job did not change either. My job was a very specialized position that allowed me to be granted an O-1 visa in the United States two years later. An alien of extra-ordinary ability, because of the unique and highly specialized nature of skills that I have built up over a decade. Those skills allowed me to be granted this highly specialized category of visa. The description for the O-1 nonimmigrant visa category is specifically designed for individuals with extraordinary ability in certain fields. It allows foreign nationals who possess exceptional expertise in their respective fields to temporarily live and work in the USA. To qualify for an O-1 visa, applicants must demonstrate extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, athletics, or the motion picture or television industry. They must provide evidence of sustained national or international acclaim and recognition for their achievements. The O-1 visa is intended for individuals with extraordinary and scarce ability and is subject to specific requirements and evidence criteria. Scientists and researchers eligible for an O-1 visa must be able to show that they've received a major internationally recognized award (like the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize) or similar evidence.

The greatest country on earth granted my application for an O-1 visa within 3 days for the same job that back in South Africa G convinced people anyone could do. G convinced the new management team that people without any of the specialized experience that I had could and should get my job. Against the company policy to use restructuring to solve HR issues.

I remember the day I was interviewed to re-apply for my job. I had a stack of supporting documentation prepared in a professionally binded portfolio, including several peer reviewed articles, patents and awards. The executive team that knew me and were aware of my achievements had since moved on to new roles and I had to face a new team who did not know me or my work. G had access to them, I did not. She was able to convince them that I should be replaced by someone from a completely different field who had zero experience in my field (against company rules and requirements that required objectivity during the restructuring process). There was no other reason than an HR-correction to replace me and this was against the reorg requirements. I ticked all the boxes. I had a higher qualification, I was longer with the company in the highly specialized role, I had the specific experience required. That didn't matter. I had a colleague who did not meet the qualification requirement at all since the process specified of a master's degree which she did not have. She got her job back. I did not. I drowned in the unfairness of it. I was devastated. I was humiliated. I was broken. I begged God to protect me, and He did not protect me in the way I was expecting. That was a hard season. I didn't know that what God had in mind for me was so much better than I could hope and dream. God had in mind to move me to the United States and give my children a future and security that I was just not able to provide in South Africa.

My depression, years of harassment and victimization at work cumulating in the unfair and devastating loss of a job in a country that does not really offer the ability to recover from it, led to my first breakdown. I just shut down and I couldn't move, I could hardly breath. I needed help. I had a great therapist who booked me off for a couple of weeks to mend. I came back to work to an email from G cc'ing the new top management of the company with scathing comments about how unethical I was because I went into her office claiming I was unable to function and then found myself two medical physicians including a board-certified psychiatrist with a 20-year career who gave me a free vacation. Yes, sure that's what happened. The scathing email from G was not totally unexpected at that point. The fact that my closest Christian sister K agreed with her was devastating. I really can't describe the feeling of being locked into a mental hospital knowing the only way out is if someone else says ok you can go now. The doors are locked, you can't just walk out and go to your car. You are stripped of your freedom and your humanity. The ward is locked. There is no way out. My husband brought two very scared looking little girls who had to visit me in my hospital bed. And my dearest friend who has for 2 years intensely fought by my side would believe that I would be callous about such a situation. I'm still not able to make sense of that. Nor make sense of why she would say that God turned off a switch in her head.

My pastor/cleaner friend D kept praying for me. While I was caught up in the turmoil of being pushed out of a job that I exceeded in God was working in the background. An ex-colleague who moved to the states a decade before me started consulting for a startup company in Texas. They were looking for someone with my exact expertise, a role almost created for me. He didn't know me, but he had friend in South Africa who knew my husband and they knew that my previous job was exactly the skills they required in America. I remember talking with my pastor/cleaner friend D and asking him to pray for my job in South Africa. I didn't want to move. South Africa was familiar. I had a life there. I had family and friends who surrounded me. I knew how stuff worked. D assured me that he would pray for my job in South Africa, but that he felt God also wanted him to pray about the 'America stuff' as he called it. I remember being a little annoyed at that. I wanted things to happen my way. I was praying for a specific thing and prescribing to God what the outcome should be. D walked over to me one afternoon while we were having coffee in the lab, and he said God gave me scripture for you. God has just told me that He will give you the ear of the King. Since then, I have interacted with many high-level individuals from private equity NY banker Kingmakers to CEOs, to VPs. The type of people I could never dreamed of interacting with when I was working in an obscure lab in the middle of nowhere in South Africa, but I don't think that prophecy has come true yet. I will write about it how it came true in my next book.

Within all the pain and rejection and humiliation happening at work I knew that I needed to get baptized. I craved to be closer to God. In my pain I needed Him. I asked D to baptize me in the swimming pool of a friend one sunny afternoon. The summer afternoons in South Africa have an incredibly vivid, distinct blue-sky color contrasted with lily white clouds. Getting baptized was an incredible experience, surrounded by my husband, children and close friends, it was deeply spiritual, deeply soothing, deeply cleansing. I didn't like the storms around me, but I was clinging to God. If I could only touch the seam of His garment everything would be ok. And God was holding on to me much more than I ever could cling to Him. The moment we stepped back into the house, still at the door leading in from the garage the phone rang. It was a call from America. The timing was just too exact to ignore. I was still hesitant; I was still fighting for my job in South Africa. The choice was not mine though, there were no more options for me in South Africa. The

doors were completely and absolutely closed. I started working as a consultant out of South Africa for the company in Texas.

I traveled to the USA to meet my new employer. I remember the first time I saw Houston. It was so incredibly huge. I was overwhelmed by my first visit to the United States. Everything seemed so sophisticated and advanced. I thought the people who lived here must be incredibly smart and have things figured out. When I visited the startup company at that time while consulting out of South Africa, I walked through a room that they used as a storage closet, and I silently claimed the area under my feet in Jesus mighty name. I later planned and converted that exact storage closet into my state-of-the-art application testing laboratory that I built from scratch.

After about a year of consulting out of South Africa, my employer started talking about sponsoring a visa/green card and a move to the USA. My husband and I started talking about the potential move. We were very happily married and had an established and happy life. We both had excellent jobs, good friends, a beautiful house. Our marriage wasn't perfect, and my husband was slightly absent during the pain and rejection that I was experiencing at work. He was there, but not fully behind me. My therapist commented later that when I talked about how friends were supporting me, that I never really mentioned my husband, she was a bit perplexed by his absence during my storms. He also set his mom's needs above mine, no doubt that he valued her feelings and opinions higher valued than mine. Despite this we were best friends. If you told me back then that I would be a divorced, single mother living in Texas in a few months I would have laughed at you. Yet one afternoon sitting in our lush green garden we were talking about the potential move and this absolute knowing thought/warning came up that if we move to the USA, we will get divorced.

This sometimes happens to me, these gentle warnings of the Holy Spirit. When I was a poor student in college my bicycle was my only means of transport for a while before my dad bought my first car. I remember walking back from class one morning and I could not yet see the spot behind the building where my bicycle was tied to a pole, but in that moment before seeing, I knew that I would walk around, and my bicycle would be gone, and I would have to walk the 5 miles home. When you are poor and a bicycle is your only means of transport, it is a big deal to have it stolen. Walking around the corner and seeing it was indeed gone was a bit less of a shock because I knew it was going to happen. It was as if the Holy Spirit was preparing me. At that time sitting in my garden, talking about moving to the USA and getting a warning out of the blue about divorce it was such a ludicrous thought that I instantly dismissed it. At that time, I firmly believed that divorce was a sin, and I would never do it. I judged people who got divorced, I even more harshly judged adultery. More than that I was happy and deeply connected to my husband. We were one flesh; we did everything together. We had a single household budget, and we were working together to build our life. We were a team, and we were doing very well.

The small town that I lived in, in South Africa were severely affected by the reorg of our company. Most people depended on the company for their livelihood. Shortly after losing my job, I gave testimony at my church about the goodness of God and how He was my provider. That amid the anxiety, hurt and pain of unemployment in the context of South Africa's realities I trust my loving Father and I know he will provide for me. I didn't really see a way out of my situation with rampant unemployment in South Africa, even for highly skilled, highly educated people like me but I kept trusting God's goodness.



The only door that I was aware of had just solidly closed behind me. Yet I publicly proclaimed the goodness of God. I boldly told them that I will be back a year from now to tell them about how God has provided. And in August 2016 I did exactly that, I gave a second testimony about God moving me to America to take the role of Technical Director. I was on top of the world. I was also deeply wounded by the humiliation I just experienced losing a job I absolutely adored.

In September 2016 we moved to America and started over. One moment I had a beautiful house and lush garden surrounded by loving friends and family. We packed all that up for a little apartment that we rented in America, and it had a grey carpet that I hated. I had this constant fear and dread following me. There was no going back to South Africa. This was it, sink or swim. I had to learn to drive on the 'wrong' side of the road. At 40 I did not have a credit score. I didn't know the banking system. The visa process was scary. I felt constant fear. My husband came on a O-2 visa which meant that initially he was not allowed to work. I thought I would be ok with the sole financial responsibility of starting over in a new country. I was not, I was crushed by it. I was also surrounded by the type of men that were or at least pretended to be sure of themselves. My

boss was telling me how competent and worthy I was, that he was building his new company around my skills. I felt safe with him. I felt seen. We started a relationship that lasted 6 months. I think more than anything I was grabbing onto him to save me, to help me.

I was not trusting God. I was not looking to God to provide for me. I was fighting for myself in all the wrong ways. Making my life so much worse and more painful. Anyone who has gone through a divorce will tell you the violence associated with it. Even when you are the one who wants it. I was done with my marriage and blamed my husband for not fixing my brokenness and caught up in the excitement of someone else who appreciated and saw me. I often wonder why God sent me a husband that was so different from my 'type', and why our relationship had the deep cracks that I didn't fully see in South Africa but that concentrated and fractured under the immense pressure that we faced here. I also had feelings of immense guilt because of the choices I made. For years I drowned in it. I expected to step out of my marriage lightly and easily, and happily go on with my life. I convinced myself that my kids would be better off if I was happy, that growing up in a household where two people despised and resented each other every day created such a heavy atmosphere that you choke in it. Everyone in the family chokes in it, every day. I gave up too early to avoid the mistakes my parents made and made my life much more difficult. I was a single immigrant mom to two daughters who were severely damaged by the divorce and immigration. I was drowning again.

God gave me my husband. We were happy. But I was looking to marriage to satisfy and heal me. I was resenting my husband for not fixing me, for not leading and figuring it out. My marriage was a gift for 16 years and two incredible, beautiful, smart daughters were the result. They give my life so much richness and meaning. I love travelling with them and riding camels at the pyramids, or flying over the Victoria falls in Zimbabwe. It was not in God's will for me to get divorced, and it almost killed me. But even out of these ashes God is making beauty, my ex-husband is happily married to a beautiful woman who is kind to my children. I'm glad that he is happy and that we are finding some sort of rhythm in the ashes of what was our life together. I don't regret my marriage; it was a gift that I didn't fully appreciate. I focused on the broken parts, not the beauty. I expected the impossible from it. On my wedding night our master of ceremony read the song of Don Fransico ²⁶

So you say you can't take it, the price is too high
The feelings have gone it seems the river's run dry,
You could never imagine it could turn out so rough,
You given, given, given, still it's never enough.

Your emotions have vanished that once held the thrill,
You wonder if love could be alive in you still,
But that ring on your finger, was put there to say,
You'll never forget the words you promised that day.

Jesus didn't die for you because it was fun,
He hung there for love because it had to be done,
And despite of the anguish, his word was fulfilled.

²⁶ <https://elyrics.net>

Love is not a feeling it's an act of your will.
Love is not a feeling it's an act of your will.

Now I wouldn't try to tell you that it's easy to stand,
When Satan's throwing everything that's at his command,
But Jesus is faithful, his promise is true,
And the things that he asks he gives the power to do.

I didn't follow this. I felt unseen again and gave up on my marriage. God hates divorce because of the violence associated with it. God does not hate divorced people, but he hates the pain and devastation it causes. I experienced this violence. It's like being ripped in half. My family suffered immensely, but I also know that even for this God has mercy for me and like the woman at the well He can and will still use me.

Two years after moving to America I again lost my job. I just bought my first house in the USA and had not even started paying the mortgage. I was completely alone, with no options and no fall back. It was a terrifying moment. It felt like I was punched in the stomach and the breath squeezed out of me. I texted my pastor friend D back in South Africa. He sent me the verse in Psalm 30, weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. I believed it and took it literally and expectantly. The next morning, I woke up wondering how God was going to show up, expectantly looking forward to it. That afternoon a recruiter for a major oil and gas company contacted me through Linked In. Again, this job was a perfect fit for me, the job description was an exact copy of my skills and experience. The management team later told me that they instructed the recruiter to search globally for the best candidate and they were surprised that I was available with exactly the right experience and skills living in their backyard, in Houston. It was as if someone looked at my career and wrote the job description around that. It is just too perfect to be a coincidence.

That does not mean my current job has been perfect or easy, like my marriage it is very hard, and I felt like giving up a bunch of times. I feel inadequate, I'm bruised and broken from my past failures. I struggle and endure emotional abuse from a colleague who feels threatened by me. I take my eyes off God all the time and focus on the storms around me. Somehow, I forget what God has done before and don't trust that He will do it again. I struggle with addiction and anxiety. I'm far from perfect but I have seen God move in incredible ways in my life.

I know God is with me and I have His favor. He cares about the things that I care about. He provides for me. He hears my prayers. I don't like prosperity gospel that twists the truth and turn God into a type of genie that is just ready to jump at our command and give us everything exactly the way we prescribe. I have prayed for things that God didn't give me, and looking back I am very grateful that He didn't answer my prayers. I made a mess of the things God did give me, I failed at a very important mission, my marriage. God disciplined me and dealt with the callous way I handled the promise I made, there were times where I thought I would not survive the negative consequences, stress and loneliness that poured out of it. I suffered many years of agony following my divorce, but I also know that even though this was not God's will He also used it to grow me. Even in my pain and failure He never let go of my hand.

The things God has given me wasn't always permanent, I was pushed out of my first job even though God confirmed that I would get it before I got it. I also know that losing my job would not have happened if it wasn't in God's will, if there wasn't a purpose for me here in America. My current job that God provided in such an amazing way is stressful and overwhelming. I struggle with addiction, I'm still damaged and broken from lifelong trauma. There are a lot of people that will tell you that they don't like me or that I have done them wrong. I'm selfish and entitled a lot of the time, I get irritated easily. I act like a Karen sometime and just hope I don't get recorded and end up on social media. I'm impatient. I also know I am a daughter of the King of Kings, who planned and created me and who has never let me go but carried me every step of the way.

Chapter 9

Therefore what should be our conclusion in all this?



That moment that I was sitting in my garden when the warning came to me that a move to the USA would mean the end of my marriage, I believe God was warning me, preparing me. Guiding me. The God who created the Universe was invested in my life. The God who spoke the Universe into existence, who breaths stars had a plan for my life. He has been with me, guiding me and directing me. He has given me more than I could ever dream or fathom. I never dreamed I could work for the specialty chemical company that my friends' parents worked at, I never believed that I had what it takes. I grew up admiring American culture, seeing Hollywood and NASA and all the incredible things that Americans were doing and never in a million years did I even have a thought that I would end up living here, being an American citizen.

I don't know what the future holds. I'm still a single mother struggling with my mental health, but I know that God is with me. I know that when I start my day immersed in scripture that everything is possible. He gives me strength, and He pulls me up. He has a purpose for me. I don't understand everything about why the world is what it is, why we are asked to make eternity shaping decision based on limited information and knowledge. Like Paul I look into a mirror and see a blurred image. I just know that God is real. I also know that it doesn't make me naïve or less intelligent. God can be found through critical thinking and people who dismiss that are doing it out of fear. They really don't want there to be a God, because they know the implications. Therefore, they want to create the truth and the world that fits them, which is a world where Science has replaced God.

I have seen God do incredible things in my life. God connected me to the right people at exactly the right time, people who needed my skills the moment I needed a job. I still worry and stress. I struggle with addiction. I'm broken. I'm lonely. Things that happened in my childhood still hangs over my head like this dark suffocating cloud. I'm angry with God for allowing things to happen when I was 6 that changed my DNA. I'm like Elijah who saw the power of God dropping down

from heaven and standing in awe of how breathtaking God is, and the very next moment sitting hopeless and depressed under the tree fleeing from Jezebel scared to death.

I don't understand a lot of things. I don't know why we are in a situation and a reality where we can't see or experience God and must make an eternity implication decision to stay or be away from God, and if we do it in the wrong way, we face eternal damnation. It's like having 6 seconds to decide to take the elevator or the stairs during a fire, knowing the elevator might fall but the stairs are consumed by fire already. And people are screaming in your ear, decide, decide and make the right choice in the right way. That is what life feels like to me, 70 or 80 years to decide eternity with very little concrete information to go on. My big question is why, why a loving God who is almighty and all powerful created the world this way where we kind of must figure stuff out in the dark?

For me, maybe that is just the way it is. And me not liking it and shaking my fist at the heaven screaming this is wrong, a loving God cannot possibly create a world with this incredible implication for eternity this way. And then the silent, still, knowing peace spills through me. It just is. We are living in a kind of hell, separated from God in a broken world where children get raped and people are trampled on. Someone would shoot you 6 times and laugh at you laying on the ground bleeding. The selfishness and evil in this world are tangible. There is also something else here, a softness, protection, a cloud surrounding us softening the blows. I know that what we see in the physical world is not all there is. Incredible, perfect co-incidences happen, pointers happen. I know that I'm not on this journey alone. I also do a lot wrong and make stupid, selfish choices that harm others around me.

As a trained Scientist, disciplined to look at evidence presented to me I also look at the intricacy of the world around us and my gosh! It is clearly planned. We live on a planet that needs hundreds of things to be exactly just so that we can exist. We are surrounded by biological systems that appear to be engineered. Our DNA has coding in it, and we think this just happened? Somehow a blob of plasma, against the nature of entropy and increasing chaos just happened to combine with other blobs of plasma and built this incredibly, rare, complex, designed reality by chance and eons of time. And this is the smarter conclusion? That if you trust the design and engineering that you see around you, you are somehow stupid and naïve because the world is broken and difficult?

Yes, the world is broken and difficult and scary. Yes, it is scary that I am forced to make a choice about God based on very limited and unclear information. That God says you will do wonders in my name and I will say leave I don't know you. But it also is what it is. We are separated from God, living in a type of softened hell, making a choice on whether we trust God and we trust Jesus as the only way to God. It seems unfair, and incredibly scary that when this softness is taken away we will only be left with the brutal, hardness of untampered selfishness of evil. I don't want that for me, it scares me to death. I don't want it for my loved ones, and people in my life who have not yet fully made up their minds about God. Good people.

I think God made this world. A good and loving God. We turned our back on Him. And we shouldn't scream at the unfairness of the first people who made the choice on our behalf and how unfair that is. You would have made the same choice. You have made the same choice. I made the same choice to trust myself and not my creator. There was a man who lived over 2000 years ago who was different than everyone else. He had a bigger impact than anyone else in the history

of the world. He came from God to show us the way back. To allow ourselves to be colored purple when we don't even realize that we are blue, when we are adamantly blue not realizing we are dead. I don't understand why the world is the way it is, it just is. And I believe that I need to embrace the red of the blood of the lamb God sent us to change me so that I can stand in the purple of his presence. Using my intelligence and goodness I would not have created the world this way. I have the same rebellion in me that Adam and Eve had, thinking that I can do it better than God. That I would be more loving and create a world that is open and clear and not this complex mess of hurt. But I can't see everything, I see but a small, tiny part. I'm not as smart and knowing as I think I am. The accomplished scientists, Dawkins, Darwin, Hawking, Eistein may be incredibly smart people with keen observation, yet they are confined to their little area of experience and interaction. It's tiny, the whole field of physics or medicine is tiny compared to the complexities and intricacies and precision of the Universe and Biological life.

I have struggled with mental health and anxiety, addiction and depression my whole life and sought treatment from accomplished medical professionals, and I can tell you they don't know. I have been diagnosed with clinical depression, no it's bipolar type I, type II, bipolar depression, no it's not bipolar. We give you this medicine because we think it works, but we don't really know. This new one will be better. It works on a different part of the brain. The whole clinical research process is messy. It is not Grey's Anatomy where doctors are on top of the world and know and understand everything and have it figured out. At best, as humans we stumble through a haze of messiness and chaos in every field, even the ones that appear sophisticated on the surface. Even the field of science is not exempt from messiness. You can focus on a specific field and do experiments that prove your theory only to be contradicted later. Light behaves like a wave, no it's particles, no both. Don't have this misconception that Science is elegant and sorted out and proven and clear. It is not, just like us. And just because, highly smart, educated, accomplished human beings say something, or deny God, that does not make it true. They see a tiny part in their tiny field, and they may be great at what they do but the world is so much more complex and there is so much happening behind the scenes that we don't see.

Our President doesn't have it all figured out. No president ever had. Politics is a mess, it's not a saving force. We are stumbling our way through life hoping that it will all work out. We have no clue what we are doing.

God is real. Look at the evidence of design in our Universe, in our earth that is perfectly designed to support carbon-based life. God's fingerprints are all over the preciseness of our Universe and earth. We can see God in the sophisticated, complex language of our DNA. It codes us. Our world is not random and chaotic, it contains patterns, preciseness, complexity and design. It was made and planned. We were made and planned, we have a purpose. There is more to life than what we can see. I experience it in incredible coincidences, I see it in answered prayers. I pray and things change.

I'm still left in this scary, lonely reality. In the Disney movie Finding Dory there is the scene where Dory gets lost (again) and all you see is this huge black screen that zooms out and this tiny little fish in the middle of it. It resonated so much with me. I'm surrounded by this huge void, and I don't know what I am doing. But just keep swimming. Just keep trusting, knowing that even though things don't make sense, there is a Creator behind the scenes somewhere, and even though we are

disconnected right now for reasons I don't fully understand, He is there. He is good. He is love. He is helping me. He is real.

I know that when I start my day reading the Bible my day goes better. I have wind beneath my wings to face the haters and critics. It lifts me up. A relationship with God is a profound and transformative experience that brings immeasurable beauty and value into life. It goes beyond a mere religious affiliation or belief system, encompassing a personal connection with a loving and eternal being. A relationship with God is remarkable, meaningful, and essential to our existence.

One of the most captivating aspects of a relationship with God is the experience of His unconditional love and acceptance. Unlike human relationships that are flawed and conditional, God's love is unwavering and all-encompassing. It is a love that embraces and celebrates our uniqueness, our strengths, and our imperfections. In this love, we find deep comfort, security, and a sense of belonging.

God provides invaluable guidance and direction for navigating life's complexities. Through prayer, meditation, and scripture, we open ourselves to receive divine wisdom and insight. God provides a moral compass, offering guidance in decision-making, ethical dilemmas, and finding purpose. In moments of uncertainty, God's guidance becomes a steadfast support, leading us towards paths aligned with our true calling. God offers a profound sense of inner peace. God steps into our situation. A relationship with God is a profound and transformative experience that brings immeasurable beauty and value into life. It goes beyond a mere religious affiliation or belief system, encompassing a personal connection with a loving and eternal being. This connection allows us to draw strength from God during times of adversity, providing the resilience to face life's trials with courage, hope, and a sense of purpose.

God nurtures personal growth and transformation and offer an ongoing opportunity for self-reflection, introspection, and development. As we explore the depths of our souls and seek a deeper connection with God, we become more aware of our true selves, and cultivate virtues such as compassion, humility, and forgiveness, and strive for moral excellence. This transformative journey ultimately enables us to become the best versions of ourselves.

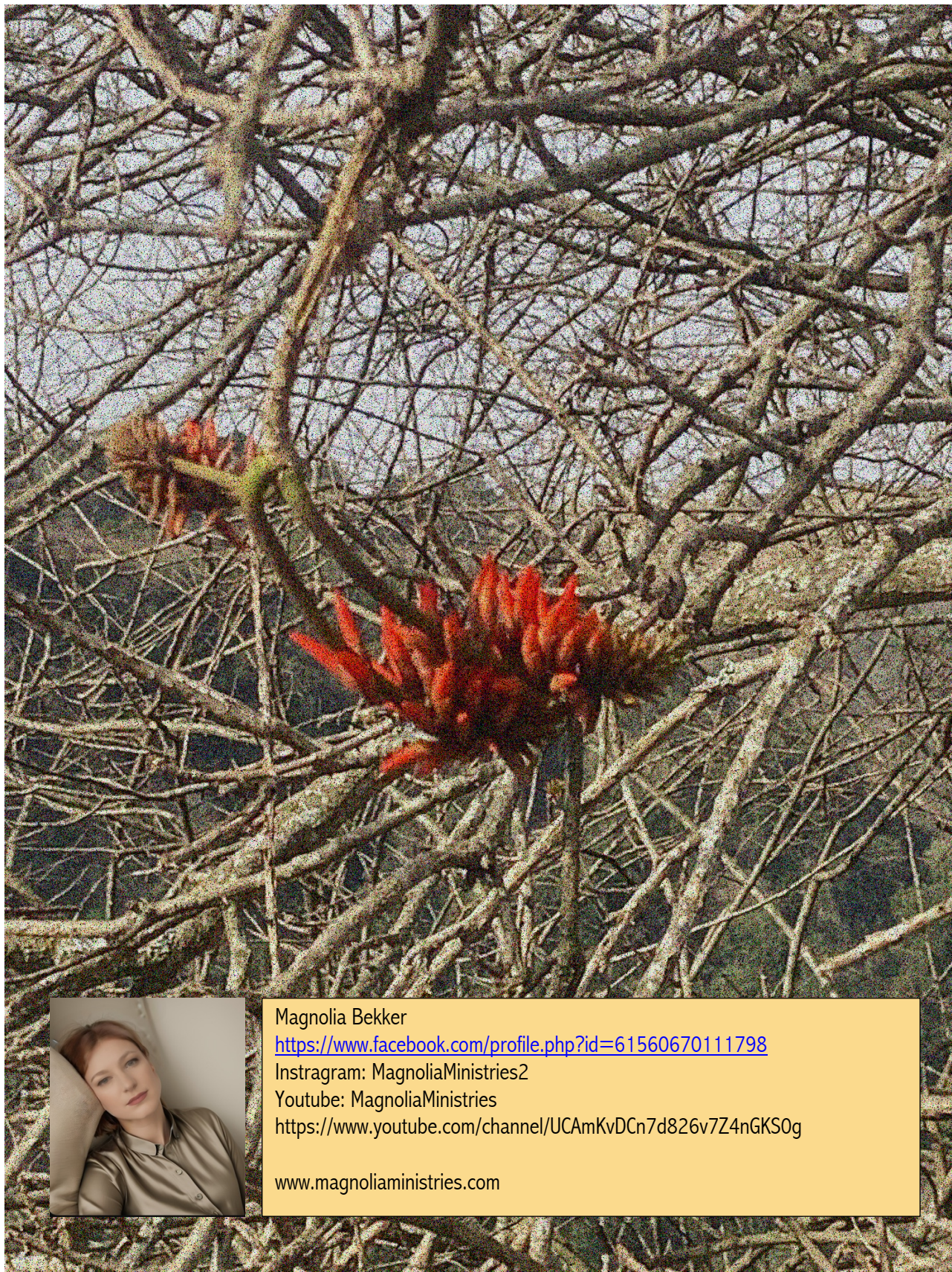
A relationship with God not only strengthens our connection with the divine but also fosters a sense of belonging within a community. In communal worship, prayer, and fellowship, we find support, encouragement, and a shared journey towards deeper meaning. The connection with fellow believers offers a network of relationships and a sense of belonging, where we can experience love, acceptance, and collective growth. In times of despair and uncertainty, a relationship with God instills a profound sense of hope and meaning. God's presence reassures us that there is a greater purpose to our existence beyond the materialistic pursuits of the world. It provides comfort and reassurance that trials and challenges are temporary, and that there is eternal significance in our lives. This hope empowers us to face difficulties with resilience, knowing that God's love and guidance will carry us through.

A relationship with God encompasses the beauty, value, and significance that goes beyond human comprehension. It offers unconditional love, guidance, inner peace, personal transformation, community, hope, and a profound sense of meaning. May we embrace the opportunity to cultivate

and deepen our relationship with God, allowing its beauty to permeate all realms of our lives, bringing fulfillment, purpose, and a deep connection with the eternal.

As for me and my household, we serve the Lord - sela





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