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**Jason M. Gates**

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**Apr 11, 2023**



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- Husband
- Father
- *Reader*
- *Thinker*
- *DevOps Engineer*
- Homeschool Speech & Debate Coach



## 1.1 Currently Reading

- *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), by Adam Smith
- *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (1940), by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles van Doren
- *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1973–1979), by F.A. Hayek

### 1.1.1 The Wealth of Nations

- Author: Adam Smith
- Publication Year: 1776
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/3300>
- Started on: 2021-12-03
- Finished on: ?

### 1.1.2 How to Read a Book

*The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*

- Authors: Mortimer J. Adler and Charles van Doren
- Publication Year: 1940
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/How-Read-Book-Classic-Intelligent/dp/0671212095/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+to+read+a+book&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/How-Read-Book-Classic-Intelligent/dp/0671212095/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+to+read+a+book&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: TBD

## Notes

### The Rules of Analytical Reading

- I. The first stage of analytical reading: Rules for finding what a book is about
  1. Classify the book according to the kind and subject matter.
  2. State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity.
  3. Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and outline these parts as you have outlined the whole.
  4. Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve.
- II. The second stage of analytical reading: Rules for interpreting a book's contents
  5. Come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words.
  6. Grasp the author's leading propositions by dealing with his most important sentences.
  7. Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.
  8. Determine which of his problems the author has solved, and which he has not; and of the latter, decide which the author knew he had failed to solve.
- III. The third stage of analytical reading: Rules for criticizing a book as a communication of knowledge
  - A. General maxims of intellectual etiquette
    9. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your interpretation of the book. (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say "I understand.")
    10. Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.
    11. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.
  - B. Special criteria for points of criticism
    12. Show wherein the author is uninformed.
    13. Show wherein the author is misinformed.
    14. Show wherein the author is illogical.
    15. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

### 1.1.3 Law, Legislation and Liberty

- Author: F.A. Hayek
- Publication Year: 1973–1979
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Law-Legislation-Liberty-statement-principles/dp/0415522293/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?crd=19F9F3DI9A7QM&dchild=1&keywords=law%2C+legislation+and+liberty&qid=1615752657&sprefix=law%2C+legis%2Caps%2C317&sr=8-3](https://smile.amazon.com/Law-Legislation-Liberty-statement-principles/dp/0415522293/ref=sr_1_3?crd=19F9F3DI9A7QM&dchild=1&keywords=law%2C+legislation+and+liberty&qid=1615752657&sprefix=law%2C+legis%2Caps%2C317&sr=8-3)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: TBD



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## 1.2 Past Reads

- *Pandemia: How Coronavirus Hysteria Took Over our Government, Rights, and Lives* (2021), by Alex Berenson
- *People Styles at Work and Beyond* (1999), by Robert Bolton & Dorothy Grover Bolton
- *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview* (2008), by W. Gary Phillips, William E. Brown, and John Stonestreet
- *Knowing God* (1973), by J.I. Packer
- *Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity* (2020), by Alisa Childers
- *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (2018), by Nabeel Qureshi
- *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World* (2019), by John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle
- *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (2019), by Greg Koukl
- *How Now Shall We Live?* (1999), by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey
- *The Prince* (1532), by Niccolò Machiavelli
- *Five Dialogues* (ca. 350 BC), by Plato
- *Cultural Apologetics* (2019), by Paul Gould
- *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), by René Descartes
- *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), by David Hume
- *Vaccines: Truth, Lies, and Controversy* (2021), by Peter C. Gøtzsche
- *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask* (2020), by Thaddeus Williams
- *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (2009), by Glenn Sunshine
- *Covid: Why Most of What You Know is Wrong* (2021), by Sebastian Rushworth
- *The Manager's Path: A Guide for Tech Leaders Navigating Growth & Change* (2017), by Camille Fournier
- *Mere Christianity* (1952), by C.S. Lewis
- *The Social Contract* (1762), by Jean-Jaques Rousseau
- *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), by John Locke
- *The Constitution of the United States of America* (1787)
- *The Unicorn Project: A Novel about Developers, Digital Disruption, and Thriving in the Age of Data* (2019), by Gene Kim
- *Leviathan* (1651), by Thomas Hobbes
- *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (2021), by Voddie Baucham Jr
- *The Federalist Papers* (1787–1788), by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay
- *Strong and Courageous: Following Jesus Amid the Rise of America's New Religion* (2021), by Jared Longshore and Tom Ascol

- *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (2003), by David Koyzis
- *The Law* (1850), by Frédéric Bastiat
- *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (2005), by Nancy Pearcey
- *The Communist Manifesto* (1888), by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
- *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World* (2000), by R.C. Sproul
- *On Liberty* (1859), by John Stuart Mill
- *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), by F.A. Hayek
- *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (1987), by Thomas Sowell
- *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (2020), by Rod Dreher
- *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (2015), by Voddie Baucham Jr
- *How to Speak, How to Listen* (1983), by Mortimer J. Adler
- *The Twelve Days of the Aspen Executive Seminar* (1972), by Mortimer J. Adler

### 1.2.1 Pandemia

*How Coronavirus Hysteria Took Over Our Government, Rights, and Lives*

- Author: Alex Berenson
- Publication Year: 2021
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/dp/1684512484?psc=1&ref=ppx\\_yo2\\_dt\\_b\\_product\\_details](https://smile.amazon.com/dp/1684512484?psc=1&ref=ppx_yo2_dt_b_product_details)
- Started on: 2021-11-30
- Finished on: ?

### 1.2.2 People Styles at Work and Beyond

- Author: Robert Bolton & Dorothy Grover Bolton
- Publication Year: 1999
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/People-Styles-Work-Beyond-Relationships/dp/0814413420/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=people+styles+at+work&qid=1640624085&srefix=people+styles%2Caps%2C271&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/People-Styles-Work-Beyond-Relationships/dp/0814413420/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=people+styles+at+work&qid=1640624085&srefix=people+styles%2Caps%2C271&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-12-14
- Finished on: ?

## 1.2.3 Making Sense of Your World

### *A Biblical Worldview*

- Authors: W. Gary Phillips, William E. Brown, and John Stonestreet
- Publication Year: 2008
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Making-Sense-Your-World-Worldview/dp/1879215519/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crid=NSMVRSO6ETN8&dchild=1&keywords=making+sense+of+your+world+a+biblical+worldview&qid=1628889565&sprefix=making+sense+of+your+world%2Caps%2C245&sr=8-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Making-Sense-Your-World-Worldview/dp/1879215519/ref=sr_1_2?crid=NSMVRSO6ETN8&dchild=1&keywords=making+sense+of+your+world+a+biblical+worldview&qid=1628889565&sprefix=making+sense+of+your+world%2Caps%2C245&sr=8-2)
- Started on: 2021-08-11
- Finished on: TBD

### How is the Book Organized?

#### Introduction

#### Part One: The Difference a Worldview Makes

##### 1. When Worldviews Collide

Major events in life tend to force us to wrestle with the ultimate questions of origins, meaning, morality, destiny, and identity. Our answers to those questions reveal our worldview, which is a framework of our most basic beliefs that shapes our view *of* and *for* the world and is the basis for our decisions and actions. There are many worldviews to choose from, and we must keep in mind that it doesn't matter whether or not a particular one *suits us*, but whether or not it *suits the world*; that is, does it match reality. All worldviews confront the three major concepts of human existence—God, humanity, and nature—and it can be helpful to compare and contrast them in those three arenas. If a worldview doesn't match reality, then feel free to throw it out, but if it does, the only reasonable response is to search out its implications and consequences.

##### 2. The World of Worldviews

##### 3. Putting Worldviews to the Test

#### Part Two: A *Biblical* Worldview

##### 4. The Essentials of a Biblical Worldview

FOO

##### 5. Why a Biblical Worldview?

The Bible is God's word—his truth—accurately received and written, and faithfully transmitted to us through the ages. Its authorship was supernaturally inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the product of that inspiration is inerrant and infallible in all things. Jesus assumed and relied on this view of inerrancy in his teachings, particularly in asserting his claim to be God incarnate. The inspiration of scripture took place through the prophets in the old testament and through the apostles in the new, and then stopped. The Bible we have today is the best historically attested ancient document we have by orders of magnitude; nobody does textual criticism like biblical scholars do. Many claim there are errors and contradictions within scripture, but closer examination of things like context and the meanings of words reveals these claims to have no foundation.

##### 6. What's Wrong? The Problem of Evil and Suffering

##### 7. Who's Right? The Problem of Pluralism

#### Part Three: So What? A View *Of* and a View *For*

##### 8. A View *of* and *for* the Self

##### 9. A View *of* and *for* the Family

10. A View *of* and *for* the Church
11. A View *of* and *for* the World

## Questions

1. *Before you read, write out the titles of the major sections and chapters to see how the book is organized.*

### Part One: The Difference a Worldview Makes

1. When Worldviews Collide
2. The World of Worldviews
3. Putting Worldviews to the Test

### Part Two: A *Biblical* Worldview

4. The Essentials of a Biblical Worldview
5. Why a Biblical Worldview?
6. What's Wrong? The Problem of Evil and Suffering
7. Who's Right? The Problem of Pluralism

### Part Three: So What? A View *Of* and a View *For*

8. A View *of* and *for* the Self
9. A View *of* and *for* the Family
10. A View *of* and *for* the Church
11. A View *of* and *for* the World

2. *According to the authors, why does everyone have a worldview?*

We all have a “story,” a description of what life is about, why we are here and where we are going. A worldview is the framework of our most basic beliefs that shapes our view *of* and *for* the world and is the basis of our decisions and actions.

3. *Give a summary statement for each of the worldviews.*

#### **Naturalism**

The natural world is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.

#### **Theism**

There is some being, which we call God, outside the natural world that brought it into being.

#### **Transcendentalism**

Everything in the natural world is a part of the supreme being known as God.

4. *Write out several meaningful quotes from the book you want to remember.*

- Consistent thinking on the part of Christians does not exist. While some lament the nonexistence of the Christian mind, American Christianity charges full speed ahead in its course of incessant activity, indomitable individualism, and irrepressible pragmatism. Comprehensive and coherent Christian thinking has never been a major part of religious life in America.
- The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less.
- Many Christians brandish a commitment to a biblical worldview that goes little beyond a “moralistic therapeutic deism”, believing in a God who only exists to enhance their personal behavior and well-being.

- A belief about God is really a belief about everything else.
- Does a biblical worldview fit the actual world? If it does not, then it may be discarded onto the heap of misguided philosophies. If it does, then a careful search into its implications and consequences is the only reasonable response.
- Those who do not consciously evaluate their worldview beliefs end up “catching” their worldview the same way they might “catch” a cold—they absorb it from the culture around them.
- As late as the nineteenth century, most scientists gave the purpose of scientific investigation being to shore up religious belief.

5. *How does thinking “worldviewishly” help us to “make sense of the world?”*

Because our worldviews are at the root of all of our thoughts and actions, we need to think in terms of worldviews to understand what’s really going on behind the scenes. If we don’t, we’ll constantly be talking past one another, as we’re working from completely different paradigms. What makes complete sense in one worldview simply won’t compute in another.

## 1.2.4 Knowing God

- Author: J.I. Packer
- Publication Year: 1973
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Knowing-God-J-I-Packer/dp/0340863544/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?dchild=1&keywords=knowing+god&qid=1628565182&sr=8-4](https://smile.amazon.com/Knowing-God-J-I-Packer/dp/0340863544/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=knowing+god&qid=1628565182&sr=8-4)
- Started on: 2021-08-08
- Finished on: TBD

### How is the Book Organized?

#### Foreword

Modern skepticism, combined with the sacred/secular, fact/value split, has led to the church’s significant weakening due to an overwhelming ignorance of God. Those who can see what’s happening are tempted to withdraw from the institutions that don’t seem to recognize their problems or be willing to address them. This current confusion is worse than anything the church has experienced since Gnosticism in the first few centuries AD.

#### Part I. Know the Lord

INSERT PART SUMMARY HERE.

##### 1. The Study of God

Given that we live in a world God created, we must study the one who created it, that we might live in it as he intends us to. But beware: pursuit of knowledge of God and his truths as an end in itself is problematic, leading to self-satisfied self-deception. Knowledge *about* God should transition to meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God. This is the charge given to all mankind; abandon it and you can waste your life and lose your soul.

##### 2. The People who Know their God

The question isn’t whether we’re good at theology, or tend to live “Christianly”, but rather whether or not we have known God. Those who know God

- have great energy for God,
- have great thoughts of God,

- show great boldness for God, and
- have great contentment in God.

They are sensitive to God's honor and truth being jeopardized, and the defiance spurs them to action, even at personal risk. The gravity of the situation forces them to prayer. The understanding of the Lordship of Christ in all things, both now and in the future, permeates every aspect of their lives. They stand for what's right, regardless of the consequences, and they boldly face antagonism with the utmost peace and serenity, confident in their relationship with the one in control.

3. Knowing and Being Known
4. The Only True God
5. God Incarnate
6. He Shall Testify

Part II. Behold Your God!

7. God Unchanging
8. The Majesty of God
9. God Only Wise
10. God's Wisdom and Ours
11. Thy Word is Truth
12. The Love of God
13. The Grace of God
14. God the Judge
15. The Wrath of God
16. Goodness and Severity
17. The Jealous God

Part III. If God be For Us...

18. The Heart of the Gospel
19. Sons of God
20. Thou our Guide
21. These Inward Trials
22. The Adequacy of God

## Questions

Chapters 1–2:

1. *Why does Packer describe his readers as “travelers?” How are you a traveler?*

Travelers are those walking the road of life, asking practical questions like which way to go, or how to go about whatever's next. Packer contrasts these with the “balconers”, who approach things only at the theoretical level, never actually getting out on the road and going anywhere. I'm a traveler in that I've been asking God what I'm supposed to be doing, and how I'm supposed to go about doing it.

2. *Many people think there is “no road to knowledge about God.” How do you answer that?*

This statement seems foolish on two fronts. First, if God exists, and we’re going with a standard definition of God, then he is the source of the created order. We have the ability to observe the world around us, and also have the ability to think critically and rationally, so we can use those abilities to make inferences about the creator. It seems straightforward that we can draw a handful of easy conclusions: God is creative; God is somehow both harsh and good; God is powerful; etc. Second, many religions hold that God has taken the initiative of revealing himself to mankind in various ways, often through the written word. Such writings can teach us a good deal about the one claiming to be their author, and it’s up to us to evaluate whether or not they are trustworthy. I suspect what’s actually at play behind this phrase is an epistemological assumption that “there is no road to knowledge,” period.

3. *What are the five basic truths that the book will follow?*

1. God has spoken to man, and the Bible is His Word, given to us to make us wise unto salvation.
2. God is Lord and King over His world; He rules all things for His own glory, displaying His perfections in all that He does, in order that men and angels may worship and adore Him.
3. God is Saviour, active in sovereign love through the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue believers from the guilt and power of sin, to adopt them as His sons, and to bless them accordingly.
4. God is Triune; there are within the Godhead three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and the work of salvation is one in which all three act together, the Father purposing redemption, the Son securing it, and the Spirit applying it.
5. Godliness means responding to God’s revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God’s Word. This, and nothing else, is true religion.

4. *What are the four characteristics of people who know God? Do you agree with these?*

Those who know God

- have great energy for God,
- have great thoughts of God,
- show great boldness for God, and
- have great contentment in God.

This seems pot on, and the lack of such people does much to explain the emaciated state of the church today.

5. *How are your prayers a key to knowing your view of God?*

“Men who know their God are before anything else men who pray, and the first point where their zeal and energy for God’s glory come to expression is in their prayers[. . .] If, however, there is in us little energy for such prayer, and little consequent practice of it, this is a sure sign that as yet we scarcely know our God.”

Prayer is something I’ve always struggled with. I suspect it’s because I’m very much a results motivated person, and the “results” of prayer are hard to observe and quantify. If Packer’s right here, my prayer life indicates I scarcely know God. It sounds like I need to spend more time meditating on who he is, at least as a start.

Chapters 3–4:

1. People frequently ask questions about their meaning and purpose in life. How does Packer answer that question?

Knowing God, which consists of

1. listening to God’s word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself;
2. noting God’s nature and character, as his word and works reveal it;
3. accepting his invitations, and doing what he commands; and

4. recognizing, and rejoicing in, the love that he has shown in thus approaching one and drawing one into this divine fellowship.
2. In what ways is knowing God like knowing a person? How is it different?

**Similar**

God is personal. You get to know him by spending quality time with him. You can know him for a lifetime and still have more to learn. You get to know him by him allowing you to.

**Different**

God isn't physically present with us. Instead we learn of him through his written word and his revelation in creation. He's not a peer, but is infinitely "over" us in majesty and glory.

3. Do you really believe when you pray that you are talking to God personally? How does this impact the way you pray?

Sometimes. In principle, yes, but not really, no. I feel like I've always been bad at prayer, but no matter what I've tried, it doesn't feel like I've improved. It feels like a very one-sided conversation.

4. What two reasons does Packer give for not using images to worship God?
  1. Images dishonor God, because they obscure his glory. They inevitably conceal most, if not all, of the truth about the personal nature and character of the divine being whom they represent.
  2. Images mislead man. The very inadequacy with which they represent him perverts our thoughts of him, and plants in our minds errors of all sorts about his character and will.
5. Is your God the God who revealed himself in Scripture? How does Packer's "test" help you answer this?

Pretty darn sure. I don't know that the test is all that useful. Is your knowledge of God focused on Jesus who reveals him? Yes, but who would answer "no" to that?

Chapters 5–6:

1. What is "the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us?" Why is this such a mystery? (Chapter 5)

The incarnation.
2. Why should the Incarnation move us to praise God for his humility? (Chapter 5)

Without it we are at a complete loss to fix our completely broken situation.
3. What does it mean for "the Son of God to empty himself and become poor?" (Chapter 5)

He restrained his divine powers to live his life in complete and total submission to the will of God the Father.
4. How does the Gospel of John teach us about the Trinity? (Chapter 6)

He establishes in the opening chapter that Jesus is God the Son, such that you can make sense of everything else he's to relate to you. Toward the end, he tells you how Jesus promised to send *another* comforter, indicating the Holy Spirit is to carry on his work in the lives of believers from now on. The relationships within the Trinity are as follows:

  - The Son is subject to the Father, for the Son is sent by the Father in His (the Father's) name.
  - The Spirit is subject to the Father, for the Spirit is sent by the Father in the Son's name.
  - The Spirit is subject to the Son as well as to the Father, for the Spirit is sent by the Son as well as by the Father.
5. How does the Holy Spirit's work make possible the Gospel and the New Testament? (Chapter 6)

Without the Holy Spirit the disciples went back to their prior jobs (fishing, etc.), not knowing what to do. When the Holy Spirit indwelt them at Pentecost, that's what set the stage for the missionary nature of the church. The Spirit inspired people to preach the good news, to teach doctrine, and to write the books and letters that would become the New Testament. Without the Holy Spirit, Christianity wouldn't have happened.



## Chapters 7–10:

## 1. State six aspects of God which do not change. (Chapter 7)

1. His life.
2. His character.
3. His truth.
4. His ways.
5. His purposes.
6. His Son.

## 2. Why does God never need to “repent”? (Chapter 7)

Repenting means revising one’s judgment and changing one’s plan of action. God never does this; He never needs to, for His plans are made on the basis of complete knowledge and control which extend to all things past, present, and future, so there can be no sudden emergencies or unlooked-for developments to take Him by surprise.

## 3. What should our response be to the majesty of God? (Chapter 8)

Rebuke our wrong thoughts about God, our wrong thoughts about ourselves, and our slowness to believe in God’s majesty.

## 4. How are God’s wisdom and human wisdom different? (Chapter 9)

Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. God alone is naturally and entirely and invariably wise. Man is limited in his ability to do any of these things.

## 5. How is human wisdom like driving a car? (Chapter 10)

It’s trying to see and do the right things in the situation that presents itself.

## 6. What effect does God’s gift of wisdom have on us? (Chapter 10)

The effect of His gift of wisdom is to make us more humble, more joyful, more godly, more quick-sighted as to His will, more resolute in the doing of it and less troubled (not less sensitive, but less bewildered) than we were at the dark and painful things of which our life in this fallen world is full.

## Chapters 11–13:

## 1. What two facts are assumed in every biblical passage? (Chapter 11)

God is king and he speaks.

## 2. In the “Believe and Obey” section, how does Packer describe a Christian? How well do you think this describes you? (Chapter 11)

He is a man who acknowledges and lives under the word of God. He submits without reserve to the word of God written in ‘the Scripture of truth’ (Dan. 10:21), believing the teaching, trusting the promises, following the commands. His eyes are to the God of the Bible as his Father, and the Christ of the Bible as his Saviour. He will tell you, if you ask him, that the word of God has both convinced him of sin and assured him of forgiveness. His conscience, like Luther’s, is captive to the word of God, and he aspires, like the psalmist, to have his whole life brought into line with it[...] The promises are before him as he prays, and the precepts are before him as he moves among men. He knows that in addition to the word of God spoken directly to him in the Scriptures, God’s word has also gone forth to create, and control, and order things around him; but since the Scriptures tell him that all things work together for his good, the thought of God ordering his circumstances brings him only joy. He is an independent fellow, for he uses the word of God as a touchstone by which to test the various views that are put to him, and he will not touch anything which he is not sure that Scripture sanctions.

I'd say that's a decent description of me.

3. What three points about God's love does Packer highlight from Romans 5:5? (Chapter 12)
  1. Paul is not talking about faint and fitful impressions, but of deep and overwhelming ones.
  2. The knowledge of the love of God, having once flooded our hearts, still fills them now.
  3. The instilling of this knowledge is described as part of the regular ministry of the Spirit to those who receive Him.
4. Read through the final section of Chapter 12 ("Amazing Love"). Are there areas of your life that you need to open up more to God's love?

I could stand to trust more that God has placed me in our current circumstances for a purpose.

5. What does Packer mean when he says, "Those who suppose that the doctrine of God's grace tends to encourage moral laxity... do not know what they are talking about"? (Chapter 13)

If you are indeed a recipient of God's grace, you cannot help but respond accordingly, and moral laxity becomes an impossibility.

#### Chapters 14–16

1. What four ideas are involved in God being the judge? (Chapter 14)  
ANSWER
2. What is the relation of Jesus Christ to God's judgment? (Chapter 14)  
ANSWER
3. Can you explain God's wrath? (Chapter 15)  
ANSWER
4. According to Romans, what is God's wrath? (Chapter 15)  
ANSWER
5. What three lessons does Packer draw from his consideration of the goodness and severity of God? How can we apply each one? (Chapter 16)

ANSWER

#### Chapters 17–18

1. Packer describes two types of jealousy. How is the second type a positive virtue? (Chapter 17)  
ANSWER
2. What are the practical consequences of God's jealousy for those who profess to be God's people? (Chapter 17)  
ANSWER
3. What does the word "propitiation" mean? (Chapter 18)  
ANSWER
4. Explain in a sentence for each how the following help us understand propitiation. (Chapter 18)

- The driving force in Jesus' life.

ANSWER

- What of those who reject God?

ANSWER

- What is peace?

ANSWER

- The dimensions of God's love.

ANSWER

- The glory of God.

ANSWER

#### Chapters 19–20

1. Is God the Father of all people? What sort of “sonship” can a human being have? (Chapter 19)

ANSWER

2. Why is the “Fatherhood” of God such an important concept? (Chapter 19)

ANSWER

3. What are the four aspects of God as Father Packer describes? (Chapter 19)

ANSWER

4. How does our adoption of the Father show us the richness of God's grace? (Chapter 19)

ANSWER

5. In what ways do you struggle with God's guidance in your life? (Chapter 20)

ANSWER

6. How does God guide you? (Chapter 20)

ANSWER

7. What are the six common pitfalls we have about God's guidance? (Chapter 20)

ANSWER

### 1.2.5 Another Gospel?

*A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*

- Author: Alisa Childers
- Publication Year: 2020
- Link: ?
- Started on: TBD
- Finished on: TBD

## 1.2.6 Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus

### *A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*

- Author: Nabeel Qureshi
- Publication Year: 2014
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Seeking-Allah-Finding-Jesus-Christianity/dp/0310515025/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?keywords=seeking+allah+finding+jesus&qid=1641086663&srefix=seeking+allah+find%2Caps%2C341&sr=8-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Seeking-Allah-Finding-Jesus-Christianity/dp/0310515025/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=seeking+allah+finding+jesus&qid=1641086663&srefix=seeking+allah+find%2Caps%2C341&sr=8-2)
- Started on: 2022-01-01
- Finished on: TBD

### Questions

1. Read the *Introduction* from Nabeel. What are the three purposes of the book? What does he add in the *Introduction* that reveals something of the kind of person he is?
  1. Give non-Muslim readers an inside perspective of a Muslim's heart and mind.
  2. Contrast the strength of the case for the gospel and Jesus against that of the Quran and Muhammad.
  3. Portray the immense inner struggle of Muslims grappling with the gospel.

The benediction the author includes at the end of the introduction showcases how he's motivated by his love for and the Lordship of Christ in his life.

2. Now read the *Prologue*. How does the closing request in his prayer give us an understanding of why he even started his spiritual journey?

ANSWER

3. Since this is an autobiography, I would like for you to focus on several aspects of Nabeel's journey and just jot them down as you read.
  - a. List the points of contrast between Islam and Christianity.

ANSWER

- b. Point out key truths that made Nabeel seriously consider Christianity.

ANSWER

- c. Point out the role friends and others played in his life. How would you describe their approach and attitude?

ANSWER

## 1.2.7 A Practical Guide to Culture

### *Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World*

- Authors: John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle
- Publication Year: 2019
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Practical-Guide-Culture-Generation-Navigate/dp/0830781242/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=a+practical+guide+to+culture&qid=1640624413&s=books&srefix=a+practical+guide+%2Cstripbooks%2C175&sr=1-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Practical-Guide-Culture-Generation-Navigate/dp/0830781242/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=a+practical+guide+to+culture&qid=1640624413&s=books&srefix=a+practical+guide+%2Cstripbooks%2C175&sr=1-1)
- Started on: 2021-12-17

- Finished on: 2021-12-27

## Questions

1. John's most recent book is intended for Christian leaders and parents as they equip the next generation for cultural engagement. The book is neatly organized. Read through the contents and write out the titles of the four main sections. Note the subsection titles and how they relate to the section theme. Why do you think Part Four was included?

### Part One: Why Culture Matters

1. What Culture Is and What It Does to Us
2. Keeping the Moment and the Story Straight
3. A Vision of Success

### Part Two: A Read of the Cultural Waters

4. The Information Age
5. Identify After Christianity
6. Being Alone Together
7. Castrated Geldings and Perpetual Adolescence

### Part Three: Pounding Cultural Waves

8. Pornography
9. The Hookup Culture
10. Sexual Orientation
11. Gender Identity
12. Affluence and Consumerism
13. Addiction
14. Entertainment
15. Racial Tension

### Part Four: Christian Worldview Essentials

16. How to Read the Bible
17. How to Trust the Bible
18. The Right Kind of Pluralism
19. Taking the Gospel to the Culture.

If Parts One through Three introduce you to the problem and convince you of its significance, Part Four is there to answer the, "Now what do I do about it?" question.

2. Part One: Summarize the concept "culture" and what impact it has on the individual.

Culture is the environment humans make for themselves to live in; it's what we think is normal. We (mostly passively) shape it, and it actively shapes us.

3. Part Two: In a sentence or two, summarize how each of the "undercurrents" of culture in the subsections impact the individual.

### **The Information Age**

Kids these days are inundated with information, but aren't trained with how to evaluate the ideas that bombard them. The media through which information is delivered are not neutral, but shape what and how we think.

### **Identity After Christianity**

When we jettisoned Christianity, we lost what it means to be human. In the ensuing search for meaning, we seek to place self, sex, science, stuff, or the state in the place of God.

### **Being Alone Together**

The ever-presence of information technology in our lives gives us the false impression that we don't need physical community in our lives, that digital community is sufficient; however, buying this lie tends to convince us that (1) we're the center of our own universe, (2) we deserve to be happy all the time, (3) we must have choices, (4) we are our own authorities, and (5) information is all we need, not teachers.

### **Castrated Geldings and Perpetual Adolescence**

There was a time when there were two groups in society: children and adults. In the middle of the 20th century, teenagers emerged as a distinct group, and in the intervening decades this middle group of those who haven't matured has expanded to the age of 30 or so. The antidote for this perpetual adolescence is to cultivate virtue in young people and actively raise them into adulthood.

4. Part Three: Which ones among the cultural issues discussed really caught your attention? Are the "Action Steps" particularly helpful for you?

### **Pornography**

Having been rescued from addiction to pornography myself, I was surprised that none of the action steps involved growing up to be the man or woman God's made you to be. That was the turning point for me.

### **Addiction**

As one who's been saved from certain addictions in the past, and still struggles with some in the present, I was disappointed that this chapter was so narrowly focused on drugs and alcohol. It'd be worthwhile to broaden it and ask people if they're addicted to coffee, sugar, carbohydrates, etc., plus a number of the other chapters in this part of the book.

### **Racial Tension**

It feels like there's an unspoken assumption that if your circle of friends isn't ethnically diverse, then you're racist (I'm exaggerating it to make a point). When I lived in the United Arab Emirates, my friends came from here, there, and everywhere across the globe. As I live now in Albuquerque, NM, the people I regularly interact with are largely white and New Mexican. The diversity of the groups of people I interact with is representative of the diversity of the local population. Such a possibility was overlooked in the treatment of this chapter.

## **1.2.8 Tactics**

### *A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*

- Author: Greg Koukl
- Publication Year: 2009
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Tactics-10th-Anniversary-Discussing-Convictions/dp/0310101468/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=tactics+greg+koukl&qid=1640624310&s=books&prefix=tactics+%2Cstripbooks%2C150&sr=1-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Tactics-10th-Anniversary-Discussing-Convictions/dp/0310101468/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=tactics+greg+koukl&qid=1640624310&s=books&prefix=tactics+%2Cstripbooks%2C150&sr=1-1)
- Started on: 2021-11-14
- Finished on: 2021-12-12

## Questions

1. How does Greg distinguish between the terms “strategy” and “tactics”?

Strategy is the high-level plan for getting from where you are to where you want to go. Tactics are the maneuvers you use to react/respond to what you’re faced with in the moment.

2. Why does Greg believe that “tactics” is the missing piece of the puzzle in apologetics?

To the extent that the church has been training Christian in apologetics, we’ve largely been giving people claims to reiterate. We haven’t been training them to respond to critique. Tactics, then, help you to think, and to force your interlocutor to think as well.

3. What is the “Columbo Tactic”? Give an example of how to use it.

What do you mean by that?

4. What is the second application of the “Columbo Tactic”? What is the “burden of proof”?

Why do you think that? When someone makes a claim, they need to support it with grounds; that is, they have the burden of proving their claim.

5. The third step in the Columbo Tactic is to use questions to make a point. Why does he believe asking questions is important?

Rather than making a statement, you ask a question to force the other person to come to the conclusion you would’ve made as a statement. If you make the statement, they can easily write you off; if they come to the same conclusion internally, it’s much harder to write off their own reasoning abilities.

6. Describe the “Suicide Tactic” and give an example.

Show how the claim self-destructs, e.g., if someone attempts to argue that there are no absolute truths, ask how they know that notion is true.

7. Describe the “Taking-the-Roof-Off Tactic” and give an example. How effective do you think this tactic is?

It’s *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming the other person’s view, and then following it to its logical conclusions to see if they’re sensible or absurd. E.g., you ask “Given all the evils perpetrated in the world, how could a good God exist?” But your own viewpoint is there is no god, only naturalism. If your view is correct then there is no basis for morality; ultimately all actions are caused by prior location and momenta of subatomic particles. So why do you believe there is evil in the world?

8. Describe the “Steamroller Tactic”. What kind of people does this work best with?

It’s making bad behavior blatantly obvious when someone is being rude and not actually allowing you to engage in the dialogue.

## 1.2.9 How Now Shall We Live?

- Authors: Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey
- Publication Year: 1999
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/How-Now-Shall-We-Live/dp/084235588X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+now+shall+we+live&qid=1622568879&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/How-Now-Shall-We-Live/dp/084235588X/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+now+shall+we+live&qid=1622568879&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-07-27
- Finished on: 2021-12-12

## How is the Book Organized?

### Introduction—How Now Shall We Live?

Our culture today is falling apart in its rebellion against God. The church generally doesn't realize that Christianity is a worldview, a framework that speaks to *absolutely everything* in existence. As such, it is ill-equipped to carry out the cultural mandate of being God's redemptive agent of blessing in the world. Our culture is showing signs that it is starting to wake up to the lies it has been operating under for centuries. The time to reach the world with the message that all truth is God's truth is now.

### Part One. Worldview: Why It Matters

Christianity is not merely a collection of doctrines and practices, but a comprehensive framework for understanding all of reality—it is a worldview. Living our lives in accordance with what God says is true about life, the universe, and everything will transform the world—its cultures, social and economic institutions, etc.—from what it is into more of what God intends it to be. To do so we must understand that the truths of Christianity are attacked (often subtly) on all sides by ideas stemming from the assumption that God does not exist. We must familiarize ourselves with such ideas so we know how to identify how they differ from a Christian worldview, and how they fail to adequately answer the fundamental questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? What's wrong with the world? How can we fix it?

#### 1. A New Creation

Understanding Christianity as a worldview leads to substantial change in the world around us.

#### 2. Christianity Is a Worldview

A worldview is the sum total of your beliefs about the world, and it shapes how you live your life, the decisions you make. A Christian's worldview should be based on the truths revealed to us in Scripture, but many believers don't realize that those truths are meant to inform *all of life*. Understanding that they are enables us to live more rationally, as we'll be living in accordance with the laws and ordinances God built in to his creation. Only when we do so can we live the best life possible; defying the natural or moral law leads to consequences. The culture war is a clash of worldviews. We must understand the ideas that seduce people away from the truth.

#### 3. Worldviews in Conflict

Broadly speaking, belief systems fall into the two categories of the *naturalistic*, stating that nature is all that there is, and the *theistic*, holding that there is something beyond nature. The naturalistic perspective gives rise to a number of philosophical frameworks that are rife with logical flaws and internal inconsistencies. Tolerance of multiple perspectives has been redefined and elevated to such a status that questioning the implicit assumption that all perspectives are equally valid, or morally equivalent, is no longer tolerated. This climate of apathy, in which no idea is worth fighting for, means we can't persuade people with rational arguments, which makes it that much harder to convince people of the truth of Christianity.

#### 4. Christian Truth in an Age of Unbelief

We will often come up against people with false ideas, but before we can address the ideas themselves, we first need to address the worldview gap between us. If we don't, we're effectively speaking a different language and nothing will even begin to make sense. Start by listening for their answers to the four fundamental questions, paying attention to where their thoughts differ from those of Christianity. You can't get to why Christianity matters unless you first have an understanding of who God is and why we owe him our obedience. Our commission is not merely to save souls, but also minds, and to do so in a way that brings the truths of scripture to bear on all of life, such that we revive the culture around us and awaken it to what God desires it to be.

### Part Two. Creation: Where Did We Come From, and Who Are We?

All worldviews start with the question of origins, and the answers generally fall into the categories of the naturalistic and the theistic. Naturalism is a philosophy that goes back centuries that claims that nature is all that is, or was, or ever will be. As it was gaining in popularity, Darwin's hypothesis of natural selection and its implications for the evolution of all life from base ingredients gave naturalism the pseudo-scientific



rationale it was looking for. Scientists have tried to show you could create life in a test tube, but their efforts fall far short and only support that if such a thing were possible, it would only happen under the careful direction of an intelligent agent. What we now know from breeding, mutation, and the fossil record indicates that natural selection is not the engine for unbounded change required by evolution. Yet despite the evidence, the world today is saturated with naturalism, and attempting to question it isn't a fair fight, because what's at stake isn't a scientific theory, but a worldview with implications in every aspect of public and private life. If naturalism is wrong, and if the scientific evidence actually supports the idea that the only thing that could've created the world was an intelligent being outside of the physical universe, then we need to go home and rethink our lives, and we don't want to.

#### 5. Dave and Katy's Metaphysical Adventure

The world is currently *saturated* with the idea that science can explain everything about our existence, and your religious beliefs are fine if you want to have them to make you feel good. However, honest questions about theories of naturalistic origins are not tolerated, and there's no applying scientific methodology to "scientific" theories of origins. For young people growing up in this environment, it can be *excruciating* to go against the flow of what they're being inundated with day in and day out. Naturalism is a philosophy, a worldview, bent on eradicating the idea of God as creator. If God isn't the creator, all of Christianity goes up in smoke, but if he is, then it's not a matter of "my beliefs" or "your beliefs," it's a matter of the ultimate truth of reality.

#### 6. Shattering the Grid

Whatever you take as the starting point of your worldview functions as your religion. Naturalism begins with assumptions (e.g., that nature is all that was, or is, or ever will be) that can't be tested with scientific methodology, and as such those starting premises are taken on faith. The naturalist worldview is proclaimed all around us as absolute truth—hilarious, as naturalist philosophy leads to postmodernism, in which there is no absolute truth—while other religious beliefs are claimed to be simply matters of personal, subjective opinion.

#### 7. Let's Start at the Very Beginning

Most ancient cultures have believed that the universe was more or less eternal, and science also held this viewpoint until relatively recently. As our scientific investigations into the cosmos has progressed, however, we've determined that the universe did, in fact, have a beginning—what's been called "the big bang". The first two laws of thermodynamics (conservation of matter, and entropy) indicate that there must have been a beginning, and that beginning must have been triggered by something outside the physical universe itself. Determining what triggered the universe into being is outside the purview of science, as there is no way for us to scientifically observe something outside the physical universe. Unfortunately, many scientists, seeking to avoid the theological implications of the origin of the natural world, have started proposing ever more ludicrous hypotheses (many universes, self generation, imaginary time, etc.) to explain our origin without resorting to an intelligent transcendent mind as the agent behind it. Additionally, the natural world we observe seems eerily well-suited to both support life itself, and support our observation of it. If the fundamental constants of physics were slightly different, or if Earth's situation were slightly different, either the universe as we know it wouldn't exist, or we wouldn't. The denial of the straightforward implications of our scientific discoveries demonstrates the commitment to the atheistic agenda of many in the scientific community.

#### 8. Life in a Test Tube?

Scientists have attempted to show that life could spontaneously arise from the conditions of a supposed primordial earth by replicating those conditions in the laboratory. However, what such experiments actually show is a far cry from what media reporting on them claims. What they have shown is if you want to get even the most basic building blocks for life, you need an intelligent agent diligently controlling the conditions of the experiment, the reactions taking place, etc., and with all our technological prowess, we haven't come anywhere close to producing life. The thought, though, is that over millions of years the improbable becomes inevitable; however, simulations indicate that the probability of life arising spontaneously is essentially zero, regardless of the timeframe you examine. The key problem for the naturalist is the difference between order with low information content (as in the lattice structure of crystals) versus order with high information content (as in the structure of DNA). Empirical evidence makes it clear that natural forces do not produce structures with high information content, and that's not

to say we don't know how it works, but rather everything we've observed says it doesn't work. There are times when it is more rational to accept a supernatural explanation, and this is one of those times.

9. Darwin in the Dock

Darwin's hypothesis was that behind the cyclical variations he observed in animal traits was an engine for unlimited change that, given enough time, could take nothing and produce the diversity he saw around him. It was conjecture, nothing more—an extrapolation into the distant past, with the feeblest of backings—and it turns out he was simply mistaken. First, we have centuries of breeding to show that the best efforts of shuffling the genes in a population lead to specializations *of the same animal*; that is, organisms stay true to type, and variation away from the mean leads to a decrease in “fitness” (specifically the abilities to stay healthy and reproduce). Second, random mutations, which are the only natural way of introducing new genetic information into a population, alter the details in existing structures, but don't lead to the creation of new structures, and the mutations again lead to a less fit organism. Finally, the fossil record bears out that the intermediary forms predicted by Darwin simply don't exist. An organism is a highly complex integrated system. If a single subsystem were to evolve on its own, that would likely lead to the catastrophic failure of the system as a whole. To transition from one complex integrated system into another one, a whole host of corresponding changes need to be made immediately, and this is something natural selection can't do. Darwin made his conjecture with far less information available to him than we have today, but the question is why the scientific establishment sticks with it so dogmatically in the face of the last 150 years of evidence. The reason, of course, is that this isn't about science, but about a conflict of worldviews, and if the universe is governed by an intelligent personal being, then that's something I need to reckon with.

10. Darwin's Dangerous Idea

When Darwin came on the stage, it was in the midst of the naturalistic philosophy fighting for purchase against the Christian worldview in the western world. Though the evolution hypothesis was admittedly weak scientifically, natural selection became the linchpin that finally gave naturalism its credibility. As a worldview, naturalism shapes our understanding of *everything*. For instance, ethics are merely ideas we get once we've evolved to a certain level, so there is no objective standard for morality, and we can create and recreate our own standards as we continue to progress; law is nothing more than a collection of policies deemed to be socially advantageous, not based on any concept of right and wrong; etc. With no transcendent truth, we default to the perspectives of our affinity groups (ethnicity, gender, etc.), which vary across time and space. Though Darwinism is put forth as science, it is philosophy—one that fails to reflect reality accurately. Only Christianity consistently stands up to the test of practical living.

11. A Matter of Life

The story of a helicopter gunner shot down in Vietnam, and the Army surgeon who saved his life. Though no one would have questioned allowing the private to die, having lost both legs, shattered both arms, lost one eye and irreparably damaged the other, and sustained shrapnel in the brain, the surgeon knew he had to do whatever he could to save the man *because he was human*. The image of God is not to be taken lightly.

12. Whatever Happened to Human Life?

We used to think that human life was sacred, as we humans were created in the image of God, but since naturalism tells us we are ultimately no more than the highest-evolved primates, we shouldn't let a concept like the sanctity of human life get in the way of our further progression. Where natural selection says we got to where we are by the least fit in the population dying out, the logical extension asks, “Why don't we help the population along by weeding out the weaker members?” Thus we have the three horrors of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia backed by the cold (il)logic of natural selection, all in service to further propagating the superior genes that got us here. When naturalistic philosophy eliminated God from the public consciousness, it necessarily jettisoned all concrete notions of morality and meaning, but the image of God within us ceaselessly searches for the meaning and purpose we know we were created for. We find the answer in creation.

13. In Whose Image?

The Christian worldview

- corresponds with the scientific evidence,
- provides the strongest basis for human dignity,
- gives a sense of meaning and purpose,
- provides a sense of assurance about our ultimate destiny, and
- provides the most certain motive for service and care of others.

The naturalistic worldview falls short in all those areas. Humans long for fulfillment, dignity, meaning, and purpose. The naturalist has no real hope here, but the Christian has the assurance of the creation narrative.

#### 14. God Makes No Mistakes

Chuck's story of his autistic grandson is a reminder that those the naturalists think we should simply get rid of, for the betterment of the species, are often the ones who most naturally live a life of unadulterated joy, wonder, and compassion.

#### Part Three. The Fall: What has Gone Wrong with the World?

15. The Trouble with Us
16. A Better Way of Living?
17. Synanon and Sin
18. We're All Utopians Now
19. The Face of Evil
20. A Snake in the Garden
21. Does Suffering Make Sense?

#### Part Four. Redemption: What Can We Do to Fix It?

22. Good Intentions
23. In Search of Redemption
24. Does It Liberate?
25. Salvation through Sex?
26. Is Science Our Savior?
27. The Drama of Despair
28. That New Age Religion
29. Real Redemption

#### Part Five. Restoration: How Now Shall We Live?

30. The Knockout Punch
31. Saved to What?
32. Don't Worry, Be Religious
33. God's Training Ground
34. Still at Risk
35. Anything Can Happen Here
36. There Goes the Neighborhood
37. Creating the Good Society

38. The Work of Our Hands
39. The Ultimate Appeal
40. The Basis for True Science
41. Blessed Is the Man
42. Soli Deo Gloria
43. Touched by a Miracle
44. Does the Devil Have All the Good Music?
45. How Now Shall We Live?

## Questions to Answer

### Part 1

1. *Read Chuck's introduction. Why did he write this book? How has our culture changed from what he describes?*

He wrote the book to remind the church that its mission is to act as God's redemptive agent of blessing within the world. We can only do that if we bring God's truth to bear in all areas of life.

While Chuck had an optimistic perspective on where things were headed 20 years ago, it seems what he saw as a course change was perhaps more just shifting gears before continuing on our course "to hell in a hand basket." Some of his encouraging statistics haven't quite panned out. E.g., divorce rates are decreasing, but so are marriage rates. Instead we see the significant rise in cohabitation. Birth rates for unwed teen moms are decreasing, but birth rates for unwed moms are increasing. We're just waiting longer before having kids. Welfare spending topped \$1 trillion in 2016.

Chuck thought all the ideologies marking the 20th century had proven themselves bankrupt (and they have), but they're now rearing their ugly heads again with a shiny new mask, and our inability to be aware of, let alone learn anything from, history means we're going to give them another shot, thinking this time we'll get it right.

2. *How has the book been organized?*

- Part 1: What is worldview and why is it important?
- Part 2: Who am I?
- Part 3: What's wrong with the world?
- Part 4: How can what's wrong be made right?
- Part 5: Why am I here?

3. *How does Chuck define and describe a worldview?*

Worldview is intensely practical. It is simply the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the "big picture" that directs our daily decisions and actions.

4. *What is the real "culture war" according to Chuck?*

The real war is a cosmic struggle between worldviews—between the Christian worldview and the various secular and spiritual worldviews arrayed against it. This is what we must understand if we are going to be effective both in evangelizing our world today and in transforming it to reflect the wisdom of the creator.

5. *What does Chuck mean by "discipleship of the mind?"*

The Christian calling is not only to save souls but also to save minds. Sadly, many Christians have been misled into believing there is a dichotomy between faith and reason, and as a result they have actually shunned intellectual pursuits. Pastors must begin to redefine their task to include intellectual evangelism, for if they do not preach to issues of the mind, they will find themselves increasingly alienated from their own flock.

## Part 2

1. *Why is the view of creation such an important part of any worldview?*

Our view of creation answers the question, “Who am I?” and how we answer that impacts our answer to the next question, “Why am I here?” What we believe about origins necessarily impacts what we believe about God, man, truth, knowledge, and ethics; that is, it impacts every other aspect of our worldview.

2. *Chuck discusses the implications of atheistic Darwinism (chapter 10). List a few of these.*

- **Ethics:** These are merely ideas we get once we’ve evolved to a certain level, so there’s no objective standard for morality.
- **Law:** This is nothing more than a collection of policies deemed to be socially advantageous. It’s not based on any concept of right and wrong. We make it up as we go and can change it whenever a change becomes more advantageous than what we have currently.
- **Education:** “Good” ideas are just the ones that do the best job of getting us what we want. There are no right or wrong ideas, just whatever works best for you.
- **Truth:** Since there is no transcendent truth, we’re necessarily held captive by the perspectives of our affinity groups (ethnicity, gender, etc.). All perspectives are equally valid, as they’re all just social constructs.

3. *How do the practices of abortion and assisted suicide reveal worldview commitments (chapter 12)?*

We used to think that human life was sacred, as we humans were created in the image of God, but since naturalism tells us we are ultimately no more than the highest-evolved primates, we shouldn’t let a concept like the sanctity of human life get in the way of our further progression. Where natural selection says we got to where we are by the least fit in the population dying out, the logical extension asks, “Why don’t we help the population along by weeding out the weaker members?” Thus we have the three horrors of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia backed by the cold (il)logic of natural selection, all in service to further propagating the superior genes that got us here. When naturalistic philosophy eliminated God from the public consciousness, it necessarily jettisoned all concrete notions of morality and meaning, but the image of God within us ceaselessly searches for the meaning and purpose we know we were created for. We find the answer in creation.

4. *What other key ideas and truths did you find particularly helpful?*

The Christian worldview

- corresponds with the scientific evidence,
- provides the strongest basis for human dignity,
- gives a sense of meaning and purpose,
- provides a sense of assurance about our ultimate destiny, and
- provides the most certain motive for service and care of others.

The naturalistic worldview falls short in all those areas. Humans long for fulfillment, dignity, meaning, and purpose. The naturalist has no real hope here, but the Christian has the assurance of the creation narrative.

## Part 3

## 1. What is the “human dilemma” (Chapter 15)?

It’s the question of what’s wrong with the world. Why are we plagued with war, suffering, disease, and death?

## 2. Why does Chuck call this the most formidable stumbling block to the Christian faith (Chapter 15)?

First, it’s a very difficult question to answer, but beyond that, it’s significantly harder for us to truly believe whatever answer we might intellectually assent to in the midst of the suffering and pain. We believe the universe was created by a being who is infinitely wise and infinitely good. How, then, do we explain the presence of evil? Could not an all-loving, all-powerful God instantly put a stop to the suffering and injustice in the world?

Though he could, he chooses not to because, in his infinite foreknowledge, he knew that making us free moral agents, with the ability to choose good or evil at any moment, would be *better than any alternative*. Why? We won't know until the end of time when we can ask him face to face. In the meantime, we can trust his judgment, given everything else we know of him.

3. What are the four common consequences of the Fall and sin that Chuck mentions (Chapter 20)?
  1. Sin disrupts our relationship with God.
  2. Sin alienates us from each other.
  3. The fall affects all of nature.
  4. Death and its preliminaries—sickness and suffering—would become part of the human experience.
4. What are the five false solutions to the problem of evil (Chapter 21)?
  1. Deny that God exists at all.
  2. Deny that suffering exists.
  3. Place God beyond good and evil.
  4. God's power is limited.
  5. God has created evil to achieve a greater good.
5. What other key ideas and truths did you find particularly helpful?

The fall being a historical physical reality is necessary to making sense of the world. When searching for what's wrong with the world, if you don't identify the root problem as sin in the human heart, any solutions you'll come up with will miss the mark (and might make things worse).

#### Part 4

1. How is the conversion of Dr. Bernard Nathanson an example of the redemption offered in the Biblical worldview?

It's an example of God taking something that was once good and had gone bad and restoring it back into something good again.
2. Chuck lists a number of false answers to the question, "How can we fix what's wrong with the world." List them:
  - Chapter 24: We need to overturn the systemic oppression in society to usher in an earthly utopia.
  - Chapter 25: We need to liberate ourselves from oppressive notions of sexual purity.
  - Chapter 26: We need to discover scientific/technological solutions to the problems of the world.
  - Chapter 27: We need to understand that ultimately everything in life is meaningless, so there's no sense fixing anything.
  - Chapter 28: We need to realize we're part of the eternal oneness such that we can return to a state of peace with the universe.

3. Why does Chuck call Christian redemption "a restoration" (chapter 29)?

It restores us to our created condition in which we have a right relationship with God, man, self, and creation.

4. What other ideas and truths did you find particularly helpful?

I'm skeptical of Colson's conflating of the concepts of consummation—Christ's making all things new at the end of time—and restoration as described in this part of the book. I worry there's too much emphasis on ushering in the eternal kingdom here and now through the efforts of the church, though we know that's not possible until Christ's return.

#### Part 5

1. What is “Cultural Commission” (p. 295)?

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.

2. Read the last paragraph of chapter 31 (p. 305). How does this perspective give you insight into how you should live for Christ?

The great commission and the cultural commission are inseparable.

3. What is “real shalom” (p. 365)? How is this a goal of the work of restoration God has given us?

Right relationship with God, man, self, and creation. This was the state mankind was created in. Sin destroys those four relationships. Christ’s work of redemption makes possible the righting of those wronged relationships.

4. What other key ideas and truths did you find particularly helpful?

I found it interesting that *Touched by an Angel* was held up as a shining example of a Christian being a Christian in whatever their field is, as I remember that show pretty consistently being called out when it was on the air for its misrepresentation of God and Christianity.

5. What are three things you are going to do or think about differently after reading this section?

1. Remember the concept of shalom.

2. Try to figure out what God wants me doing right now.

3. Try to encourage my fellow Colson Fellows in training to think more critically about the content we’re ingesting.

### 1.2.10 The Prince

- Author: Niccolò Machiavelli
- Publication Year: 1532
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1232>
- Started on: 2021-11-14
- Finished on: 2021-12-03

### 1.2.11 Five Dialogues

- Author: Plato
- Publication Year: ca. 350 BC
- Links:
  - <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1642>
  - <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1656>
  - <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1657>
  - <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1643>
  - <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1658>
- Started on: 2021-10-10
- Finished on: 2021-11-13

## 1.2.12 Cultural Apologetics

- Author: Paul Gould
- Publication Year: 2019
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Cultural-Apologetics-Conscience-Imagination-Disenchanted/dp/0310530490/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=3DMNK9ITSKHWM&dchild=1&keywords=cultural+apologetics+paul+gould&qid=1633270663&prefix=cultural+apologetics%2Caps%2C363&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Cultural-Apologetics-Conscience-Imagination-Disenchanted/dp/0310530490/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3DMNK9ITSKHWM&dchild=1&keywords=cultural+apologetics+paul+gould&qid=1633270663&prefix=cultural+apologetics%2Caps%2C363&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-10-04
- Finished on: 2021-10-17

### Questions

1. As you read the opening chapters, try to distinguish between traditional and cultural apologetics. Provide a sentence description of each. Remember, these are not competing but complementary approaches to explaining the Christian faith.

- **Traditional Apologetics:** Having all the evidence on hand to back up why Christianity is true.
- **Cultural Apologetics:** In addition to the aforementioned evidence, it's showing Christianity to be not only plausible but also desirable.

**Note:** I don't actually agree with Gould's conception of cultural apologetics. I think it misses something substantial in the ability to take non-biblical worldviews and pick them apart, such that you can identify that which is good and show where it's been pilfered from God, and that which is bad, and show how it attempts to run counter to reality.

2. Gould describes the state of the world as "disenchanted." What does he mean by this?

If there's one thing that drives me absolutely nuts about this author, it's that he so rarely uses concrete language and defines his terms. This was perhaps the worst one in terms of undefined terms. It sounds like he uses it to mean a world that no longer believes in the supernatural, but he also seems to use it to mean more than that, attaching undefined mystical connotations to the term.

3. Our most fundamental orientation to life and the world is love. We are driven and directed by our longings and desires. How does cultural apologetics address these yearnings?

First I'll note that I don't think I agree with the underlying premise here, but again it depends on *how you define* love. Regardless, cultural apologetics is about identifying where a particular individual's longing line up with what God has wired us to desire, and then making known to them why they love what they love.

4. In an age of disenchantment, "self-expression and satisfaction of desires" are the highest good. The chief sins are failures to be true to yourself (hypocrisy) and failure to be tolerant (judgmentalism). Describe some ways this is evident in our current cultural moment.

- The "be true to your heart" line is what Disney's been selling for decades, heard most readily in Mulan's *True to Your Heart*, by 98 Degrees and Stevie Wonder. The problem there is the heart is fickle, so it isn't a solid basis by which to evaluate anything.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs exist all over the corporate landscape to promote a diverse workforce, as long as your beliefs allow you to consider all others' beliefs as equally valid. If you say something like "there is only one truth," that kind of thinking won't be tolerated, so the workforce is diverse and inclusive as long as you agree with the mainline narrative.

5. Gould argues that Christianity is good because (1) it is true; and (2) Christianity has been good for the world. In what ways has Christianity been good for the world?



All you need is to look at the way the concept of all humans being made in the image of God has transformed cultures throughout the ages:

- Castaway babies rescued from trash heaps in ancient Rome.
- The ingenuity of the middle ages freeing humans from the drudgery of manual labor, freeing them to more creative uses of their talents.
- The biblical notion of private property laying the foundation for capitalism, and the millions of people that's lifted out of poverty over the centuries.
- Combatting slavery, both hundreds of years ago and today.
- Etc.

### 1.2.13 Meditations on First Philosophy

- Author: René Descartes
- Publication Year: 1641
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Meditations-First-Philosophy-Ren%C3%A9-Descartes/dp/B08GVJ6K2N/ref=sr\\_1\\_2\\_sspa?dchild=1&keywords=meditations+on+first+philosophy&sr=8-2-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUFSSSFVUSEdMODFUNKkmZW5jcnlwdGVkSWQ9QTA0Njk1NTcyNUY1VjJJNERIM1d=](https://smile.amazon.com/Meditations-First-Philosophy-Ren%C3%A9-Descartes/dp/B08GVJ6K2N/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?dchild=1&keywords=meditations+on+first+philosophy&sr=8-2-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUFSSSFVUSEdMODFUNKkmZW5jcnlwdGVkSWQ9QTA0Njk1NTcyNUY1VjJJNERIM1d=)
- Started on: 2021-10-05
- Finished on: 2021-10-09

### 1.2.14 An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

- Author: David Hume
- Publication Year: 1748
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/9662>
- Started on: 2021-10-01
- Finished on: 2021-10-05

### 1.2.15 Vaccines: Truth, Lies, and Controversy

- Author: Peter C. Gøtzsche
- Publication Year: 2021
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Vaccines-Controversy-Peter-C-G%C3%B8tzsche/dp/1510762191/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=2WQFB11AVI8RZ&dchild=1&keywords=vaccines+truth+lies+and+controversy&qid=1633269886&prefix=vaccines+truth+li%2Caps%2C221&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Vaccines-Controversy-Peter-C-G%C3%B8tzsche/dp/1510762191/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2WQFB11AVI8RZ&dchild=1&keywords=vaccines+truth+lies+and+controversy&qid=1633269886&prefix=vaccines+truth+li%2Caps%2C221&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-09-03
- Finished on: 2021-10-02

## 1.2.16 Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth

### 12 Questions Christians Should Ask

- Author: Thaddeus Williams
- Publication Year: 2020
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Confronting-Injustice-without-Compromising-Truth/dp/0310119480/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=2ASDNDID058G&dchild=1&keywords=confronting+injustice+without+compromising+truth&qid=1631018369&sprefix=confronting+injustice%2Caps%2C265&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Confronting-Injustice-without-Compromising-Truth/dp/0310119480/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2ASDNDID058G&dchild=1&keywords=confronting+injustice+without+compromising+truth&qid=1631018369&sprefix=confronting+injustice%2Caps%2C265&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-08-30
- Finished on: 2021-09-12

### How is the Book Organized?

What is “Social Justice”?

Scripture commands us to seek justice, but the term “social justice” has two different meanings, depending on who you’re talking to. Social Justice A is biblical justice—rescuing infants left out to die, dismantling the trans-Atlantic slave trade, opposing the Third Reich—while Social Justice B conflicts with a biblical view of reality—the oppressor vs oppressed narrative of Marx, Engels, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt school; the deconstructionism of Foucault and Derrida; gender and queer theory; etc. Everybody is pro-justice, but our worldviews determine what we mean by the term.

Part 1: Jehovah or Jezebel? Three Questions about Social Justice and Worship

Justice is giving others what is due them, so ultimately justice is about worship and giving God his due.

1. The God Question: Does our vision of social justice take seriously the godhood of God?

The opening of Romans describes humanity when we’re at our worst, from the horrors of the Aztec empire and its conquest, to Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. We inherently know God and what he requires of us, but we continually put something else in his place in our lives. Any attempts to fix things via political or economic control will ultimately fail due to the failure to address the problem of sin in each of us. The first commandment is first for a reason, and if we try to do justice without first giving God his due, we’re not really doing justice.

2. The *Imago* Question: Does our vision of social justice acknowledge the image of God in everyone, regardless of size, shade, sex, or status?

Idolatry is the first injustice, and the carcinogenic source of all other injustices. When we reduce people to inside-the-box (meaning a naturalistic worldview) categories, we become oblivious to the beyond-the-box fact that every human being is a divine image-bearer.

3. The Idolatry Question: Does our vision of social justice make a false god out of the self, the state, or social acceptance?

- Idols of the right: material prosperity, rugged individualism, Christianity that is only heavenly-minded, status quo, skin tone.
- Idols of the left: political correctness, critical theories, postmodernism, intersectionality.
- The idol of self: We, not God, are the author of human *telos* (meaning), but we buckle under the impossible weight of that self-assigned responsibility.
- The idol of state: “Once we abolish God, the government becomes God” (Chesterton), so we turn there for validation of our self-defined selves that we absolutely *must* have.

- The idol of social acceptance: We want to somehow hold to our Christian beliefs and practices, while at the same time allowing culture to trump the truth of God’s word. Basically we don’t want our Christianity to cost us anything.

#### Part 2: Unity or Uproar? Three Questions about Social Justice and Community

Tribalism is the idea that we should divide people into group identities, then assign undesirable or evil traits to each group in such a way that we don’t see the image-bearers of God before us. It’s been the idea behind It inspired racism in America, genocide in Germany, the gulags in Siberia, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the killings in Rwanda, Darfur, the Congo, etc. The idea has such staying power because humans have a need to belong in a community, but we need to fill that need without our groups becoming self-righteous and resulting in tribal warfare.

4. The Collective Question: Does our vision of social justice take any group-identity more seriously than our identities “in Adam” and “in Christ”?

Extreme groups on all sides of the spectrum tend to attract and keep adherents not necessarily because of their ideology, but because of the community they provide. Though we all belong to the single group of the human race, what we believe about human nature differentiates us. Christianity believes that the human nature is sinful and in need of redemption, while ideologies influenced by Rousseau believe that mankind is naturally good, but that our institutions make us wicked. It’s interesting to note that if you tackle the evil in the individual, you have the possibility of solving the problem of evil both in the individual and in our social institutions, but if you only tackle the social institutions and the evil really lies in the individual, you don’t have a hope of solving either. In Christ, all our divisions no longer matter. Unfortunately there are those, even within the church, who insist that something or other trumps our identity in Christ.

5. The Splintering Question: Does our vision of social justice embrace divisive propaganda?
6. The Fruit Question: Does our vision of social justice replace love, peace, and patience with suspicion, division, and rage?

#### Part 3: Sinners or Systems? Three Questions about Social Justice and Salvation

7. The Disparity Question: Does our vision of social justice prefer damning stories to undamning facts?
8. The Color Question: Does our vision of social justice promote racial strife?
9. The Gospel Question: Does our vision of social justice distort the best news in history?

#### Part 4: Truth or Tribes Thinking? Three Questions about Social Justice and Knowledge

10. The Tunnel Vision Question: Does our vision of social justice make one way of seeing something the only way of seeing something?
11. The Suffering Question: Does our vision of social justice turn the “lived experience” of hurting people into more pain?
12. The Standpoint Question: Does our vision of social justice turn the quest for truth into an identity game?

#### Epilogue: 12 Differences between Social Justice A and B

## Questions

What is “Social Justice”?

1. How does Williams define/describe Social Justice A and Social Justice B?

A is biblical justice and B is in conflict with the biblical view of reality.

Part 1: Jehovah or Jezebel?

1. What are the three questions Williams says we should ask about Social Justice and Worship?

1. Does our vision of social justice take seriously the godhood of God?
2. Does our vision of social justice acknowledge the image of God in everyone, regardless of size, shade, sex, or status?
3. Does our vision of social justice make a false god out of the self, the state, or social acceptance?

2. Give a summary sentence or two explaining why each question is important?

1. Justice is giving each his due, so any attempts at justice without first giving God his due are ultimately not doing justice.
2. We can't pursue justice (giving each his due) without first acknowledging that those we're pursuing justice for are image-bearers of God.
3. Pursuing idols of self, the state, social acceptance, etc., will inevitably lead to injustice.

Part 2: Unity or Uproar?

1. What are the three questions Williams says we should ask about Social Justice and Community?

1. Does our vision of social justice take any group-identity more seriously than our identities “in Adam” and “in Christ”?
2. Does our vision of social justice embrace divisive propaganda?
3. Does our vision of social justice replace love, peace, and patience with suspicion, division, and rage?

2. Why does Williams say “Tribalism” is the worst and most destructive idea in the twentieth century?

Tribalism is the idea that we should divide people into group identities, then assign undesirable or evil traits to each group in such a way that we don't see the image-bearers of God before us. It's been the idea behind It inspired racism in America, genocide in Germany, the gulags in Siberia, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the killings in Rwanda, Darfur, the Congo, etc.

3. What does he say are three fundamental human needs (chapter 4)? How do these needs manifest in our cultural moment?

The three fundamental human needs are for identity, community, and purpose. The question of identity is answered via identity politics, critical theories, and intersectionality. The answer to the identity question automatically provides you with a community of everyone else in the same group. Each group, then, has its own sense of what the highest purpose is, whether that's achieving political victories over the rival party, campaigning for [insert qualifier here] justice, etc.

4. In what ways does he say James Cone inverts the Apostle Paul's three truths that bring the Church to unity?

Issue	Paul	Cone
sin	universal human affliction	oppression, a white man's game
“in Christ”	transcends all group identities	subordinate to racial identities
who decides justification	God	the black community

Part 3 : Sinners or Systems?

## 1. What are the three questions Williams asks about Social Justice and Salvation?

1. Does our vision of social justice prefer damning stories to undamning facts?
2. Does our vision of social justice promote racial strife?
3. Does our vision of social justice distort the best news in history?

## 2. William says, “We build our sins into our systems.” What examples does he give?

Antisemitism in Nazi Germany, anti-black racism in early American history, the caste system in India, Apartheid in South Africa, and the one-child policy in China.

## 3. How is the equation “Disparity = Discrimination” not biblically or practically true?

It’s true that disparity can be caused by discrimination, but it can also be caused by a whole host of other factors, some nefarious, many benign. The Bible does speak against discrimination, but not against disparity. It calls out people for sinning in their pursuit of wealth (e.g., Solomon), but never rebukes those who earned their wealth righteously and steward it well (e.g., Job). Indeed, Jesus even reminds us that “the poor you’ll always have with you” (Matthew 26:11).

## 4. What examples do you find helpful to understand Williams’s argument?

- Speeding violations on the New Jersey Turnpike: Twice as many blacks speeding as whites. Black population is younger, and younger drivers tend to speed more.
- Bank lenders reject twice as many black applicants for home loans: Whites turned down at higher rate than Asians or Hawaiians. Black banks reject black applicants at an even higher rate.
- Average age within a group can explain differences (e.g., more maturity leading to better outcomes).
- Month of birth leading to different outcomes in sports.

## Part Four: Truth or Tribes Thinking?

## 1. What are Williams’s three questions about Social Justice and Knowledge?

1. Does our vision of social justice make one way of seeing something the only way of seeing something?
2. Does our vision of social justice turn the “lived experience” of hurting people into more pain?
3. Does our vision of social justice turn the quest for truth into an identity game?

## 2. How does he use the concept of “tunnel vision?”

If you’re only able to process the world in a single way—that is, if the problem, no matter what it is, must necessarily be explained by racism, sexism, heteronormativity, or whatever else your tunnel is—then you wind up blinded to all other explanations, many of which may better explain the data than your own viewpoint. You see this same tunnel vision not only in the critical social justice issue, but in most of the divisive issues of our current cultural moment: pandemic response (vaccines, masks, lockdowns), election integrity, economic planning activities, media communications, climate change, etc. If you’re unable to view an issue from multiple perspectives, dialogue is effectively dead before it ever begins, which means your ability to solve the problem is predicated on you having assumed the correct answer before encountering any evidence. There’s some hubris for you.

## 3. Explain what Williams means when he says, “The Bible is as anti-fear as it is anti-oppression.”

The Bible clearly demonstrates God’s concern for the oppressed, with numerous admonitions to care specifically for them. It also commands you over 100 times to “fear not,” but instead to trust and hope in the Lord.

## Epilogue

1. Is the chart of the twelve differences between Social Justice A & B helpful? Does it seem forced at points? Does it faithfully represent a Christian Worldview, in your opinion?

It's a nice concise summary, so it should be helpful to reference later. I didn't notice any points that seemed forced. I don't think it's a comprehensive representation of a Christian worldview, but it seems to be faithful in what it presents. Something that stood out as missing was what exactly the church is and what role it is to play in God's redemptive work in the world.

## 1.2.17 Why You Think the Way You Do

*The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home*

- Author: Glenn Sunshine
- Publication Year: 2009
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Why-You-Think-Way-Worldviews/dp/0310292301/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=why+you+think+the+way+you+do&qid=1629734405&sr=8-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Why-You-Think-Way-Worldviews/dp/0310292301/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=why+you+think+the+way+you+do&qid=1629734405&sr=8-2)
- Started on: 2021-08-22
- Finished on: 2021-08-31

### How is the Book Organized?

#### 1. What Is a Worldview and Why Should I Care?

A worldview is the framework you use to interpret the world and your place in it. You should care because worldviews are the foundation for culture, and they change over time, either for better or worse.

#### 2. The Worldview of Ancient Rome

Though the ancient Roman world permitted a wide variety of pagan and mystery religions, it was neoplatonism that really laid the foundation for its epistemology. The hierarchy of being gave the necessary justification for practices such as human sacrifice, slavery, contraception, abortion, and infanticide.

#### 3. Christianity and the Transformation of the Pagan World

The life of those in the early church displayed a vastly different underlying worldview from the ancient Roman world around them, specifically in terms of valuing the individual as made in the image of God. As Christianity grew, some of the gnostic and neoplatonic philosophies of the day started to make inroads into the church. With the legalization of Christianity under Constantine, the dominant worldview within the Roman empire began to shift.

#### 4. The Emergence of the Medieval Worldview

As the empire started to collapse, the clergy largely picked up the pieces because they were the ones educated and trained in things like administration. Irish Christianity largely preserved education, and as the Germanic and Roman cultures intermingled, they produced feudalism and manorialism. Urban populations began to grow. The inquisitorial and adversarial legal systems developed. Platonic humanism developed—meaning God created the world, and thus it can tell us about him—along with scholasticism—which consists of a five-part method of investigation. Science developed, in terms of both inventions to improve every-day life, and broader concepts of understanding the cosmos. Similar developments were squashed under non-Christian worldviews.

#### 5. Medieval Economics and Politics

The idea of work being good led to monasteries reinvesting profits to increase productivity. That mindset, along with the concept of private property, laid the foundation for capitalism. The guild system developed to regulate the production standards. Technological innovation progressed to do away with drudgery. Merchants arose as middlemen to transport goods from here to there. Augustine's *City of God* set the stage for political thought. Tensions between the church and the state, and between the church and the people, grew. Aristotle's breakdown of forms of government (monarchy/tyranny, aristocracy/oligarchy, and republic/democracy) was helpful

in assessing how sin plays into rule. The concepts of limited government, natural law, and inalienable rights developed.

#### 6. The Breakdown of the Medieval Model

The Italian Renaissance rediscovered ancient Rome as the epitome of civilization. They shifted the emphasis in education from logic (from scholasticism) to rhetoric (from ancient Rome). They sought to study past authors to achieve a grand synthesis of all human knowledge, but the systems of thought that went into that synthesis were incompatible. Scholars had previously assumed everyone was speaking the same truth from different directions, but this raised the question of who was right and wrong. Protestantism hit the scene, and then Catholicism rebounded, adding more questions to the “who’s right and wrong” pile. Resistance theory developed, as well as the notion of the divine right of kings. The discovery of the New World raised questions about the truthfulness of biblical history. Pyhchronical skepticism laid the early groundwork for postmodernism.

#### 7. A New Paradigm of Knowledge

The Copernican Revolution changed our mental model of the universe. A heliocentric universe had been proposed a number of times, gaining little traction and causing minimal religious consternation; Galileo just happened to be the first person to be a jerk about it, an calling the pope a simpleton in a treatise he commissioned is bound to create problems for you. The question of the appropriate model of the universe wasn’t science on one side and Bible on the other, but science and Bible on both sides of the debate. Descartes sought to answer the Pyhchronists, and came up with “I think, therefore I am,” followed by “I exist, therefore God exists,” and finally “God exists, therefore clear and distinct ideas must be true.” Pascal developed probabilism, and believed truth could be found through experimentation and observation, setting the stage for Newton to “stand on the shoulders of giants.” Though we think of Newton as a scientist, he didn’t distinguish between his theological and scientific investigations.

#### 8. Enlightenment and Revolutions

In the age of the Enlightenment, rationalism started prevailing in both science and religion. In Christianity, God is infinite and personal, creator and sustainer, and transcendent and immanent. Deism arose holding to just the first characteristic in each of these pairs. Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* laid the foundation for both classical (free market) economics and classical liberalism. Edmund Burke became the father of classical conservatism, agreeing with Smith that government regulation was bad for the economy. The philosophes prized intellectual independence and original thinking, and paved the way for philosophical naturalism. Worldview began to shift in the direction of materialism. Religious revivals happened all over trying to bring more of the scriptures to bear on daily life. The revolutions in England, America, and France showed how the worldviews of Locke and Rousseau played out. The results were dictated by a combination of those ideas and the histories of the countries involved.

#### 9. Modernity and Its Discontents

Deism had set the stage for a transition to materialistic naturalism, just as soon as a mechanism could be discovered that could explain how everything came to be. Darwin’s natural selection was that mechanism. *Science* no longer meant knowledge, but rather only that which is knowable via the scientific method. Darwinian evolution, ironically, isn’t subject to the scientific method. It becomes the basis for both racism and eugenics. Utilitarianism arose as an alternative ethic, along with the notion that ethics are situational and relative. The survival of the fittest mentality also found its way into economics and industrialization, which then laid the groundwork for Marxism and all it entails. Materialism led to nihilism, meaning there is no meaning, but when that wasn’t palatable, it bred existentialism as a sort of nihilism-lite.

#### 10. The Decay of Modernity

In the wake of the two world wars, most Western nations adopted some version of Keynesian economics, along with expanded state powers to intervene on behalf of society. Deconstructionism led to reinterpretations of anything previously known. Postmodernism, with its rejection of objective truth, and its insistence on cultural and moral relativity, is essentially deconstructionism-lite, not following through on all its implications. This gave rise to feminism and the sexual revolution, with their attempts to undermine the traditional family structure. While all this was going on, transcendental worldviews started having a greater impact, with the advent of New

Age and Neo-Paganism. The postmodern and transcendental thinking merge in movement like eco-spirituality, which lies behind things like the Gaia hypothesis (e.g., Pandora in *Avatar*) and the global warming movement functioning as a religion.

11. Trajectories

Basically we've come full circle back to ancient Rome. Abortion, infanticide, human rights violations, slavery... Whatever you believe in is totally fine, as long as you pay homage to Caesar.

## Questions

1. Read Chuck Colson's Foreword and Glenn's Acknowledgments to get some background of Glenn's involvement in the Colson Fellows (formerly Centurions) Program. Now look over the Contents page. What can you tell from the book by how the contents are organized?

First you need to start with the pre-evangelism of getting people to understand what worldview is and why it's important. Once that's established, you can start walking through the various thought patterns in any given age, analyzing them from a worldview perspective.

2. The best way to grasp the flow of Glenn's explanations and arguments is to summarize each of the chapters and note any key ideas that strike you as important. A brief paragraph for each is sufficient.

See **How is the Book Organized?** above.

3. The closing section of the book, *The Image of God*, is a call for Christians to recover the ideas and values of the biblical worldview. List some of the key ones.

- When Western civilization embraced a robust vision of the image of God, we had our greatest successes; when we ignored it, we had our greatest failures.
- In terms of human rights, the image of God is the source of human worth.
- We must resist calls to consider other creatures on par with humanity.
- Christians should be at the forefront of environmental concerns and creation care.
- In science and technology, we need to be as concerned about the ethical dimensions of our research as we are about the results—particularly with regard to biotechnologies.
- God gave humanity both intellectual and physical work to do in the garden of Eden, and thus we should view work as a positive good, not a necessary evil.
- We must provide for the needs of others, honoring them as individuals and serving them rather than subcontracting our responsibilities to care for our neighbors to the government or to any other entity.
- In political life, we must keep the importance of the image of God shared by people of all nationalities front and center in our thinking.
- We also need to insist on the right to dissent. Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and the right to express themselves without fear of repercussion, whether or not they agree with us.

4. What are three things you will do differently as a result of reading this book?

1. For those who don't understand worldview or its implications, I'll ask them to read through this book with me.
2. I'll see if Glen has references to back up all the claims he's made, particularly the ones of the form, "What you usually hear about this period is history isn't quite accurate."
3. I'll be on the lookout for other ways our current cultural moment is beginning to mimic ancient Rome, such that I can call attention to it.



### 1.2.18 Covid: Why Most of What You Know is Wrong

- Author: Sebastian Rushworth
- Publication Year: 2021
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/gp/product/9188729834/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o02\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://smile.amazon.com/gp/product/9188729834/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o02_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)
- Started on: 2021-08-04
- Finished on: 2021-08-23

### 1.2.19 The Manager's Path

*A Guide for Tech Leaders Navigating Growth & Change*

- Author: Camille Fournier
- Publication Year: 2017
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Managers-Path-Leaders-Navigating-Growth/dp/1491973897/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+manager%27s+path&qid=1622571752&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Managers-Path-Leaders-Navigating-Growth/dp/1491973897/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+manager%27s+path&qid=1622571752&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-06-17
- Finished on: 2021-08-13

### 1.2.20 Mere Christianity

- Author: C.S. Lewis
- Publication Year: 1952
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Mere-Christianity-C-S-Lewis/dp/0060652926/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=mere+christianity&qid=1622568911&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Mere-Christianity-C-S-Lewis/dp/0060652926/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=mere+christianity&qid=1622568911&sr=8-1)
- Started on: 2021-06-27
- Finished on: 2021-07-22

#### How is the Book Organized?

Book 1. Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

The existence of the Law of Human Nature, which all men fundamentally agree on, implies there is a mind beyond the physical universe, which called the universe into being and demands we behave in a certain way. We know we are unable to keep the law fully, so we have put ourselves at odds with that mind, which is a serious problem.

1. The Law of Human Nature

We all operate as if we agree on the Law of Human Nature, and none of us are really keeping it.

2. Some Objections

The Moral Law is different from mere instinct and is not mere social convention but real truth.

3. The Reality of the Law

When considering inanimate objects, you have only the facts; however, with humans you have both the facts (how men behave) and something else (how they ought to behave). That something else is a real law, which we haven't made, pressing in on us, and our inability to keep it yields consequences.

4. What Lies Behind the Law

The universe can be viewed through either a materialist lens, in which case matter is all that existed and what we observe is essentially a fluke, or through a religious lens, in which case there is something behind the universe that is more like a mind than anything we know. If such a mind existed, it would be beyond the powers of observation alone, but we could expect it to show itself inside ourselves as an influence trying to get us to behave in a certain way.

5. We Have Cause to be Uneasy

If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day, and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again.

Book 2. What Christians Believe

God made the universe and it was good. He gave us free will to choose good, which came with the freedom to choose evil, and we chose that instead. That fundamentally broke creation, but it somehow remembers what it was meant to be. Christ came to be the human life run fully on God as intended, such that his death could somehow make right what we messed up, and our call is to spread his life to others.

1. The Rival Conceptions of God

Pantheists believe God animates the universe, while Christians believe God made it.

2. The Invasion

We have a universe that contains much that is obviously bad and apparently meaningless, but contains creatures like ourselves who know that it is bad and meaningless. Christians believe this is a good world that's gone wrong, but still remembers what it's supposed to be. Dualists believe there are two independent and opposite powers warring it out here, but the "independent and opposite" notions falls apart on further examination. Rather this is a civil war or rebellion, and we are living in enemy-occupied territory.

3. The Shocking Alternative

The moment you have a self at all, there is a possibility of putting yourself first—wanting to be the center—wanting to be God, in fact. God designed the human machine to run on himself, but when we try to run without him, the machine breaks down. Jesus arrives in history claiming to be the mind beyond the universe.

4. The Perfect Penitent

The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start, and we can accept this without knowing how it works. Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Jesus could surrender his will, and suffer and die, because he was man; and he could do it perfectly because he was God.

5. The Practical Conclusion

Baptism, believe, and the Lord's supper somehow spread the Christ-life to us.

Book 3. Christian Behavior

Questions of morality ultimately boil down to the question of the purpose of man's existence, which is why they wind up being so contentious. If we live the way we were designed to function, it will go better both for us as individuals, and for society as a whole.

### 1. The Three Parts of Morality

Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown in the running of the machine, and every moral failure is going to cause trouble to both you and others. Morality is concerned with (1) fair play and harmony between individuals, (2) tidying up or harmonising the things inside each individual, and (3) the general purpose of human life as a whole. We can all cooperate in the first, disagreements begin with the second, and become more serious with the third.

### 2. The 'Cardinal Virtues'

#### **Prudence**

Practical common sense; taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.

#### **Temperance**

Not abstaining, but going the right length and no further.

#### **Justice**

The old name for everything we should now call "fairness," which includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises, and all that side of life.

#### **Fortitude**

Both kinds of courage—the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that "sticks it" under pain.

### 3. Social Morality

Scripture was never meant to replace or supersede human arts and sciences; rather it is a director that will set them to the right jobs, and energizer that will give them new life. We won't have a Christian society until most of us really want it. We can't carry out the golden rule until we love our neighbors as ourselves, which we can't do until we love God, which means obeying him.

### 4. Morality and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is concerned with giving man better raw materials for making his choices; morality is concerned with the choices themselves—the free choice of man, on the material presented to him. With every choice you are changing the central part of you into either a more heavenly or more hellish creature. As you get better, you better understand the evil that is still left in you; as you get worse, you understand it less.

### 5. Sexual Morality

The choice of marriage, with total faithfulness, or complete abstinence is so difficult and against our natures that either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct has gone wrong. It's neither the case, as we're led to believe, that the sexual desires we experience are natural and healthy, or that the Christian path is impossible.

### 6. Christian Marriage

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. Those who are in love have a natural inclination to bind themselves by promises, so the Christian law is not forcing upon the passion of love something which is foreign to that passion's own nature; it is demanding that lovers should take seriously something which their passion of itself impels them to do. Love, as opposed to "being in love," is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit.

### 7. Forgiveness

Loving my neighbor (or enemy) as myself doesn't mean liking them or thinking them nice, but it does mean forgiving them as we do ourselves, choosing to look past their prior mistakes and assume the best of them. The something inside us that feels resentment must be killed, and we do so with God's help through practice, forgiving first in small things, and building up to bigger things.

8. The Great Sin

Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind. It means enmity, both between you and someone else, and between you and God. It is spiritual cancer.

9. Charity

Charity, meaning "love in the Christian sense," is a state of will, rather than feelings, which we naturally have about ourselves, and must learn to have about others. Good and evil both increase at compound interest, so the little decisions we make every day are of the utmost importance. Ask yourself, "What would it look like if I loved [my neighbor, or God]," and go and do it.

10. Hope

I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.

11. Faith

Faith, in our context, is accepting and regarding as true the doctrines of Christianity. A battle is underway within each of us between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other. We must train the habit of faith and continually remind ourselves of what we believe.

12. Faith

"Work out your own faith with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you." If you are right with him, you will inevitably be right with all your fellow creatures.

Book 4. Beyond Personality: or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity

God is three persons in one being. He wants us to share in the life he has had in himself since before time began. To do so is to deny our own desires and wills, and instead take on his. It's hard, but he helps us to do it, and intends for us to help others do the same.

1. Making and Begetting

Theology is practical, especially now. A great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today are simply the ones which real theologians tried centuries ago and rejected. To beget is to become the father of; to create is to make. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself.

2. The Three-Personal God

The whole purpose for which we exist is to be taken into the life of God. Theology is, in a sense, an experimental science.

3. Time and Beyond Time

God is not in time. In that case, what we call "tomorrow" is visible to him in just the same way as what we call "today". In a sense, he does not know your action till you have done it, but then the moment at which you have done it is already "now" for him.

4. Good Infection

I think it important to make clear how one thing can be the source, or cause, or origin, of another without being there before it. The Son exists because the Father exists, but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and the Son is a real person, is in fact the third of the three persons who are God. Now the whole offer which Christianity

makes is this: that we can, if we let God have his way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always has existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as he does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became man in order to spread to other men the kind of life he has—by what I call “good infection”. Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.

#### 5. The Obstinate Toy Soldiers

The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe. And especially it wants to be left to itself, to keep well away from anything better or stronger or higher than it, anything that might make it feel small.

#### 6. Two Notes

God gave us free will because a world of mere automata could never love and therefore never know infinite happiness. When you’re talking about God—i.e., about the rock bottom, irreducible fact on which all other facts depend—it is nonsensical to ask if it could have been otherwise. It is what it is, and there is an end of the matter.

#### 7. Let’s Pretend

Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already. When you are “dressing up as Christ,” you will quickly see some way in which the charade is most apparent, and then you know something that you and God must work on. You are no longer thinking simply about right and wrong; you are trying to catch the good infection from a person. Men are mirrors, or “carriers”, of Christ to other men. Sometimes unconscious carriers. This “good infection” can be carried by those who have not got it themselves. God looks at you as if you were a little Christ; Christ stands beside you to turn you into one.

#### 8. Is Christianity Hard or Easy?

If you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. Laziness means more work in the long run. The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs.

#### 9. Counting the Cost

God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy. No possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what he is determined to produce in every one of us in the end. The job will not be completed in this life, but he means to get us as far as possible before death.

#### 10. Nice People or New Men

If Christianity is true, why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all non-Christians? Our careless lives set the outer world talking, and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity itself. There are many people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name. And always, of course, there are a great many people who are just confused in mind and have a lot of inconsistent beliefs all jumbled up together. Consequently, it is not much use trying to make judgments about Christians and non-Christians in the mass. It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things, but to convert rebellious wills cost his crucifixion. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save. What can you ever really know of other people’s souls—of their temptations, their opportunities, their struggles? One soul in the whole creation you do know, and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands.

11. The New Men

Becoming a Christian is not mere improvement but transformation.

**Questions to Answer**

1. *This book is really a collection of four books. What are they?*

**Book 1. Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe**

The existence of the Law of Human Nature, which all men fundamentally agree on, implies there is a mind beyond the physical universe, which called the universe into being and demands we behave in a certain way. We know we are unable to keep the law fully, so we have put ourselves at odds with that mind, which is a serious problem.

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God is three persons in one being. He wants us to share in the life he has had in himself since before time began. To do so is to deny our own desires and wills, and instead take on his. It's hard, but he helps us to do it, and intends for us to help others do the same.

2. *What makes this book so accessible to so many people is the origin of the messages. When and for what was this content first communicated?*

It was originally a series of lectures given over BBC radio in the midst of World War II. In a time when people were naturally asking, "What is wrong with the world?" on a regular basis, Lewis was asked to explain to the people of Great Britain what it is that Christians believe. His original audience was about as broad as it gets, and that, combined with his conversational tone (as is fitting for a radio broadcast), makes it such that the work has a minimal (perhaps nonexistent) barrier of entry.

3. *As you read, notice the flow of Lewis's arguments. Highlight 10–15 key ideas/quotes from each of the four major sections of the book. Share some of these here and with your cohort.*

See the outline above.

4. *How has Mere Christianity helped you understand and articulate the Christian worldview? Would you recommend the book to others?*

I definitely appreciated Book 1 the most, as Lewis starts with no Christianity—no religion even—only human nature, and methodically works his way from there to the logical conclusion that there must be something outside of the natural world that caused it to come into being, that acts as the source of the human nature within us, and that we have fundamentally and irreparably offended (and we know it), and that is a very big deal. I would hope non-believers would be willing to engage his logic and argumentation and try to figure out where he goes wrong (if he does).

I would heartily recommend Book 1 to others; the remaining three I would recommend with some caveats. I was surprised by how much Lewis was persuaded to view evolution as incontrovertible fact, and was disappointed by the extent to which that informed some of his views. I'm also curious to learn how exactly he understood that one could lose one's salvation. I wouldn't necessarily argue against it, but I was surprised to see it pop up a few times in a book on the bare-bones basics of Christianity.

### 1.2.21 The Social Contract

- Author: Jean-Jaques Rousseau
- Publication Year: 1762
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/46333>
- Started on: 2021-05-31
- Finished on: 2021-06-05

### 1.2.22 Two Treatises of Government

- Author: John Locke
- Publication Year: 1689
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Two-Treatises-Government-John-Locke/dp/1495323447/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=john+locke+two+treatises+of+government&qid=1622569046&sr=8-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Two-Treatises-Government-John-Locke/dp/1495323447/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=john+locke+two+treatises+of+government&qid=1622569046&sr=8-2)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-05-31

### 1.2.23 The Constitution of the United States of America

- Publication Year: 1787
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/5>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-05-30

### 1.2.24 The Unicorn Project

*A Novel about Developers, Digital Disruption, and Thriving in the Age of Data*

- Author: Gene Kim
- Publication Year: 2019
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Unicorn-Project-Developers-Disruption-Thriving/dp/1942788762/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+unicorn+project&qid=1622569473&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Unicorn-Project-Developers-Disruption-Thriving/dp/1942788762/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+unicorn+project&qid=1622569473&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-05-27

### 1.2.25 Leviathan

- Author: Thomas Hobbes
- Publication Year: 1651
- Link: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3207>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-05-09

### 1.2.26 Fault Lines

*The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*

- Author: Voddie Baucham Jr
- Publication Year: 2021
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Fault-Lines-Movement-Evangelicalisms-Catastrophe/dp/1684511801/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=fault+lines&qid=1622572442&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Fault-Lines-Movement-Evangelicalisms-Catastrophe/dp/1684511801/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=fault+lines&qid=1622572442&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-04-21

### 1.2.27 The Federalist Papers

- Authors: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay
- Publication Year: 1787–1788
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/1404>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-04-09

### 1.2.28 Strong and Courageous

*Following Jesus Amid the Rise of America's New Religion*

- Authors: Jared Longshore and Tom Ascol
- Publication Year: 2021
- Link: <https://press.founders.org/shop/strong-and-courageous/>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-03-06



## 1.2.29 Political Visions and Illusions

*A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*

- Author: David Koyzis
- Publication Year: 2003
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Political-Visions-Illusions-Contemporary-Ideologies/dp/0830852425/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=387ZNX45ZYQTZ&dchild=1&keywords=political+visions+and+illusions+david+koyzis&qid=1608493977&sprefix=political+visions+and+i%2Caps%2C291&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Political-Visions-Illusions-Contemporary-Ideologies/dp/0830852425/ref=sr_1_1?crid=387ZNX45ZYQTZ&dchild=1&keywords=political+visions+and+illusions+david+koyzis&qid=1608493977&sprefix=political+visions+and+i%2Caps%2C291&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-02-26

### What is the Book About?

A walk through the counterfeit redemptive narratives of the most prevalent ideologies of our day, supporting the author's thesis that "ideology is idolatry".

## 1.2.30 The Law

- Author: Frédéric Bastiat
- Publication Year: 1850
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/44800>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-01-22

### What is the Book About?

An examination of the meaning and implications of the phrase "law is justice".

## 1.2.31 Total Truth

*Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*

- Author: Nancy Pearcey
- Publication Year: 2005
- Link: [https://www.amazon.com/Total-Truth-Study-Guide-Christianity/dp/1433502208/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=I7JJWRY1GM7C&dchild=1&keywords=total+truth+nancy+pearcey&qid=1606515393&sprefix=total+truth+na%2Caps%2C203&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Total-Truth-Study-Guide-Christianity/dp/1433502208/ref=sr_1_1?crid=I7JJWRY1GM7C&dchild=1&keywords=total+truth+nancy+pearcey&qid=1606515393&sprefix=total+truth+na%2Caps%2C203&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-01-12

### What is the Book About?

A rich historical examination of how the church inadvertently pushed itself to where it is today, combined with exhortations on what to do about it.

### 1.2.32 The Communist Manifesto

- Authors: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
- Publication Year: 1888
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/61>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2021-01-02

### What is the Book About?

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

### 1.2.33 The Consequences of Ideas

*Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World*

- Author: R.C. Sproul
- Publication Year: 2000
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Consequences-Ideas-Redesign-Understanding-Concepts/dp/1433563770/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+consequences+of+ideas+sproul&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Consequences-Ideas-Redesign-Understanding-Concepts/dp/1433563770/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+consequences+of+ideas+sproul&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-12-15

### What is the Book About?

A whirlwind overview of western political thought from antiquity to today.

### 1.2.34 On Liberty

- Author: John Stuart Mill
- Publication Year: 1859
- Link: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/34901>
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-12-07

### What is the Book About?

An examination of the relationship between authority and liberty.

#### 1.2.35 The Road to Serfdom

- Author: F.A. Hayek
- Publication Year: 1944
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Road-Serfdom-Documents-Definitive-Collected/dp/0226320553/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=road+to+serfdom&sr=8-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Road-Serfdom-Documents-Definitive-Collected/dp/0226320553/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=road+to+serfdom&sr=8-2)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-11-28

### What is the Book About?

A clarion call to the socialists of all parties in England that the cultural trends the author was seeing there closely paralleled what he'd observed in Germany and Austria before the rise of the National Socialist (Nazi) party. Seventy six years later, it reads like it was written to the world yesterday.

#### 1.2.36 A Conflict of Visions

*Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*

- Author: Thomas Sowell
- Publication Year: 1987
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Conflict-Visions-Ideological-Political-Struggles/dp/0465002056/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=3TK5FIBBMTRC1&dchild=1&keywords=a+conflict+of+visions+thomas+sowell&qid=1600831487&prefix=a+conflict+of+visions%2Caps%2C231&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Conflict-Visions-Ideological-Political-Struggles/dp/0465002056/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3TK5FIBBMTRC1&dchild=1&keywords=a+conflict+of+visions+thomas+sowell&qid=1600831487&prefix=a+conflict+of+visions%2Caps%2C231&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-11-24

### What is the Book About?

The inability for people to effectively dialogue on the issues of the day stems from the paradigmatic disconnect between diametrically opposed visions of human nature.

#### 1.2.37 Live Not by Lies

*A Manual for Christian Dissidents*

- Author: Rod Dreher
- Publication Year: 2020
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Live-Not-Lies-Christian-Dissidents/dp/0593087399/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=live+not+by+lies&qid=1608493936&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Live-Not-Lies-Christian-Dissidents/dp/0593087399/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=live+not+by+lies&qid=1608493936&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?

- Finished on: 2020-11-14

### What is the Book About?

A warning that the cultural circumstances in the world today bear remarkable similarities to various societies over the last century before their embrace of totalitarianism, and recommended practices from Christians who weathered the storm and kept the faith alive.

## 1.2.38 Expository Apologetics

*Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*

- Author: Voddie Baucham Jr
- Publication Year: 2015
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/Expository-Apologetics-Answering-Objections-Power/dp/1433533790/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=NBF4U5SDL8L&dchild=1&keywords=expository+apologetics+voddie+baucham&qid=1600779698&srefix=expository+apolo%2Caps%2C313&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Expository-Apologetics-Answering-Objections-Power/dp/1433533790/ref=sr_1_1?crid=NBF4U5SDL8L&dchild=1&keywords=expository+apologetics+voddie+baucham&qid=1600779698&srefix=expository+apolo%2Caps%2C313&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-09-28

### What is the Book About?

A framework for approaching the defense of the faith by identifying, analyzing, and then refuting counterfeit world-views.

## 1.2.39 How to Speak, How to Listen

- Author: Mortimer J. Adler
- Publication Year: 1983
- Link: [https://smile.amazon.com/How-Speak-Listen-Mortimer-Adler/dp/0684846470/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+to+speaking+how+to+listen&qid=1622571465&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/How-Speak-Listen-Mortimer-Adler/dp/0684846470/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=how+to+speaking+how+to+listen&qid=1622571465&sr=8-1)
- Started on: ?
- Finished on: 2020-08-28

## 1.2.40 The Twelve Days of the Aspen Executive Seminar

- Author: Mortimer J. Adler
- Publication Year: 1972
- Link: [http://cyberspacei.com/greatbooks/h2/speak\\_listen/sp\\_listen\\_016.htm](http://cyberspacei.com/greatbooks/h2/speak_listen/sp_listen_016.htm)
- Started on: 2020-08-21
- Finished on: 2020-08-28

### **What is the Book About?**

A brief history of the political and economic questions facing the world today, which have been hotly debated since well before this country was founded.



## 2.1 Counterfeit Worldviews Invading the Church

### Total Reading Time

~95 minutes

September 12, 2022.

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      - *When Love Makes You Compromise*
      - *When Love Demands You Stop Thinking*
    - \* *What are the Consequences?*
  - *Authoritarianism*

- \* *What's Wrong with This?*
  - *Authority Figures are Right*
  - *I Can't Ascertain Truth for Myself*
  - *Questioning Authority Figures is Wrong*
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- \* *What are the Consequences?*
- *What Can We Do About All This?*
  - *Understand Our Training Regimen*
    - \* *Revelation*
    - \* *Reason*
    - \* *Reality*
    - \* *How Am I Supposed to Do All This?*
  - *Identify, Analyze, and Refute*
  - *Require Specificity*
  - *Request Transparent Communication*
  - *Rely on Your Community*
- *Conclusion*

### 2.1.1 Motivation

When my family and I moved to town six years ago, it took us quite a while to find a church home. Though we tried plugging into a few places, sometimes for months at a time, we never really felt like we fit. One weekend, though, we had what I called the most efficient church shopping experience ever. After doing some research throughout the week, we set off Sunday morning to visit a new church. We lasted maybe 20 minutes into the service when my wife and I looked at each other, said, “Nah,” and got up and left. We got back in the car, found the next closest church on the map that hadn't started yet, and headed that way. At stop number two, we didn't even make it into the sanctuary because they wanted us to hand over the sleeping baby in our arms to their childcare program. No thanks; back in the car, and on down the road to the next closest church. Stop number three was the winning ticket, so in less than an hour we'd visited three churches and found the place we would call home. Mission accomplished.

Fast-forward about three months, and the pastor announces that he'll be taking a pastorate back home so he and his family can better care for aging parents. Makes sense, and I don't fault him for making the switch. Sometimes, though, it seems like the lead pastor is what's holding things together, and after his departure things that hadn't been addressed but really needed to be start to surface and things start to fall apart. In this particular case we had a rough interim period, a sketchy pastoral search process, a contentious congregational meeting to hire a new pastor, a difficult time under new leadership, a request from the elder board that the new pastor resign, and then the departure of both the new guy and a disgruntled faction within the church. You'd think, with all that in mind, when asked if I would consider joining the elder board, I would've responded with, “I'm out. No—thank you for thinking of me.” Instead, being convinced the call to eldership was from God and not solely from the church, I agreed, and then got to see “how the sausage is made.”



so to speak. Fast-forward some more, and after my wife and I confront some of the church leadership on lying to the congregation, and those conversations ending effectively in, “Well, I guess we’ll just need to agree to disagree,” we realize that for us to continue following where God is leading us, we need to leave the church we’d invested our lives in over a number of years.

That was rough, but in short order we found ourselves connected to a church that seemed like it really had a culture of devoting itself to the study of the scriptures and to discipleship. Good deal—at that point we needed a place that was rock-solid founded on truth. However, on our second Sunday there, the lead pastor who’d been there a couple decades gives his two weeks notice. Now at this point I start thinking we should be able to monetize our apparent skill set here. Want to get rid of your pastor? Invite us to your church, we’ll start getting plugged in, and he’ll be out the door in a few weeks to a few months, guaranteed. Tongue in cheek aside, this ushered in a rough interim period, a sketchy pastoral search process, and a contentious congregational meeting to hire a new pastor. Déjà vu. Seeing that this congregation didn’t have a biblical understanding of the church, of church leadership, or of church discipline, we decided not to invest any more time there.

Switching away from our church family woes, in recent years I’d also been feeling a need to seek out more intentional training in spiritual matters. Being raised in the middle east, a good deal of my childhood was devoted to learning how to defend the faith, particularly in conversation with all the other world religions out there. However, much of my adult life was spent largely relying on that foundation that had been built up in childhood, not necessarily developing it further. I therefore started looking around to see who or what kind of program I might train under. I looked into a few seminaries, but didn’t think I was supposed to step away from software engineering at the time. I came across [The Institute of Public Theology](#), which looks like a great program, but the price tag and time commitment were more than I thought was reasonable for us, given the rest of life right now. Eventually I found a program that looked like it fit the bill, and a few friends and I signed up for their year-long training program.

Given our last two church experiences, I think I’m perhaps more perceptive now than you’re average Joe when it comes to seeing things start to go sideways in a Christian context. As our time in the program progressed, there started to be concerns about how some of us were engaging with the materials (e.g., you’re being too negative in your critiques, etc.). I suspected our small group leader was undergoing some harsh treatment at the hands of the program’s leadership. Eventually, not being able to ignore the problems any longer, I sank an entire day into re-reading six months’ worth of online forum discussions to see if I could figure out what exactly the problem was and where. At the end of that, I reached out to the program leadership and said, “Hey folks, I’m not sure exactly what’s going on, but I suspect some of us have been accidentally sinning against one another. I might be wrong, but here’s all my research to support that. Can we please get together and talk things through?” What should have been a simple matter of, “Sorry, all. We made some bad assumptions, didn’t do our homework, and therefore made some false accusations. Can you please forgive us?” turned really ugly really quickly, and in less than two weeks a friend and I were expelled from the program.

You run into three nasty church situations like this in three years’ time, and you have to start wondering, “Am I the problem? Why would God put us through all of this? Wasn’t the first go-around painful enough? What on earth is going on?” On the surface it might seem like all the various problems we’ve experienced are unrelated—a confluence of events such that this was simply an unfortunate and unpleasant season in our lives—however, we eventually realized that there is something that ties all the strands together: a conflict of worldviews.

## 2.1.2 What Is a Worldview?

### Reading Time

~8 minutes

Before we unpack what I mean by a conflict of worldviews, we must first understand what the term means. It was first coined by the German philosopher [Immanuel Kant](#) in his *Critique of Judgment* in 1790 as *Weltanschauung* (literally *view of the world*). While for Kant the term meant simply the perception of the world you gained empirically, the term quickly grew to encompass all the fundamental beliefs you hold that color how you view the world. Often you’ll hear people use the analogy that your worldview is a pair of glasses through which you see everything else—if the lenses

are blue, then everything will have a bluish hue, etc. Though there are multiple ways to talk about worldviews, there are three that I find most helpful.

### The Four Fundamental Questions

The first way to have a more concrete understanding of a worldview is to say it answers these four fundamental questions:

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I here?
3. What's wrong with the world?
4. How can what's wrong be made right?

Everyone has an answer to these questions, whether or not they've thought through them intentionally. The biblical worldview answers these questions as follows:

1. I am an individual () made in the image of God, the crowning glory of his creation ().
2. I am here to glorify God () and enjoy him forever ().
3. The problem with the world is I don't do what I was created to do (;).
4. To address the problem, I can surrender my life to the lordship of Christ () and allow God to transform me more and more each day into his likeness (). Ultimately Christ will return to judge the world and make all things right again (;).

A non-biblical worldview will have different answers to one or more of these questions.

### The Historical Meta-Narrative

The second way to understand a worldview more fully is to look at the historical meta-narrative it tells. History tells a story, the main components of which are:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption
4. Consummation

The biblical worldview tells us:

1. God created all things, both seen and unseen (), created man and woman in his image as the crowning glory of his creation, and deemed it all very good ().
2. Mankind ruined our perfect relationship with our creator by sinning against him (). This fall from grace forever impacted God's perfect creation (;).
3. After promising redemption for millennia (;), God sent his son Jesus () to become fully human (), to live a perfect, sinless life (), to die a substitutionary death on the cross in our place (), that his righteousness might be credited to us () and we might be reconciled to God () through faith in him ().
4. God has appointed a day for Christ to come again to judge the living and the dead () and make all things right ().

A non-biblical worldview will address the same four areas of the historical meta-narrative, but there will be differences in one or more of the stages.

**Note:** The historical meta-narrative and the four fundamental questions line up as follows: Who am I and why am I here? Creation. What’s wrong with the world? Fall. How can what’s wrong be made right? Redemption and consummation.

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## The Five-Fold Breakdown

The third and final way to think about worldviews that I find useful is to break up the fundamental beliefs into a handful of categories. People tend to break it down in different ways, but one way that’s helpful to remember is your worldview consists of your views on:

1. God
2. Man
3. Truth
4. Knowledge
5. Ethics

The biblical worldview specifies:

1. There is only one true God (), eternally existent in the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ().
2. God made man in his image as the crowning glory of his creation (), and gave us the responsibility to exercise dominion over his created order ().
3. Truth is absolute and unchanging (), having its source in God himself ().
4. We can know truth through what God revealed to man in the special revelation of the Bible (), as well as in the general revelation of his creation (logic, math, science) (; ; ).
5. Ethics are absolute and are based on the unchanging word and will of God (; ; ).

A non-biblical worldview can be broken down into the same five categories, but will differ in what it specifies for one or more of them.

## To Sum Up

There is a biblical worldview—that is, a worldview completely consistent with revelation, reason, and reality—and there are numerous counterfeit worldviews—those that disagree with the biblical one on one or more points. I refer to them as *counterfeit* worldviews because, like a counterfeit bill, they resemble the real thing, but are wrong in often subtle ways. That which they get right, they pilfer from scripture, and that which they get wrong is a twisting of God’s truth.

Note that in all I’ve said above I have appealed to the Bible as a source of truth without first establishing it as such. Examining the veracity of scripture is a lengthy endeavor outside the scope of our current discussion, so I’ll leave looking into it as an *exercise to the reader*. However, to whet your appetite it’ll be sufficient to say, “I choose to believe the Bible because it is a reliable collection of historical documents, written down by eyewitnesses in the lifetime of other eyewitnesses; they report supernatural events that took place in fulfillment of specific prophecies, and claim that their writings are divine rather than human in origin.”

**Note**

Though a person’s worldview is formed by the time they enter adolescence, that doesn’t mean it can’t change over time. Rather what’s meant here is that if you’re talking with someone who’s a teenager or older, they already have a comprehensive view of the world that answers all of life’s fundamental questions, whether they realize it or not.

Now one final note before we leave this section: Often enough I’ve heard people use the term “worldview” to mean something more along the lines of *systematic theology*—a complete, orderly account of all Christian doctrine that believers will learn over the course of years of intensive study—but to conflate the two terms is to misunderstand both concepts significantly. Everyone has a worldview, whether or not they’ve studied theology, and whether or not they can articulate it with any clarity. The elements of your worldview form quite early in life, with most of them (your fundamental beliefs about God, man, truth, and knowledge) solidifying by age nine or so, and the final element (ethics) *settling around age thirteen*. To learn to identify, analyze, and refute counterfeit worldviews is not just an academic exercise for the theological scholars—it’s necessary for each and every one of us because we’re all influenced by various worldviews on a daily basis.

### 2.1.3 Where Is the Conflict Then?

If you’ve been in the church for any significant amount of time, I’d guess as you were reading through the last section you were thinking something along the lines of, “Okay, this seems like Christianity 101. What’s the big deal?” The problem that arises is we say we hold to scripture, while at the same time mentally assenting to multiple conflicting worldviews. This inherent contradiction is played out in what we think, say, and do, but without the ability to identify, analyze, and refute counterfeit worldviews, we’re often unaware of it.

Let’s unpack this by examining two concrete cases of worldviews that have been making significant inroads into the church in recent decades. First we’ll take a look at what happens when our emotions become the barometer for reality. After that we’ll see how the tyranny of the experts unfolds within the church. Let’s dive in.

#### Emotionalism

**Reading Time**

~30 minutes

The first worldview in play is *emotionalism*. For a fuller treatment of this subject, I highly recommend *Mama Bear Apologetics*, edited by *Hillary Morgan Ferrer*, but I’ll try to do it justice in brief. Starting around the Age of Enlightenment back in the 17th century, there was a growing belief in the philosophy of *naturalism*, which holds (among other things) that the only things that are knowable are what we can observe with our senses. As this view grew in popularity, eventually authority and divine revelation were jettisoned as sources of knowledge, which characterized the age of *modernism* in the 19th century. As we continued to whittle away at sources of knowledge, we eventually wound up at *postmodernism* in the mid-20th century, where the only truth is that there is no truth. However, being created in the image of God, and subject to his reality, humans naturally crave a source of truth—perhaps a built-in longing for our creator—so even in our insistence that no such source existed, we still needed one.

Well if we’ve given up on revelation, reason, and reality, what’s left over that can fill the void? Cue the Disney montage and crank up *True to Your Heart* from the *Mulan* soundtrack, because the answer is your emotions. This worldview is often easy to see out in the wild. For instance:

- Following your heart—oftentimes contrary to your better judgement and the advice of those who have your best interests in mind—has been one of the dominant themes in children’s literature and entertainment over the last half-century, and it always works because “they all lived happily ever after.”

- Over the last two decades or so, the concepts of trigger warnings and safe spaces were incubated on college campuses and are now spreading through society at large, all in service of ensuring no one has a negative emotional response to anything.
- Recently [Matt Walsh](#) released a documentary entitled *What is a Woman?*, in which he travels the world seeking answers regarding gender and transgender issues. At times it's downright comical as his interviewees are reticent to answer simple questions directly, instead relying on emotional justifications for their beliefs.

Though the examples above are fairly noticeable, emotionalism can also be much more subtle, particularly as it's been invading the church. For instance:

- We have a family that will be joining our small group, and the husband is one who was raised in the church and is now an unbeliever, and we want to make sure we conduct ourselves in a way that is loving and welcoming and not off-putting.
- We want to make sure we're seen as loving our neighbor, so we'll [insert something here] to ensure we're not creating a wedge between us and those we seek to minister to.
- The way you're critiquing this Christian organization's content is overly negative, and is hampering the ability of some in our group to engage with the material, so you need to change the way you engage with the information and communicate with your fellow participants.

## What's Wrong with This?

In the prior three examples it might be significantly harder to discern where the problems lie. We know we're commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (). We know that people can't be saved without first hearing the gospel from us (), and we don't want to create a barrier such that they can't hear it. We don't want to cause people to stumble in their faith (). It seems like in these examples we're simply being exhorted to be good Christians—what's wrong with that? To answer that question, we need to realize that emotionalism is built on a number of false assumptions: that positive emotions are good and negative ones are bad, that something I feel must be true, and that I'm responsible for the feelings of those I interact with, among others. Let's walk through each of these in turn.

## Positive Good, Negative Bad

It's natural that we think emotions indicate whether the situation that caused them was good or bad. For instance, when we're celebrating the wedding of dear friends, we're overjoyed, because their marriage is a good thing. Alternatively, when we hear of the latest mass shooting, our hearts break, because murder is a bad thing. However, it's relatively easy to come up with counterexamples to show that this relationship between emotions and ethics doesn't hold universally.

Consider the case of a man viewing a woman naked. He naturally has a positive emotional response to this visual stimulus. Does that mean the situation that caused that response is good? It depends on the broader context. If the woman in question is his wife, then yes, because that's how God designed it to work. If she isn't, then no, the situation that caused the positive emotional response is bad, because it's adultery, which God forbids (). These two possibilities are an oversimplification, to be sure, but for our purposes here we just need to realize that the goodness or badness of any scenario depends on the specifics of the situation and not on the emotional responses in play.

Consider also the scenario of saying something in a conversation that causes a negative emotional reaction in someone. Were you wrong to say what you said? Again, it depends on what exactly is going on. If you were hurling insults at them, then yes, repentance and forgiveness are necessary, and hopefully the two of you can be restored to fellowship in short order (). However, if you communicated truth to them and the Holy Spirit used that truth to convict them of unrepentant sin in their life, which then caused the negative emotions associated with guilt, then no, what you did was both right and necessary; indeed, scripture requires it ().

At its core, this foundational assumption of emotionalism is just bad logic. We know from experience that some good situations produce positive emotions, and some bad situations produce negative ones, but then we flip that around and say that positive emotions imply goodness and negative ones imply badness. I'm afraid that's just wrong.

## Feeling = Truth

This second assumption tends to manifest in two different ways. In the first case, consider a newly married couple. It's their first time celebrating the wife's birthday together after the wedding, and the husband has arranged for a romantic meal at a fancy restaurant. The food is superb, the dessert top-notch, and yet when they return home for the evening, the husband can tell something's wrong, but hasn't the slightest idea what. Being a loving husband, he tries to remedy the situation with flowers, notes, etc., but to no avail. Fast-forward to the husband's birthday and the wife prepares a cake and candles, has some small gifts to open, and invites some friends over. "Aha!" realizes the husband, now fully clued in. "This is how you celebrate a birthday!" On the wife's birthday, the celebration had left her feeling deflated and unloved, because all the regular trappings of a birthday were missing. However, did her husband stop loving her, on her birthday of all days? Not at all—it was simply a mismatch of how birthdays were celebrated in their respective families. The feelings present did not match the reality of the situation. (And yes, I've learned my lesson, and there have been flowers, cake, presents, etc., ever since.)

The second case is a little harder to parse through. If you've ever been through any instruction on communicating in the midst of conflict, chances are you've heard it can be helpful to the conversation to make statements about your feelings rather than to make statements of fact. For instance, "I feel like you're being unloving," rather than simply, "You're being unloving." No one can argue with your feelings, or so the saying goes. While there's some truth to this statement, unfortunately it has been extended well outside its natural boundaries as it's permeated modern culture.

If you are simply expressing the emotions you're feeling, you're making a truth claim about your emotional state (e.g., "I'm angry right now"). Someone could try to argue that you're lying about your feelings in the moment, but in general we can take it on faith that someone is being truthful in relaying their emotions to us. And doing so can indeed be helpful to the conversation so others aren't left guessing and then operating on assumptions.

However, more often than not people tend to use the phrase "I feel" as a substitute for phrases like "I suspect," "my gut tells me," or ultimately "I believe." Rather than making a truth claim about the speaker's emotional state (which can't practically be falsified), they're actually making a truth claim about some aspect of reality (which can). They're couching their statements in the vocabulary of emotions, though, which has the impact of making them unassailable. The problem, then, is that when making a truth claim about reality, you should be able to support it **with a well-reasoned argument** (where "argument" refers to the rhetorical device, as opposed to the modern redefinition of the term to mean "quarrel"). Even in the cases when you think it's just your gut talking, that's actually your brain processing information faster than your consciousness can keep up (see, e.g., *Blink*, by Malcolm Gladwell), and you should be able to think through the argument after the fact. If you can't, your truth claim has no justification, and there's really no reason for someone to listen to it.

This assumption is a pernicious one, again because we have first-hand experience of instances in which our emotions do happen to line up with reality; that is, they *can* indeed clue us in to the truth of the matter. However, to take the (understandably large) subset of instances in which emotions and truth align, and then to say that what I feel in *any* situation *must* be true, is a **logical fallacy**. On the one hand your emotions may not line up with reality, and on the other you may be using emotional language to hide your assertions about reality from scrutiny. Either way the assumption falls flat.

## I'm Responsible for Your Feelings

This final assumption we'll analyze under emotionalism is a case of taking a good idea—don't be a jerk—and extending it far beyond the bounds of reason. If you're mean, rude, abusive, etc., your actions will cause negative emotions in others, and that's a bad thing that should be avoided. What should be avoided, exactly? Being mean, rude, abusive, etc.; however, we've been trained to think the answer is causing negative emotions in others, and when you take that to its logical conclusion, it means you need to conduct yourself in such a way as to never cause a negative emotional response in anyone you interact with, ever.

To an extent, this may simply be a lack of maturity playing itself out in society. I don't like feeling sad, upset, depressed, hurt, etc., and when I do I have two options: I can take those thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ (), and then deal with them appropriately, or I could blame you, take no responsibility whatsoever, and demand that you

and everyone else on the planet never hurt me in such a way ever again. Keep in mind that life will throw all sorts of circumstances your way. You're not responsible for what life throws at you, but you absolutely are responsible for how you respond. *Boundaries*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, is a great resource in this arena.

I suspect something else that's been hampering the church in particular in this area (at least in the western world) is our relatively recent poor performance in terms of number of souls saved vs those abandoning their faith, which forces us to ask the question, "What are we doing wrong?" It seems we've gravitated toward the answer—I would argue because we're far more influenced by the cultural milieu than we'd ever care to admit—that it's the way in which you speak that determines whether or not your words will be received well. If only we could speak in such a way as to be perceived as loving, unifying, humble, encouraging (though we'll define these terms as the culture does, not as scripture does), then we'll be able to have enough relational capital to win our neighbors to Christ and prevent our children from abandoning the faith as soon as they leave home. Remember that you're responsible for delivering the truth, not for how someone responds to it.

## Counterfeit Worldview

Now that we've walked through some of the faulty assumptions underpinning emotionalism, let's take a step back to see how it's a counterfeit worldview in conflict with the biblical one. The contrast is easiest to see if you recall the latter three parts of the five-fold breakdown from earlier:

3. **Truth:** Truth has you as its source, and is therefore fluid, both in time, and from person to person.
4. **Knowledge:** We can know truth through what we happen to be feeling in the moment.
5. **Ethics:** Right and wrong are determined by whether actions cause positive or negative emotions.

Though it's easiest to see in these three areas, these fundamental beliefs have implications across the board. In terms of the four fundamental questions:

1. **Who am I?** My identity is determined by whatever I happen to be feeling in the moment. This may be in accord with the biblical worldview, but I might feel like I'm attracted to members of the same sex, that I'm a member of the opposite sex stuck in the wrong body, that I'm actually a **non-human animal inhabiting a human body**, etc. My identity is effectively only limited by my imagination.
2. **Why am I here?** To pursue whatever activities lead to positive emotional responses. This usually only means in the short-term, though—if there are any long-term negative emotional consequences to my actions, I'll just pursue more activities that yield short-term highs to distract from that.
3. **What's wrong with the world?** Definitely all the things everyone else is doing that result in me experiencing negative emotions. Definitely not anything I do that does the same, and if anyone tries to point out such a scenario, them pointing it out is what causes my negative emotional reaction, so they're in the wrong.
4. **How can what's wrong be made right?** Society must be restructured such that no one hurts anyone else, even accidentally, ever again. While we're at it, we may as well throw in free unicorns for everyone too.

In terms of the historical meta-narrative:

1. **Creation:** Everything came into being however I feel like it did. I might feel like a young-earth creationist or a big bang naturalistic materialist—either way's fine, or I can pick something else that makes me feel good.
2. **Fall:** Things went wrong when humans started experiencing negative emotions. They're uncomfortable and often hurt, and ruin the paradise of positive emotions we inhabited at some indeterminate point in the past.
3. **Redemption:** We can save ourselves by ensuring we never experience things like hurt, anger, rejection, depression, etc., ever again. Theoretically that should be possible by rearchitecting society, but in the meantime we'll just do whatever we can to deaden our senses.
4. **Consummation:** One day we'll get to a place where everyone's happy and no one's ever upset. No telling how we'll get there, but oh well \\_()\\_/.

Then we can return to the five-fold breakdown, the last three parts of which we started with up above. To finish it out:

1. **God:** Whatever conception of God makes you feel most at peace is good for you. This tends to be what's been characterized as [moralistic therapeutic deism](#).
2. **Man:** I'll define myself however I feel like it, thank you very much. See the first two fundamental questions up above.

## How Does This Play Out?

With all of this in mind, let's see if we can discern where emotionalism might be in play in the three more subtle example scenarios from earlier.

## When Love Silences You

We have a family that will be joining our small group, and the husband is one who was raised in the church and is now an unbeliever, and we want to make sure we conduct ourselves in a way that is loving and welcoming and not off-putting.

Many ideas you'll run into in life are neither all good nor all bad. Rather than simply accept them at face value, though, you can cultivate a posture of discernment by approaching ideas with the following questions:

- What ideas here are good or bad?
- Why are they good or bad?
- Where do these good or bad ideas come from?
- What purposes do these good or bad ideas serve?

Let's try to ask some of these questions of the current scenario.

In terms of what's good, we know that treating an unbeliever with the love and respect due to another made in the image of God is a good thing. Scripture tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves () and to be welcoming (). We know such admonitions are good because they come from God and are meant for our flourishing, both individually and in community. We can reason that if we were, for instance, to conduct the small group in such a way that it seemed like the purpose was to save the unbeliever, treating him as a sort of project, that likely wouldn't go over well. Shouldn't we instead just let our light shine before others () and see how that plays out?

It depends on what exactly you mean by "letting your light shine." If you mean regularly pointing people to the truth of God's word, such that it can set them free from our slavery to sin (), then absolutely—go for it. If, on the other hand, you mean just generally living as "decent" human beings—you know, a step or two above serial killers—in the hopes that one day they'll have an epiphany and realize there's something fundamental they've been missing that no one's ever told them about, then no, chances are that won't be terribly effective. We tend toward the latter understanding, though, due to tacitly believing a false assumption that to be loving means to not tell someone what they're doing is wrong.

I distinctly remember one evening where this influence of emotionalism was in full force, though I wouldn't realize what was going on until years later. Our small group went through a season in which the couples shared their backstories with each other. This was a time in which we were more vulnerable with each other than ever before. When this particular couple shared their story of faith, marriage, and then the husband abandoning his faith afterward, one of the comments he made was that in all of their journey he hadn't abandoned his marital vows. In that moment, I was instantly on high alert as my mind thought, "That ain't right." I waited to see if anyone else would raise a concern, but instead it was all hugs, thanks, "we're here for you," etc. To my shame, I didn't say anything.



### Book Recommendation

For a fuller treatment of these roles the husband takes on in marriage, see *What He Must Be... If He Wants to Marry My Daughter*, by Voddie Baucham Jr.

What was I so concerned about, though? When we got home, I brought the issue up to my wife. Fidelity to the marital covenant is more than just making sure you don't cheat on your wife. When a man marries a woman, he's agreeing to take on the roles of provider, protector, prophet, and priest, both for his wife and for any children God may bless them with. Provider and protector are easy enough for everyone to understand: bring home bacon, and stand between your family and those who would do them harm. Prophet and priest sound stranger to our modern ears, though. Prophet means representing God to your family (speaking God's truths to them), and priest means representing your family to God (lifting them up in prayer). When my friend abandoned his faith, he abdicated these latter two roles. When he shared his story, the Holy Spirit tried to speak truth through me, but then and in the days, weeks, and months that followed, my desire to love my friend kept me silent.

### When Love Makes You Compromise

We want to make sure we're seen as loving our neighbor, so we'll [insert something here] to ensure we're not creating a wedge between us and those we seek to minister to.

As we saw up above, we know that loving our neighbor is a good thing, because it's the second part of the greatest commandment (). We know we're to be the salt of the earth (), and that salt only does any good when it comes into contact with food, so we don't want to be separating ourselves from those we're supposed to be seasoning. Where does this thought go wrong, then? It depends on what kind of bounds we put on it (if any). For instance, in our attempts to ensure our neighbors perceive us as loving them, do we wind up compromising truth? As we seek to ensure we can continue ministering to the lost, do we wind up disobeying other commands from God in the process?

This scenario is perhaps easier to work through if we make it more concrete, so let's talk about how many churches responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you think back to March of 2020, one of the common reasons cited for shuttering churches was that we were doing it to show our love for our neighbors. If you tried to push on this to determine what exactly was meant, you might've been answered with something along the lines of, "We don't want to take the chance that us staying open is what causes someone to contract COVID and die." What motivates such a response, though? If we do stay open, and someone does contract the virus, and they do die, what happens? Negative emotions—either in us, because we feel guilty, or in those close to the deceased, because they're mourning the loss of a loved one, or both.

Hang on, though: Why are we worried about believers passing away, when we know that what awaits us after death is infinitely better than anything we could possibly have in this life ()? People will still be sad, sure, but that doesn't mean death is a bad thing for us. Maybe you're worried about not being ready to die yet, but if that's the case, what do you need to do to get ready? Life is fleeting (, ), and we never know which day will be our last. Are you living accordingly?

Perhaps then church leaders clarified that, no, we're concerned for the who might die as a result of our actions. In that case there really is a negative outcome, because the end result is an eternity spent in hell. Hang on, though: Who's responsible for someone coming to faith? Is it me, or is it God (, )? Is God indeed sovereign over all his creation and the affairs of man (, , ), or did someone die with COVID and God's response was, "Darn it, I meant to save that one"? If our actions were intended to prolong the lives of unbelievers that they might be saved, did we then do anything to ensure they came in contact with the truth that has the power to save them, or did we just go about living as "loving" examples in the hopes that they'd eventually get a clue?

Okay, no, we understand that the death of a believer means, "Go directly to heaven; do not pass 'Go'; do not collect \$200," and that God is ultimately in charge of when we kick the bucket. Rather, we're closing down for a time because this is how we lovingly submit to our governing authorities (). First question: What if you're being told to disobey God's commands (), like to not neglect gathering together ()? Second question: What authorities are we supposed to submit to, exactly?

### Book Recommendation

For more details on the appropriate relationship between church and state, and on the history of the development of Christian political thought, grab a copy of Glenn Sunshine's *Slaying Leviathan*—one of the best books I've read in the past year.

Note that if I were still living in another country with a different form of government, I would not be making this argument. Instead, I would be living my life in submission both to Christ and those governing authorities, praying and working for, and looking forward to the day in which God's truth would lead to a proper relationship between earthly sovereigns and subjects.

This latter question deserves some examination, real quick, as it's something that often gets confused when people are throwing Romans 13 around. When Paul was writing his letter to the Romans, he was doing so in the midst of the **Roman Empire**, in which the highest authority in the land was the emperor. Some authority was delegated to those under the emperor for the execution of certain offices (e.g., within the military or various provincial governments), but ultimately this period of ancient Roman history was characterized by a government that became ever more monarchical. In contrast, the United States is what's known as a constitutional **republic**, in which the highest authority in the land isn't a person, and isn't an office, but instead is a document: the **United States Constitution**. Certain authority is delegated to various elected representatives for the execution of particular offices, but when an individual in one of those offices seeks to appropriate for himself authority that has not been delegated to him by the constitution, he's operating outside the bounds of his roles both as a government official and as a minister of God (). When that's the case, you're still required to submit to the governing authority, but that's the constitution, which the particular official has run afoul of. When presidents, governors, and mayors start behaving like little tyrants, submitting to their whims, instead of holding them accountable both to the foundational documents that delineate their authority and responsibilities, and to the God who they ultimately serve, is perhaps one of the most unloving responses we could have.

While we must love our neighbor, we must do so while both loving God () and obeying all that he's commanded us (). Our actions must be in accordance with all of scripture. Compromise isn't an option. Unfortunately in this instance many believers allowed fear (of death, of being seen as doing the wrong thing, of making the wrong decision, etc.) and other concerns to trump revelation, reason, and reality.

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**Note:** You may argue that churches closed down not based on emotional reasoning, but based on a sound examination of the scientific evidence available at the time. In practice, I didn't see this—and I was very much on the lookout for it—though I'll grant that it might've happened somewhere. What I saw instead was a good deal of appealing to experts without first examining their authority or the veracity of their claims, which we'll return to later on in this piece.

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### When Love Demands You Stop Thinking

The way you're critiquing this Christian organization's content is overly negative, and is hampering the ability of some in our group to engage with the material, so you need to change the way you engage with the information and communicate with your fellow participants.

First some backstory on this one. Some of the study materials for that year-long training program I mentioned in the introduction included the **Bible Project videos**, which are short, well-animated, informational videos that help you understand that the Bible is a unified story that leads people to Jesus. In terms of what they attempt to achieve, they are both excellent and unparalleled; however, problems became apparent very early on in the series. In some cases the concerns raised were along the lines of, "I don't think I would've said it quite that way." In others, "I disagree with your interpretation, but I understand how you got there." In still others, "This is just plain wrong. The Bible says one thing, the video says another, and the two do not agree." We were eventually counseled by the program's leadership to take what was good from the videos and comment on the positive for the edification of others, but to keep our concerns to ourselves, as they were negatively impacting some members of the group.

What's good here? You don't want to be a Debbie Downer all the time—it's not good for you or for those you're around. A joyful heart is good medicine (). It's good to focus on the good (). Uplifting speech is a good thing, but negative talk is *no bueno* (, , ). We shouldn't judge others (, ). You don't want to be around divisive people (, ). We shouldn't be a stumbling block to others (, ). It seems like there's a pretty solid scriptural basis for the exhortation to chill out and focus on the good.

What's wrong here? Unfortunately it's that the scriptures above are either being misinterpreted or misapplied to the current situation, or both.

- : While it's good to be cheerful, thinking critically about a teaching isn't indicative of a spirit of anxiety that weighs you down. If someone else's critical thinking gets you down, that's something that we should work through.
- : Focusing on the good is worthwhile, but I'd think trying to ensure Christian teaching adheres to the word of God is one of the honorable and commendable things that fits into that bucket.
- , , : These verses don't warn against critiquing other people's ideas, but rather against speech that is unwholesome, wicked, perverse, rotten, or worthless.
- , : These passages aren't saying not to judge, as Jesus goes on to call out the Pharisees for being blind, and says you can determine people to be either good or bad based on the fruit their lives produce. Rather, he's saying the measure we use when judging others is the measure that God will use when judging us, so it's a call to forgiveness and sacrificial love. But in order to forgive, there first needs to be something that requires forgiveness, which means some action has been deemed wrong.
- , : Paul's letter to Titus is an exhortation to sound doctrine and the godly living that accords with it. The divisive people in this verse are those Paul has been warning Titus about throughout the letter—rebellious and deceptive false teachers and charlatans—not people questioning the biblical accuracy of a presentation. The bad company in Paul's letter to the Corinthians is referring to those who would tempt you to sin, not to ensure your teaching is sound.
- , : The first verse here is admonishing you to not take advantage of the disabled, or, more generally, to not be a jerk. In the second verse, Paul is talking about the liberty of conscience we have in matters of differing personal conviction. Neither verse is making the general statement that you must avoid doing something that has the potential to upset somebody.

To sum up, when someone's being critical, exhorting them to not be a jerk is just fine. Beyond that, though, there are some questions you should ask to get to the heart of the matter: Are the criticisms mean-spirited and rude, or are they simply pointing out where something doesn't seem to align with scripture? Are you uncomfortable with the critique because of the content, tone, or way in which it was put forth, or just because you're uncomfortable with any kind of confrontation? Has the person leveling the criticism actually sinned, or is someone just offended that their leadership has been called into question? By all means think critically about your critical thinking, but by no means stop thinking critically.

### What are the Consequences?

Emotionalism is a worldview that is inconsistent with how God designed the world. When your thoughts, speech, and actions don't mesh with reality, that causes problems. Other than the specific instances we've looked into above, what sort of problems manifest when this worldview infiltrates the church?

#### Definition

*Epistemology* is just a fancy word for beliefs about what we can know and how we can know it.

On the most basic level, our thinking is simply conflicted and erratic. We have one epistemology that applies to spiritual or religious matters (however you'd care to define those terms), and another one that applies everywhere else. Nancy

Pearcey does a fantastic job in *Total Truth* chronicling where this sacred/secular divide came from, and what havoc it's wrought both on the church and on society at large. The problem is worse than this, though, as we hold to the biblical worldview only when discussing matters of doctrine or theology within our walls, but then when those beliefs are to be lived out, even within the church, a different and incompatible ethic informs our actions. We've been so effectively disciplined in this way of thinking that we don't even realize the disconnect. What does this mean practically? I've typically seen it work itself out in two ways.

In the first case we wind up stifling the Holy Spirit's attempts to speak through us. We think, "Gosh, I really feel like I should say something right now, but if I do the other person might take it the wrong way, it might come across as sounding harsh, it might push them further away from the faith, I might be seen as unloving and judgmental, etc." This we must not do ().

Consider the various interactions Jesus had with the religious elite of his day. At one time or another people took things the wrong way, he was (appropriately) harsh, people wound up walking away, and he would definitely have been considered unloving and judgmental by today's standards. We assume these are bad things, and yet Jesus, who is God—the source and definition of love, goodness, rightness, etc.—did them. It's completely reasonable for us to approach such passages of scripture and say, "Hang on, this looks wrong to me, but I know it must be right, so Lord help me to understand how it is." In practice, though, our actions say, "Lord, I think you were wrong." How's that going to go over when you stand before him in judgment?

"Well hang on a minute," you say. "That's Jesus we're talking about! Who am I to do something like that?" Let me get this straight: We're called to imitate Christ (), and are to be sanctified () more and more into his likeness (), but you don't want me to do what Jesus did because he's God and I'm not? What are the boundaries of your assertion?

On top of the fact that our thinking here is nonsensical, we also deprive the body of believers from hearing God speak through us. Though we all intellectually assent to the fact that God can communicate to his church through the leading of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives, more often than not we do a poor job corporately discerning what he's trying to say to us. If you wish to improve in this arena, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, by Ruth Haley Barton, is a good resource with practices to integrate into the life of your community to increase the likelihood that you'll discern God's will accurately, and decrease your chances of accidentally quenching the Holy Spirit.

The second way emotionalism works itself out is actually an extension of the first. Since we've made it a habit to ignore the Holy Spirit when he prompts us to say something, we abandon our responsibilities both to exhort fellow believers to more Christ-like behavior, and to rebuke those in unrepentant sin (). For those who are actually bold enough to speak up, you often run into the "nice police" trying to silence you so no one gets hurt or is made uncomfortable. If that happens to you—keeping yourself open to correction, and making sure you conduct yourself in a manner that is above reproach ()—humbly and politely ask them what exactly you did wrong, when and where, why they believe it was wrong, and what they think an appropriate action in its place would have been (basically a more detailed version of ). In practice no one has ever answered these questions for me, and like the officials questioning Jesus, my accusers stand condemned by their silence.

The end result of all of this is we lovingly strong-arm the church into an artificial unanimity so we can present our best face to the world—a world that desperately needs the truth we have but won't share for fear of offending someone. Greg Koukl contends in *Tactics*—another one of the best books I've read in the past year—that we must combat such a fabricated unity through well-reasoned argumentation in our pursuit of knowledge. What is it that changes lives? Living lovingly as good examples, or truth convicting one of sin and of the need for a savior and sanctification? Again, don't be a jerk, but truth is absolutely essential, and Satan is doing everything he can to suppress it with this counterfeit worldview.

## Authoritarianism

### Reading Time

~30 minutes

The next worldview in play is *authoritarianism*. If you recall our brief history of emotionalism, over the past couple hundred years we worked our way to the point where we had thrown out all our sources of knowledge and then were left grasping for something, anything, to fill the void. Where some thought to fill the void with our emotions, others said, “Gosh, I don’t know. This is so hard to figure out. Tell you what, you just tell me what to think, mister public authority figure of some sort, and I’ll go with that.”

The nasty thing about lies is the best ones have a good deal of truth baked into them. Whereas emotionalism plays off the fact that our feelings often do provide information regarding the truth of a situation, authoritarianism exploits the fact that people in positions of authority often should be good sources of information. And indeed, this was largely true for much of history: children should listen to parents (), elders should be respected (), and so on, and this was a good thing. The interesting thing is we abandoned authority as a valid source of knowledge in the age of modernism, but then less than two centuries later we brought it back with a vengeance. What’s different between then and now? Historically authority figures functioned as sources of knowledge, because the knowledge they were imparting was anchored in revelation, reason, and reality. Now they’re attempting to function as sources of knowledge completely untethered from that foundation.

Many examples of this worldview are easy enough to spot:

- Various forms of government are built on it, e.g., dictatorships, oligarchies, autocracies, etc. When the power to determine right and wrong thinking, speech, and behavior lies in the hands of a select few, the average citizen is simply to be grateful that those in power know what they’re doing and are benevolent enough to bless the population with their oversight and control, all in service of the public good.
- Something that often comes out in the midst of a scandal—whether we’re talking about something like [Watergate](#) or [the fall of Mars Hill Church](#)—is that the culture of an organization was such that the one thing you absolutely could not do was question the person in charge.
- In recent years we’ve all become well-acquainted with various talking heads claiming to represent “the science,” though they never seem to present any scientific evidence to back up what they have to say. Their message is simply, “Agree with me, or else. . .” If you don’t, there’s an army of fact checkers policing the internet to cow you into submission.

Though the examples above are fairly easy to recognize, authoritarianism can also rear its head in much more subtle ways. For instance:

- Your research really flies in the face of what we’re hearing from everywhere else. Perhaps you got something wrong somewhere, and we just haven’t figured out what it is yet. Regardless, we don’t feel comfortable publishing this.
- If you don’t like this decision, then you really need to think and pray about it. Perhaps there’s some sin in your life that’s preventing you from agreeing, or perhaps you need to mature some before it’ll make sense.
- If you’ll continue to be tempted to be critical of this organization’s leadership, then perhaps a different program would better meet your needs at this time.

## What's Wrong with This?

These last three examples might be a good deal harder to parse through. There's definitely value in listening to what everyone else in my field is saying, particularly if my own conclusions disagree significantly with theirs. It may be the case that either I'm lacking in maturity or being blinded by sin in my life. I can imagine it being awkward and unpleasant if I'm continually questioning the leadership, so perhaps it's best to just walk away. It seems like in these examples we're simply being encouraged to be prudent—what's wrong with that? Before we answer that question, we need to realize that authoritarianism is built on a number of false assumptions: that authority figures are right, that I don't have the ability to ascertain truth for myself, and that to question an authority figure is wrong, to name a few. Let's tackle each of these one at a time.

## Authority Figures are Right

As mentioned previously, this assumption held true a good deal of the time throughout history, and indeed it continues to hold true in a great many scenarios today. That's where much of its staying power comes from. After all, to become an authority figure in whatever the context, you've likely put in a good deal of work over a number of years, building up experience that contributes to your ability to be right more often than not. Who am I to question you? It's not difficult, though, to come up with some counterexamples to show that the assumption doesn't hold in all circumstances.

Consider an example from history. Prior to the 19th century, well before we had an understanding of things like virology and microbiology, the medical authorities of the time regularly prescribed **bloodletting** as the treatment of choice for a wide variety of ailments. Sickesses were due, or so the thinking went, to an imbalance in the *humours* in the body, and the only solution was to get them back in balance by draining some blood. If the patient doesn't show signs of improvement, just keep draining. Now with our modern understanding of medical science, we look back in time and think, "What a bunch of fools." At the time, though, this wasn't just one expert, but near the entirety of the medical community saying, "This is truth," and they were dead wrong (macabre pun intended).

Another example from the last century or so is the growing *tyranny of the experts* in modern society. This phrase refers to the various social and economic planning activities that have been attempted by governments or philanthropic organizations that have failed miserably. This has been chronicled recently by economist William Easterly, and 50 years ago by lawyer and political scientist Jethro K. Lieberman. Though such activities—be they economic development, medical interventionist, or otherwise—are designed to produce the ideal society, they fail to achieve their desired outcomes. Why? Because it is wholly impossible for one person, or even a group of people, to have access to and process sufficient information to make the right decisions every step of the way, as Friedrich Hayek explains in his *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 1: Rules and Order*.

As we've seen in other places, this assumption boils down to yet another example of a **logical fallacy**, where we know *some* authority figures are right *some* of the time, but then we extend that and say that *all* authority figures are right *all* of the time. If you want to impress your friends at a cocktail party with your Latin skills, that's what we call a *non sequitur*, meaning "it doesn't follow;" that is, the conclusion (that authority figures are right, without any qualifications) doesn't follow from the premise (that I know of some examples in which authority figures were right). I suspect C.S. Lewis was on to something 70+ years ago:

"Logic!" said the Professor half to himself. "Why don't they teach logic at these schools?" ~ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

## I Can't Ascertain Truth for Myself

This second assumption tends to be an outgrowth of the first, particularly for the average Joe. After all, if the experts are the ones that can figure out what's true, and they've put in years, sometimes decades, of intense work and study to develop their expertise, who am I to try to figure out what's correct? I don't have their background, and I don't have the time to develop the experience, so shouldn't I just take their word for it?

There are two misconceptions at play here. The first is that we have to become an expert in a field in order to determine truth in that field. If that were the case, we simply wouldn't function:

- I don't know how to cook dinner tonight; I'm not a chef.
- I don't know how to take care of my yard; I'm not a landscaper.
- I don't know how to exercise; I'm not a professional athlete.
- I don't know how to raise my kids; I'm not a certified teacher.
- I don't know what a woman is; I'm not a biologist.

I hope it's clear from personal experience that such thoughts are nonsensical. It should also be obvious that to whatever extent you lack expertise in a field, you are capable of learning.

The second misconception is that since I don't have time to become an expert in something, I shouldn't do any research at all. The premise is understandable. I'm not going to spend the next decade earning degrees and certifications in communicable diseases to determine how my family should respond to the pandemic. However, the conclusion, again, doesn't follow; that is, it is possible for me to [do enough research to come to well-informed decisions](#) without being an expert.

I suspect, if we're honest with ourselves, this assumption really just boils down to good old fashioned laziness. We're too comfortable, and the thought of giving up some of our many pleasures to put time and effort into determining whether or not something is true is too much for us to bear. We'd much rather return to the never-ending onslaught of Disney+ series and think about hard questions later. We're like Scarlett O'Hara:

“I can't think about that right now. If I do, I'll go crazy. I'll think about it tomorrow.” ~ *Gone with the Wind*

The problem is tomorrow never comes.

## Questioning Authority Figures is Wrong

This final assumption we'll analyze under authoritarianism is really just the logical conclusion of the last two. If authority figures are right, and I'm not currently capable of determining right behavior on my own, then my role is to believe and obey. This should sound familiar, because it accurately describes a particular phase of life: when I'm a child, and Mom and Dad are doing everything they can to prevent me from accidentally maiming myself. “Don't run out in the street! Don't touch the hot stove! Don't stick the fork into the power outlet!” Then of course those admonitions are met with the never-ending chorus of “Why?”s, which are inevitably countered with, “Because I said so!” I wonder if this is part of where we've gone wrong.

In *Parenting by the Book*, author John Rosemond walks the reader through the four seasons of parents' relationships with their children: service, leadership, mentoring, and friendship. In the season of service, which is from birth to roughly age two, “Do what I said” is appropriate, because the kids won't be able to understand more yet, and they need to learn to obey Mom and Dad for their own safety. The season of leadership, which lasts till the pre-teen years, is characterized by training your kiddos to understand the reasoning behind thoughts and actions. Obedience is still required, but obey first, and then we can tackle all the questions. The mentoring season, which lasts till the late teens, assumes you've already trained the kids to discern truth from falsehood, right from wrong. You're there to assist, but not to lay down the law, as they should understand the law and its foundation for themselves at this point.

There's much more that can be said about the abysmal state of parenting in modern society, but I suspect one of the consequences is our culture is effectively stuck in the transition between the service and leadership stages. Authority figures will tell us what to think, say, and do, but then we're not allowed to question them because [insert grave consequences here]. For some reason we don't realize this is a phase we're supposed to grow out of. In short, we're behaving like toddlers.

I suspect something else that plays into the prevalence of this assumption is a dangerous combination of pride and incompetence. If someone never really learned how to ascertain truth, and if at some point they wind up in a position of authority, then they find themselves in a precarious place where they can't actually justify their thoughts, speech, and actions. That's a scary place to be. What's easier: putting in the hard work to support your beliefs, or saying, "How dare you question me!"?

## Counterfeit Worldview

Now that we've dismantled some of the assumptions undergirding authoritarianism, let's circle back to examining how it qualifies as a counterfeit worldview. As with emotionalism, this is easiest to see by returning to the last three points of the five-fold breakdown from earlier:

3. **Truth:** Truth has authority figures as its source, and therefore fluctuates, depending on who's in power and what they're thinking at the time.
4. **Knowledge:** We can know truth by listening to whomever the authorities happen to be currently.
5. **Ethics:** Right and wrong are determined by whomever is in charge, however they care to determine it.

Though it's easiest to see in these three areas, these fundamental beliefs have implications across the board. In terms of the four fundamental questions:

1. **Who am I?** My identity is determined by whatever authority figures I happen to be listening to at the moment. If they're saying I'm just a random collection of atoms, then I guess I'm no more than a cosmic accident. If they're saying I'm just the product of neurons firing in response to environmental stimuli, then I guess I'm not really responsible for my actions.
2. **Why am I here?** To do whatever the **grand poobahs** of the world tell me to do. If they tell me to go green to save the planet, then I better go **buy a Tesla**. If they tell me I need to be working for **racial reconciliation**, then point me to the bandwagon so I can jump on. If they say "two weeks to flatten the curve," I'll lock myself in my house until they say it's safe to come out again.
3. **What's wrong with the world?** People are standing on the wrong side of history, not obeying the directives the elites are doling out, which are designed to usher us into a utopian paradise. If you point out that any time that's been tried throughout history it's resulted in complete and total failure, you're part of the problem, because it'll work this time.
4. **How can what's wrong be made right?** Just obey, for crying out loud. Failing that, wait for those in charge to eventually eliminate all their opposition, first through indoctrination via propaganda, then through coercion, and eventually and ultimately through lethal force. Enjoy the ride.

In terms of the historical meta-narrative:

1. **Creation:** Everything came into being the way "the science" tells us it did: nothing plus time plus chance plus more nothing equals everything. The fact that the experts disagree on the age of the universe **to the tune of billions of years**, and that **we don't yet have a working theory of evolution**, shouldn't bother us.
2. **Fall:** The ultimate problem that we need to be trying to solve is whatever happens to be fashionable for the elites at the moment. Depending on where you are in history, it bounces around between things like economic inequity, racism, human-induced climate change, overpopulation, pandemics, threats to our democracy, etc.
3. **Redemption:** Whatever the problem, and whatever its enormity, we definitely have it in us to solve it ourselves, thanks to the special knowledge somehow attained by those in charge.



4. **Consummation:** If we do what the authorities say, they'll usher us into a brave new world where all our problems are solved.

And then to finish out the five-fold breakdown, the last three points of which we saw up above:

1. **God:** The concept of God is defined by whomever happens to be in charge. Depending on whom you listen to, this may match the biblical worldview, or God might be an outdated notion from prior unenlightened times. It might even be some nonsensical combination of the two.
2. **Man:** Man is at the same time both an insignificant chance combination of space dust, and supremely and infinitely capable of bending nature to our will to remove any of its imperfections.

## How Does This Play Out?

Now let's revisit the three more subtle examples from earlier to see if we can discern where non-biblical thinking might be in play.

## When Research Controverts the Narrative

In our discussion of emotionalism, one of the scenarios we examined was how various churches were influenced by that worldview when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As you read through that section, you might've been thinking, "Actually, no, we consulted with a number of people in the medical field as we made our decisions." In general, that's a good thing, but then the question is how you went about doing it. For the sources consulted, were their backgrounds examined to determine what level of authority they had to speak to the unfolding situation, or was being a doctor or nurse sufficient? Did they provide data and rational argumentation to back up their recommendations, or were there only opinions? For any data provided, were the sources also available such that you could examine them for yourself, or was it just, "I'm a professional; trust me"? Hang on, am I saying that church leaders should have dug that deep into the science before coming to their decisions? Yes, but that's actually beside the point here.

What I want to talk about now is the scientific community. I know a fellow who is a virologist, working for an organization to promote biological security and incident response around the world. You would think those would be the people you'd want weighing in on an emerging global pandemic, right?

### Book Recommendation

If you'd like a thorough and balanced examination of the quest for the origin of COVID-19, check out *Viral*, by Alina Chan and Matt Ridley.

If you can remember the early months of 2020, you'll recall that the WHO declared the outbreak a [public health emergency of international concern](#) at the end of January. By mid-March we had the first publication to definitively say that the virus was [not a laboratory construct](#) or purposefully manipulated; that is, it jumped to humans from some animal population. Once that paper was published, the "definitely not man-made" origin story was absolutely everywhere almost overnight. The strange thing about it, though, was that the paper basically argued that the unique features seen in this particular virus, such as the presence of a [furin cleavage site](#), for example, could be explained away as evolutionary changes, and that since, as far as we knew, nobody had been doing the kind of gain of function research that might lead to it, it must not be man-made. I say all this not to begin a debate about the origins of the virus, but rather so you have the backstory for what unfolded next.

Now if you know anything about furin cleavage sites (which I don't, but I know people who do), you knew that argument was at the very least sketchy, and warranted some closer examination. The virologist I mentioned earlier found the evidence and argument presented both weak and disturbing, so he and a small handful of collaborators painstakingly researched all the data that was available at the time. Within five weeks, they had prepared a paper arguing that the preponderance of evidence pointed to some sort of artificial intervention in the development of the virus. However,

the paper needed to first make it through an internal review process before being published, and that's where the lead researcher ran into feedback along these lines:

Your research really flies in the face of what we're hearing from everywhere else. Perhaps you got something wrong somewhere, and we just haven't figured out what it is yet. Regardless, we don't feel comfortable publishing this.

What's good here? It's wise to consider the opinions of others, particularly when your own ideas differ significantly. Perhaps there were unwarranted claims within the paper, so just to be safe, the researcher pulled out any kind of editorializing and ensured it was focused solely on the science to see if that would help. No dice. Perhaps there was something wrong in the analysis, so they ran the research by a number of others to see if anyone could find anything wrong with it. No luck there either. True, the situation in early 2020 was volatile, to say the least, and the paper had the potential to add to the volatility, but what you need more than anything in the midst of such a scenario is truth on which to operate. Regardless, the higher ups in this particular organization feared publishing the research of some experts, because it controverted the opinions of other experts who had the power to set the narrative.

Let me give you an example from my own place of employment, which is one of our [national laboratories](#). In September of 2021, an announcement went out in the company's daily news email that made the claim that almost all U.S. COVID-19 deaths were in unvaccinated people. The announcement included a link to a [WebMD article](#) for more details, which then in turn linked to two other articles from the [Associated Press](#) and [Deadline](#). Of the three, none provided sources for raw data or indicated how their analyses were carried out, so there was no means of assessing the accuracy of the analysis and conclusions for yourself. Additionally, the articles employed bad rhetoric and a number of logical fallacies in attempting to convince you of their points. The announcement included a point of contact for any questions, so I wrote in with my concerns and a summary of the research I'd done trying to understand the science before contacting them. Here's the response I got:

Jason, thank you for your email. This sounds like the beginning of a debate than a question [*sic*], and I have asked the staff not to get into debates on this issue. With the executive order announced last week, sounds like we all will be vaccinated soon, which is good news.

Hang on, at one of our nation's premier scientific institutions, we're not allowed to debate the science? After our organization spent about ten million taxpayer dollars in various research and development efforts supporting the dominant narrative? Really?

What's wrong here? This isn't how science is supposed to work. Regardless of the results, if the research has been conducted with integrity, then you publish and allow the scientific community to debate the issue in public. To fail to do so, or to put the kibosh on such debate, is to hamper the community in its quest for truth. Two and a half years into this thing, and the world is slowly coming around to the realization that human intervention is actually the more likely origin for the virus, and that at this point the "pandemic of the unvaccinated" line was questionable at best, if not downright manipulative. How might things have played out differently if the scientific community had actually allowed for a free interchange of ideas, as it's supposed to?

The story of COVID-19 is one in which there's only one way you're allowed to think, speak, and act, and that's defined by those in charge. To search for truth outside the acceptable answer is to risk ostracization. Most of the time, you're not even allowed to ask a question. But why do I bring all this up when we're talking about counterfeit worldviews invading the church? Because the leadership of many churches conducted themselves in the exact same way. We're in charge, we made our decisions based on what the experts (at least the ones who are allowed to speak) told us to do, and the issue is not up for debate (but of course all of this was said in the most loving way possible).

## When Church Decisions Seem Sketchy

This next example comes from one of the pastoral search scenarios mentioned in the introduction. As the process progressed, the lead of the search team became very quickly convinced that the candidate they'd found was the right man for the job; however, one of the other members of the team was not so sure. Not quite knowing what was wrong, but having a gut feeling that something was off, they tried to talk it through with the team lead, but eventually ran into a response along these lines:

If you don't like this decision, then you really need to think and pray about it. Perhaps there's some sin in your life that's preventing you from agreeing, or perhaps you need to mature some before it'll make sense.

What's good here? We should definitely seek the Lord in prayer in the midst of our decision making (, ). We definitely want to be examining ourselves to ensure we don't have something blinding us ( ). Perhaps our thinking in this matter is still worldly, and our mind needs some Spirit-led transformation ( ). Additionally, the lead of the search team had more experience, both in church leadership in general, and in pastoral search processes in particular. Perhaps the person questioning the decision was just put in a role for which they were ill-suited or ill-prepared.

What's wrong here? A first problem is that concerns aren't being considered, let alone addressed. One would think that if this search team is comprised of believers, each of whom has the Holy Spirit within them, then someone sensing a potential problem might be God trying to communicate to the group. One would also think that at the very least each member of the group would be coming with a different background and set of skills and spiritual gifts, so it'd be worthwhile to consider whatever's brought up, because the group as a whole should be better suited to fulfill its task than any one member individually. Unfortunately, concerns were brushed aside as unimportant or irrelevant, without any investigation, and with little discussion.

Beyond the fact that people simply weren't listening to each other, any concerns raised were also being hidden. When it came time for the congregational meeting to vote on the pastoral candidate, we were told that the search team was unanimous in their recommendation. Not so. The team lead knew there were misgivings within the group, but that information was buried. Dig a little deeper, and come to find out that it wasn't just one member of the team who thought the applicant wasn't right for the job, it was three. Unfortunately concerns were typically raised in one-on-one conversations with the person in charge, who then had the ability to quash them.

A final problem that we'll discuss here is that someone in a position of authority, real or perceived, was using that authority to manipulate people into submission. When concerns were brought to the team lead, the response was essentially, "You don't know what you're talking about." Now it's one thing to make such a claim and then back it up with well-reasoned argumentation to educate the other person and help clear up their confusion. It's quite another to make the claim and then give no justification, which communicates that the speaker isn't required to justify what they say—their word is truth. I'm afraid the only one who gets to play ball that way is God. To make sure the speaker isn't questioned, though, they then follow that up with a series of *ad hominem attacks* (e.g., "You're an immature, unrepentant sinner") to silence the questioner. Note that the team lead's initial response up above sounds very polite and spiritual, but I suspect for too long we've been duped into thinking that the tone we use is the primary factor in determining how communication is received. If what's communicated is essentially, "You're a fool, and an awful human being to boot," it doesn't matter how nicely you say it. You've essentially told someone to shut up, and you've slapped them in the face to hammer home your point.

## When Study Materials Shouldn't be Critiqued

As you read through the prior section, you might've thought, "Goodness, what a mess. Surely this sort of thing is a rarity, though, right?" Years ago I would've thought the same, but having personally observed three instances in three organizations in three years, and having heard numerous similar stories either from acquaintances or online, it seems the problem is far more prevalent than we'd like to believe. For a final example, let's return now to that year-long training program and the critiques of some of the content of the [Bible Project videos](#). "But wait," you may say, "wasn't that an example of emotionalism?" Indeed it was, and it's interesting to note how often these two worldviews actually surface in conjunction with one another.

Months before I accidentally kicked the proverbial hornets' nest by emailing the program's leadership and requesting that we get together for an open discussion, one of the friends I'd invited to participate in the program with me wound up chatting one-on-one with a member of the leadership over some initial concerns. They had what seemed to both to be a productive conversation, and came to a place of understanding (or so it seemed at the time). One of the things that stood out to me, though, as my friend recounted the interaction, was that very early into the conversation he ran into the following:

If you'll continue to be tempted to be critical of this organization's leadership, then perhaps a different program would better meet your needs at this time.

Perhaps it was the case that the program was ill-suited to him—that is, maybe its purpose wasn't what we originally thought it to be—and it would've been beneficial to look for a different training opportunity elsewhere. However, it seemed fishy that the leader would so quickly jump to, "If you question our content, you should go away." I would think it would be beneficial for participants to question the content, because (1) that shows they're really engaging with the material, and (2) that gives you feedback necessary for continuous improvement.

Fast-forward a few months, and two from the leadership team joined our monthly small group meeting to give a presentation and then host a discussion, because some in our group were being inappropriate in our online forum posts. During the presentation, they made and implied a number of claims without giving us any grounds to support them. As we've seen before, when no grounds are given in support of a claim, the implied grounds are, "because I said so." Now on the one hand, it may have been the case that some of the online forum posts were inappropriate, and some certain individuals needed correction. However, the way they went about addressing it—without identifying any problematic behavior specifically, or suggesting appropriate alternate behavior in its place, and without addressing the concerns with the individuals in question directly—indicated that the desired outcome was not to correct bad behavior, but to just make the problem go away by getting people to stop critiquing the materials.

Fast-forward again, and we reach the point where I've caused enough of a ruckus that the director of the program reaches out to me directly to say that he and another member of their leadership team would be "more than happy to speak with [me] personally and address [my] concerns." Seems like a step in the right direction, right? Except my past experiences, some of which I've related above, have me on high alert, because in response to my request for an open, honest conversation with all parties involved, I've been invited to a closed-door, two-on-one meeting with individuals who look like they've been demonstrating significant influence of authoritarianism in their actions. Now momma didn't raise no dummy, so I immediately reached out to a small handful of elders and spiritual advisors to discern with them the wisdom of accepting such an offer. The week it took to have those conversations was too much, and I was then notified that the offer for a conversation with leadership had actually been a demand, and was ejected from the program. Friends who stuck it out a while longer informed me that I was later vilified to the rest of the group for having inserted myself into a matter that didn't concern me, causing division, and being unresponsive to leadership.

What on earth just happened? No need to speculate on the motives involved, or anything else that might've been going on behind the scenes. What's important for you is to understand how this worldview tends to play out. The examples above have demonstrated a pattern:

1. Someone raises a concern.
2. The authorities get involved.
3. The concern isn't addressed.
4. The authorities do whatever they can to just make the problem (the fact that someone's raised a concern) disappear.
5. The authorities either strongly imply or say directly that the real problem is with the one who brought forth the concern in good faith.
6. The authorities do whatever they can to discredit the one who raised the concern.

Put that way, have you seen this pattern in play anywhere else? This is how totalitarian regimes behave.

## What are the Consequences?

One of my favorite quotes from [Chuck Colson](#)—special counsel to President Nixon before his imprisonment, and renowned Christian apologist after—is, “Ideas have consequences; bad ideas have victims.” We’ve already seen a number of bad ideas and their consequences up to this point. The question now is, “Where are the victims?”

First let’s cross-apply all the harms of emotionalism here. Whereas that worldview quenches the Holy Spirit speaking through believers because we fear being perceived as unloving, prideful, divisive, etc., this worldview does the same because we fear that to question an authority figure would be sin. Whereas the former causes us to abandon our responsibilities to encourage and rebuke our fellow believers, this one manipulates us into abandoning those same responsibilities to exhort and admonish Christians in positions of authority, real or perceived. Though these worldviews are quite different in their foundational beliefs on truth, knowledge, and ethics, the impact they have on society and on the church is remarkably similar. It’s also interesting to note how often they tend to work in tandem: in a single situation my indoctrination in emotionalism is telling me to shut up, while at the same time well-respected leaders are telling me the same. It’s no wonder we find it so difficult to stand for truth.

The workings out of these two worldviews can be referred to as “soft” and “hard” bullying, respectively, but I prefer to call them by the more appropriate term of *abuse*, as [Alisa Childers](#) notes in her *Another Gospel?*—yet another one of the best books I’ve read in the past year. We recoil at using the term “abuse,” and, to an extent, for good reason. It’s a serious matter, and the term should not be thrown about willy-nilly. In these situations, though, its use is entirely justified.

It’s easy enough to see that abuse is the appropriate term in high-profile cases like [that of Ravi Zacharias](#). Such cases are the outlier rather than the norm, though. Harder to identify are the cases where the abuse is spiritual or emotional, rather than physical, in nature. For instance, the case of the pastoral search committee chair using *ad hominem* attacks to manipulate into submission any who question the candidate’s fit. Or consider the case of the congregant, politely requesting more than a mere 24 hours to think and pray about a pastoral candidate before voting, only to be shouted down into silence. Or maybe it’s the discussion group leader being berated by the para-church ministry’s leadership for having lost control of the group, though they don’t provide any details as to what members of the group have done wrong and the only solution is to start kicking people out. Perhaps you know someone who rebuked church leadership on lockdown or reopening policies, only to be rebuffed with, “We’re not operating out of fear; this is how we love our neighbor and submit to the governing authorities,” with no further justification or dialogue. Though the abuse is not physical, this quote from *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* holds true:

“The results of spiritual abuse are usually the same: The individual is left bearing a weight of guilt, judgment or condemnation and confusion about their worth and standing as a Christian.”

For those who have experienced this, such feelings can hang on for a long time, as they’re hard to work through. You feel like you can’t talk about it, because you’ve been manipulated into thinking you’re the one in the wrong. If you do get up the courage to share your experience with a fellow believer, often the influence of emotionalism and authoritarianism in their life leads to them downplaying the wrongs that were committed.

The end result of all of this is our army is being ravaged by friendly fire. A spiritual war is being waged all around us every day, and we’re either laying down our weapons (truth, scripture, the Holy Spirit), or we’re inadvertently turning them on our own team, wounding one another with our misguided piety. Brethren, we don’t have time for this.

Finally since we have abandoned revelation, reason, and reality as the bedrock of knowledge, and since we regularly employ emotionalism and authoritarianism to cow our brothers and sisters into submission, the church has been helping to set the stage for, and is now helping to usher in, a worldwide “soft” totalitarianism. Back in 2015, people from around the world started reaching out to author and editor [Rod Dreher](#) with concerns that the changes they were seeing in the culture closely mirrored what they had seen decades prior immediately before the people of their countries embraced totalitarian rule with open arms. His curiosity piqued, Dreher dug in and researched the matter and eventually published *Live Not by Lies*, in which he tells stories of the horrors of life under totalitarian regimes, and shares practices that helped the faithful preserve Christianity throughout.

In the past, these counterfeit worldviews have often resulted in a “hard” totalitarianism, in which dissenters are dealt with by force. Within the 20th century alone, estimates of the death associated range from [about 100 to 170 million](#). These days, however, the force is softer in nature, though no less real, as dissenting opinions are unable to be voiced, let

alone heard. Most of the time you're not even able to ask the question. Do you question the validity of critical theory as an analytical tool? You're both arrogant and a racist. Do you question the danger of COVID-19? You're a science denier, and you're trying to kill grandma. Do you question the integrity of the 2020 election? You're anti-democracy at best and an insurrectionist at worst. Do you question whether man-made climate change poses an existential threat to mankind? You're a conspiracy theorist who's out to destroy the planet. It seems *liberty of conscience* has left the building.

Where are we today? I'll borrow and augment a phrase from *Michael O'Fallon* and say the war for epistemology is well underway, what's at stake is the future of the Christian church and civilization as we know it, and much of the church unknowingly finds itself on the wrong side. We are now reaping the consequences of having been asleep on the watch for centuries. Christians, it's time to pull ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and get back in the game. Faithfulness to our Lord demands it.

## 2.1.4 What Can We Do About All This?

### Reading Time

~20 minutes

I've heard a number of people saying things like, "We just need to have faith and focus on the gospel." The mental picture that comes to mind when I hear that is of a squad of swordsmen in the midst of battle. Beleaguered by enemy forces (though they don't realize it), their squadmaster encourages them, shouting, "Hold on to your swords, men!" You look at the squad and realize that's not the most useful advice. One guy has his hand on the hilt, but hasn't drawn it yet. Another's resting his hand on the pommel, using it as a walking stick. A third, the most eager of the group, is holding it like a baseball bat, but he's holding it backwards, grasping the blade near the point, as blood runs down his hands from self-inflicted wounds. A fourth has faith in the countless hours he's logged as a swordsman in a video game, though he doesn't even know how to grip his weapon correctly yet. None of these men have been trained in swordsmanship, let alone battle, and their squadmaster doesn't realize the precarious spot they're in.

I hope at this point your eyes have been thoroughly opened to our current predicament. Counterfeit worldviews have been invading the church for generations, and we've largely been ill-equipped to notice the incursion, let alone fend it off. We've only talked through two of them today—and even then, not in much detail—but there are plenty more where they came from. The pit of hell has been churning out tantalizing distortions of God's truth almost since the beginning of time. Satan and his minions are remarkably well-practiced, and are well-aware of what's at stake (more so than we are, or so it seems). With all that in mind, how on earth do we fight back?

### Understand Our Training Regimen

The first step is to begin training for the battle in which we are already engaged. A successful warrior is not one who just wakes up one day, decides to head off into battle, and then returns victorious. Rather, a successful warrior is one who spends the vast majority of his time training, such that when he's in battle, he can fall back on the skills and muscle memory he's built over all those hours of training, and be victorious. What does such training look like for us, though? You've heard me mention a number of times that what we think, say, and do must be in accordance with revelation, reason, and reality. The justification for this particular epistemological breakdown I'll save for another time, but for now suffice it to say these "three Rs" are umbrella terms for how God communicates truth to us:

#### Revelation

God's direct communication to us through his written word, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and through his miraculous intervention in the world he created and superintends.

#### Reason

God's way of thinking via rational thought processes, which we think after him by virtue of being made in his image.

## Reality

God's indirect communication to us through his created order, which we can study through the observational and historical sciences.

Under each of these umbrellas, then, are a number of skills in which we can develop our competency over time.

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**Note:** Don't think of these three categories as hard and fast subdivisions. There's some overlap, and developing skills in one area improves your skills in another.

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## Revelation

A primary habit to be cultivated under revelation is that of reading the scriptures. There are some who contend that we are where we are today simply because Christians are largely ignorant of what the Bible says. If the only Bible reading we do is in conjunction with the sermons on Sunday, and if those slowly work their way through scripture a few verses at a time, it can take a lifetime to finally make it through the whole counsel of God. That's simply too slow a pace, and it means we're just not familiar enough with everything God has to say. Pick one of the many "read the Bible in a year" plans and go with it. Don't get discouraged if you get behind a few days—if it takes you two years to make it through, that's better than twenty. When you make it through, celebrate, and then start back in again. *The Daily Bible* is a good resource in this endeavor.

Beyond simply reading scripture every day, we must commit ourselves to memorization, that we might hide truth in our heart (). Part of this is memorizing scripture itself, whether that means individual verses, or whole books of the Bible (start with the shortest books to build your confidence). A program like *Awana* can be a big help here. In addition to memorizing scripture, consider also memorizing one or more of the early Christian statements of faith, such as the *Apostles'* or *Nicene* creeds. A final practice in the realm of memorization that has been largely lost in evangelicalism is that of *catechism*, which is just a fancy word for a summary of doctrine compiled in a question and answer format. Consider using *A Catechism for Girls and Boys*, though there are a number of others to choose from.

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**Note:** As you're memorizing these extra-biblical resources, keep in mind that they are not infallible as the Bible itself is.

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In addition to knowing what's in the Bible, we also need to hone our skills when it comes to interpreting what it says. The practice of understanding the meaning of scripture is known as *biblical hermeneutics*. To an extent, it's simply an application of *how to analyze literature*, where the literature in question is the word of God. If you get good at one, you get good at the other, so a resource like *How to Read a Book*, by Mortimer J. Adler, can be beneficial. More specific to scripture, though, you might consider learning and practicing the *inductive Bible study method*, though other methods abound. A significant difference between interpreting scripture versus other works is you have the author on hand to help you. As such, books like Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* can be helpful, in that spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting help to put us in a place where God can better inform and correct us.

## Reason

Another way we can discern between that which is true and that which is *almost* true is by using the rules of logic. This is a practice that is often overlooked these days, so training ourselves in the *fundamentals of logic*, and in *more advanced logical argumentation*, can go a long way in improving our ability to ascertain truth. Once you have the fundamentals down, a fun way to continue to sharpen your skills is to keep your eyes peeled for *logical fallacies* throughout the day and talk through them come dinner time.

In addition to thinking logically, we can also improve our skills in the realm of communicating effectively, known as *rhetoric*. While you speaking persuasively doesn't directly improve your ability to determine truth, knowing how people communicate effectively, in terms of both honest and deceitful tactics, can help you sense when something's

amiss. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the classic text on the subject, but *How to Speak, How to Listen*, by Mortimer J. Adler, is a good one as well.

## Reality

A first arena under the umbrella of reality is that of empirical science, which consists of using our senses to better understand the world around us. We can **improve our observational abilities** over time with practice. Such skills are foundational to the **scientific method**, which allows us to verify whether our current understanding of how the natural world works is correct, and adjust our thinking if not. Additional skills that play into the process are the practices of **deductive and inductive reasoning**, which come from logic, mentioned earlier. “Well hang on now. Are you saying I need to switch careers and become a scientist?” No—indeed, doing so may decrease, rather than increase, your odds of being able to see truth clearly—but I am saying you need to be able to think critically about what you see in the world around you.

A second arena is that of **historical science**. This one is often overlooked these days, because the prevalence of naturalism has duped us into thinking the only things we can know are those we can know “scientifically,” by which is meant “by the methods of empirical science.” Consider this question, though: What did you have for lunch last Tuesday? I’m afraid no amount of observational work is going to answer that question for you. Instead you need **historical thinking skills** like examining sources, determining context, finding corroboration, and careful reading, to name a few. A great resource for training you in these techniques is *Cold Case Christianity*, by J. Warner Wallace.

Whether you’re dealing with empirical or historical sciences, a skill set useful to both is that of **evaluating evidence**. This involves evaluating the **credibility of sources**: how close they are to the information they’re reporting, whether or not they’re biased, how reliable they’ve been in the past, etc. Instead of simply accepting information because it comes from an expert, you need to be able to determine the likelihood that the expert is giving you accurate information in a particular situation.

## How Am I Supposed to Do All This?

At this point I’ve introduced you to a dozen or so skills that need improving over the course of your life. I doubt this list is complete; it was just intended to give you an idea of the depth and breadth of the training necessary to be able to stand firm for truth. That said, do you need to drop everything and start training in each of these areas simultaneously? No, don’t do that. Instead, figure out one or two areas where you happen to be weak at the moment, and focus there. On the flip side, if you know you’re particularly strong in an area, try to figure out how you might teach others. I don’t want you to walk away thinking, “Gosh, there’s so much to do, it just seems hopeless;” rather, I want you to say, “Here’s one thing I can tackle, so let me get after it.”

Parents, understand that you have the responsibility to ensure your kids are well-practiced in the martial arts of discerning truth from falsehood before they leave the home. Once they’re out in the wild, the vast majority of the influences they’ll run into will be peddling counterfeit epistemologies. The good news is training your kids in most, if not all, of these skills can be incorporated into the regular rhythms of family life: Bible reading, memorization, and catechism around the dinner table; a homeschool curriculum that includes things like critical thinking, persuasive writing and speaking, scientific experimentation, investigative journalism; etc. There’s no silver bullet solution to this training regimen—use your creativity and tailor it to each of your kids’ personalities.

Church leaders, understand that you have the responsibility to ensure your congregants are growing in these areas, as it’s part of equipping them for the work of ministry (). Now I’m not saying here that we shouldn’t be focused on loving our neighbors, sharing the gospel, being Jesus’ hands and feet in our community, etc. What I am saying, though, is that all the various things we are called to as followers of Christ must have truth as their foundation. Without it, everything falls apart. Please don’t walk away from this thinking, “Great, I just added another dozen things to my already overloaded plate.” When executing this responsibility you can and should be leveraging those in your congregation for what they can contribute, which we’ll come back to momentarily.



## Identify, Analyze, and Refute

With our training regimen in place, the next question is what to do when we encounter one of these faulty worldviews out in the wild. The first step is simply to learn to recognize it, which is why we started off with the introduction to worldview analysis up above. Memorize the four fundamental questions, the historical meta-narrative, and the five-fold breakdown, along with what the biblical worldview has to say about each area. Once those are lodged in the back of your head, thinking “worldviewishly” is simply a matter of testing things against them. This can actually be a lot of fun when you’re practicing. Pick something from popular culture—a movie, song, book, piece of artwork—and analyze it. What does this have to say that’s good, and why is it good? What does it have to say that’s bad, and why is it bad? For that which differs from the biblical worldview, brownie points if you dig in and figure out where the bad ideas came from or what they’re trying to achieve.

It’s one thing to see counterfeit worldviews crop up in popular culture, though; what do you do when you see one exerting influence in the church? A common mantra is, “If you see something, say something.” Usually that comes up in various corporate trainings around safety, security, harassment, etc., but it applies here as well. If you think you see the influence of an anti-biblical worldview in the life of a fellow believer, call it out appropriately (). There’s a chance you might be mistaken, but you owe it to your brother to talk it through with him. We can’t afford to let brothers and sisters accidentally lead one another astray.

Hopefully such situations result in the errant believer being reconciled both to truth and to whomever they may have harmed along the way. That’s not always the case, though, as pride and confusion can very easily cause us to dig in our heels. When that happens, the one in error will often resort to tactics from emotionalism or authoritarianism (or both) to try to get you to give up. If that happens to you, politely say something along the lines of, “This is manipulation, and it doesn’t work on me.” You put them on notice that you know that they know their position is both wrong and indefensible, and that their response to it is unethical.

## Require Specificity

The one thing that likely most hampers our pursuit of truth, other than the sinful human heart, is ambiguity. Let me give you an example from history. One of the most influential philosophers in the last 250 years was a German fellow by the name of [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel](#) (and with a name like that, how could he not be German?). We’ll leave what he had to say and the impact it’s had as a story for another time, but for now it’ll be sufficient to hear what some of his detractors had to say of his writing, in which he used such imprecise language, often nobody had any clue what he was talking about. [Arthur Schopenhauer](#) was a fierce critic of his, denouncing him as a clumsy charlatan, saying that his awful writing was an embarrassment to the German people and to philosophy. [Ludwig von Mises](#) devotes some space in *Human Action* to rail against Hegel for the same problem, pointing out that shortly after his death there were two camps of adherents that sprung up: the [Old Hegelians](#), who were devoted to maintaining protestant orthodoxy, and the [Young Hegelians](#), who were supporting revolutionary atheism. Hard to get further apart than that, yet both groups pointed back to the same works and the same words to support their radically different interpretations of what he’d meant. Imprecise language is dangerous.

These days I often run across authors or speakers who use words and phrases that sound really good, enticing even—words that make you react with, “Ooh, I like that”—but have no concrete meaning. The deceptive power of such communication is you allow the reader or listener to define the terms however they like, such that they agree with you. Though you may be using the same vocabulary, you might not be using the same dictionary. Your best defense against this will be to cultivate the habit of asking, “What do you mean by that?” If the response you get doesn’t really clarify things, keep asking. If the person you’re speaking with is actually interested in a meeting of the minds, it’s in their best interest to be as specific as possible such that the two of you actually understand each other. If not, then perhaps it’s worth pointing out that they’re not really saying anything.

Another place we see a good deal of ambiguity is in argumentation. A compelling argument actually has [six components](#), but we’ll just look at the first two here: the *claim*, which is the truth statement being asserted, and the *grounds*, which is the information given in support of the claim. More often than not, the grounds are simply omitted. Someone will levy an accusation against you, but then when no support for the claim is given, the implied grounds are “because I said so.” Even if grounds happen to be present, much of the time it’s also difficult to ascertain what the claim actually

is. “You done me wrong!” Okay, what do you mean by that? “I mean you’re being overly negative.” Okay, how so? When you find yourself in such a scenario, try to get definitive answers to the following questions:

- What have I done wrong? (Can the actual infraction be stated specifically?)
- Where and when did I do it? (Can you point to a particular sentence, phrasing, tone, look, etc., and say, “This was where you messed up”?)
- Why do you think it was wrong? (What is your ethic, and does it line up with the three Rs?)
- What would have been an appropriate action in its place? (Are you willing to try to correct my behavior, or are you just here to yell at me?)

A specific situation you may run into is being accused of having said or done something that caused a negative emotional response in someone. You’re already well aware of the problems underlying such an accusation, but when dealing with it one of the first things you need to do is determine if someone has actually been hurt or offended, or if that person is only hypothetical. For instance, does the use of the term “master branch” in a software engineering context actually cause emotional grief in someone whose ancestors were brought to this continent as slaves? Or is such a person just a possibility? If the one offended is real, then deal with them directly and work through whatever the issue is; if hypothetical, then require the accuser to either produce an example or retract the accusation. As long as claims remain vague and unsubstantiated, it’s too easy to be bullied into submission—don’t fall for it.

### Request Transparent Communication

As you read through the examples of how these worldviews can play out, you might’ve noticed that oftentimes things take a turn for the worse when communication happens one-on-one and in private. That’s not always the case, and all-to-all communication in public isn’t the right thing to do in all scenarios, but the frequency with which these worldviews silence people suggests that we should try to make communication transparent wherever appropriate.

What I don’t mean by this is the next time you have a disagreement with a fellow believer you go air it before the entire congregation before trying to work it out with them directly. Don’t do that (). What I do mean is you should discern whether the conversation involves or impacts more than just the two of you, and then bring others in as appropriate. For instance, concerns about the pastoral candidate impact the entire search process, so the discussion should be with the whole search team. Whether the small group has been appropriate or off the rails in their online forum posts impacts the entire group, so the discussion should involve more than just the person raising the concern.

If the situation justifies a larger discussion, though, what do you do? Politely say something along these lines: “Given the nature of this issue and the others involved with or impacted by it, I suspect a larger discussion would be more beneficial than us talking one-on-one. Can we find a time for [insert people here] to sit down together and talk it through?” Where you go from there will depend on the response. If the person you’re talking with refuses, politely ask them their reasons for thinking a private conversation is appropriate and a more open one is not. They may have valid reasons of which you’re unaware, but they should be able to relay those reasons to you.

If no rationale is given and a private conversation is still demanded, trust your gut. You may be able to request that your pastor accompany you in the private conversation, because if there’s a problem with you, they’re the one responsible for overseeing the correction of your behavior or attitude. Alternatively, as wisdom dictates, you might consider agreeing to a private conversation initially, if you can get the other person to agree ahead of time to a broader discussion if the concerns aren’t satisfactorily addressed. If either of these don’t work, again ask for a justification, and if none is given, retreat, regroup, and reconsider what your next move should be.

## Rely on Your Community

Last, but certainly not least, understand that you're not a maverick out doing battle against the forces of evil on your own. You're a part of the body of Christ—both your local congregation, and the church universal—in which God has uniquely gifted and outfitted each of us to serve in different roles. Learn to rely on one another in our various areas of expertise. Rely on the scouts, who can see the enemy coming from a long way off. Rely on the swordmasters, who can help you improve your proficiency. Rely on your squadmaster, who can marshal a group of you for a particular mission.

What do I mean by this? For the individual, take a candid look at yourself and assess your strengths and weaknesses. Where you are weak, seek out others who are strong and develop those relationships. Where you are strong, ask God to put you in relationship with those you could support and bless with the gifts he's given you. For the body of believers, figure out what each other's strengths are and learn to rely on each other in those areas. For instance, when one gifted in administration sees potential logistical problems, see what they can contribute to help shore things up. When one gifted in discernment perceives something awry, tap the brakes, and see if there's anything to the intuition. The work of the church is meant to be done by the body of believers, not only by its leadership.

Such thinking means rebelling against the radical individualism that has characterized our age. It means devoting your time and skills to something other than your own pleasure. It means intentionally investing in deep relationships in community, though there's potential for pain and heartache. It requires vulnerability, as it means keeping yourself open to correction from your brothers and sisters, because—believe it or not—you might be fooled by the next incarnation of one of these ungodly ideologies too, as I was for so many years. Don't worry; we've got your back, and we need you to have ours. We can fight this fight together.

### 2.1.5 Conclusion

So why on earth did God put us through the last few years of pain and heartache within the church? To wake us up, both to the reality of what's going on in the world around us, and to what's required of us as believers in the midst of it. It's easy to look around today and think that the world has gone absolutely crazy in only a few short years, but to think that is to misunderstand the situation completely. We are now simply reaping the fruit of the ideas sown over the last many centuries. It's also tempting to think we can turn things around relatively quickly (e.g., with the next election cycle, by speaking up at school board meetings, etc.). That we would do so is actually one of my major concerns, as that would allow us to kick back and relax, thinking we'd avoided impending disaster. What was built over the course of generations cannot be undone overnight.

In a sense, the problems we face today are no different than the ones we've been facing since the fall. One way or another it boils down to us trying to remove God from his proper place and insert ourselves in it. The good news, then, is the solution's not new either. We must allow God's truth to permeate and direct every thought we think, every word we speak, and everything we do. One day we'll stand before God and be held accountable for how we conducted ourselves. We can thank him in advance for his grace and mercy.

Fellow believers, we have lost our ability to think. If we don't regain it, we can't hope to stand firm for truth. Let me conclude with this:

Stand firm, brothers and sisters. Never give up; never surrender. *Live not by lies.*

## 2.2 Pandemic Response

### Reading Time

~70 minutes

Originally published August 29, 2021; last updated September 20, 2021. See [here](#) for the complete revision history.

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## 2.2.1 Motivation

At this point it seems necessary for me to formalize our family's response to the ongoing pandemic countermeasures. At various points in the past year and a half it seemed reasonable to wait for more data, and in recent months it looked like things would get back to some semblance of normal once everyone who wanted the protection of one of the vaccines had it. However, that no longer appears to be the case, as cities, states, and countries are starting to reimpose various levels of lockdown measures and vaccine mandates.

Before we dive in, if you'd like a concise and approachable book on the subject of COVID-19 and the worldwide response, I highly recommend [COVID: Why Most of What You Know is Wrong](#), by [Sebastian Rushworth](#). The author is a Swedish doctor, and he gives a remarkably level-headed analysis of the data that is easily understandable by a non-expert. I will note the book was finalized in December of 2020, so any data that became available this year were unavailable while the book was being written, and as such the author has changed his take on a few minor points since its publication. Another good resource is [Unreported Truths About COVID-19 and Lockdowns](#), by [Alex Berenson](#), but if you're only going to read one book on the subject, prefer the former.

A final aside before getting started: It can be easy to dismiss concerns such as those that follow as uninformed, unscientific, paranoid, delusional, etc.; however, researchers at MIT [conducted a study](#) to determine how coronavirus skeptics spread information on social media, and they were able to determine that such communities employed high degrees of scientific rigor and rhetoric in their data analysis and argumentation. We encourage you, as they do, to follow the data and see where it leads, and to be willing to re-evaluate any preconceived notions you have. We will endeavor to do the same, and we invite you to correct us where we are mistaken. Our goal here is to educate and encourage a dialogue on any of these points.

## 2.2.2 Where Do We Stand Today?

Our thinking today was informed by trying to tackle the following questions:

1. How severe is the pandemic, in terms of hospitalizations, mortality, and any long-term effects of the virus?
2. How effective have we been in countering it, in terms of measures like masks, lockdowns, and vaccines?
3. Have there been any negative consequences to adopting the various countermeasures we've employed?

Let's walk through these one at a time.

### The Danger of COVID-19

#### Historical Background

Before assessing the danger of COVID-19, I think it's instructive to get some historical perspective by looking back at how the world responded to the swine flu in 2009. After it was all over, [Der Spiegel](#) sought to reconstruct the timeline of events and what played into the decision-making around the globe. [Their article](#) is worth a quick read, but allow me to sum up their analysis here: A fear of prior deadly pandemics, combined with a focus on worst-case scenario predictions out of touch with mounting evidence, along with significant pressure from both the pharmaceutical industry and political players around the world, contributed to a worldwide hysteria for a virus that in the end killed no more than the average flu season.

With that background in mind, let's take a look at how things have played out this time around.

## The Initial Scare

For the first few months as the disease spread throughout Asia, and began to spread through the rest of the world, most countries did nothing but watch to see how things would unfold. Then in March of 2020, the [Imperial College of London](#) released a [report](#) that seems to have triggered the initial scare. The team that produced the report was led by a mathematical epidemiologist, and they used a combination of mathematical modeling and analysis of data as it was emerging from China to predict that an unmitigated pandemic (meaning without taking any countermeasures) would lead to 510,000 deaths in the UK and 2.2 million deaths in the US, not counting any deaths that would result from the healthcare systems being overrun. Unfortunately the Imperial College report isn't clear on a cut-off date for those deaths; however, a [separate modeling study on Sweden](#) was posted to [medRxiv](#) in April, 2020, predicting 96,000 deaths in the country by July 1st. Given such startling predictions, it's understandable that much of the world responded with, "We can't just sit here; we have to *do* something!"

However, it's important to realize that many of the initial predictions were based on *mathematical models* trained on a limited amount of data. As a *former computational scientist*, I think the mathematical modeling community needs to have a lot more humility and transparency about what it can claim, and with what level of certainty, and what it cannot. Now that we have an additional 18 months of real-world data, we can evaluate both how accurate those models were, and how dangerous the disease really is.

## What Constitutes a COVID-19 Case?

Before we do that, though, we need to talk a bit about how the world has been tracking the spread of the virus, and for that we need to understand the details of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests. The best write-up I've seen on these is from [Sebastian Rushworth: How Accurate are the COVID Tests?](#) I highly recommend reading the article, as I won't be able to do it justice here. In a nutshell, the PCR test is trying to take a viral genome fragment and replicate it enough times such that you have a large enough sample to detect. The number of times you allow the fragment to replicate is what's known as the *cycle threshold* (CT). Rushworth says "a positive test result after 40 cycles is almost certainly a false positive, while a positive result after 20 cycles is most likely a true positive." Unfortunately, as PCR tests were rolled out the world over to track the spread of the disease, no mechanisms were put in place to associate test results with the CTs that produced them, so we (the public and doctors alike) are left in the dark as to what the results truly mean.

On top of this problem, the PCR test [has no ability to tell you whether or not you are infectious](#). The reason here is the tests only detect viral genome *fragments* in the swab that was done of your nose or mouth. Those fragments may have come from an active infection in your system, they could be remnants from you weathering the disease in the past, or they could have been inhaled from your environment (and it's not possible to tell if they will or won't infect you). To determine whether or not you truly had the disease, you need to follow up a PCR test with an antibody test, though this is rarely being done. Rushworth concludes his article with

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why PCR positive cases are a very poor indicator of how prevalent COVID is in the population, and why we should instead be basing decisions on the rates of hospitalization, ICU admission, and death. If we just look at the PCR tests, we will continue to believe that the disease is widespread in the population indefinitely, even as it becomes less and less common in reality.

### Caveat

The first article linked here was not written in the most level-headed fashion. Try to just pay attention to the data and links provided therein.

Unfortunately it sounds like a [good number of PCR tests for COVID-19 are being conducted with a CT of 40](#) (other sources indicate 45), so the fidelity of the results is highly questionable. That being said, as you hear of "cases rising" or a "resurgence of cases" in your area or around the world, these are the cases being referenced.

**Note:** The situation may even be worse than this, as it looks like [the WHO guidelines for the surveillance of COVID-19](#) also allow for probable cases to be recorded without any testing. However, my understanding of the medical and legal terminology in that document may be incorrect.

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### The Rise of the “Casedemic”

The loose criteria for determining COVID-19 cases in turn give rise to a phenomenon that’s been dubbed a “casedemic”, where testing yields a significant number of cases, but you don’t have corresponding impacts in terms of hospitalizations and deaths. [Ivor Cummins](#) gives us a good look at what the data show in the video clip below.

If you have time to do some number crunching, I encourage you to compare the time series data for [COVID-19 cases](#) and [COVID-19 deaths](#) and draw your own conclusions.

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**Note:** If you do look into the raw data, you’ll notice a significant rise in both cases and deaths in late 2020 and early 2021. This is to be expected after locking down much of the world’s population during the summer months when we would normally be outside building viral immunity within the population (see the discussion of seasonality below).

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Unfortunately searching the internet for the term “casedemic” has a tendency to provide articles that exhibit significant bias. I’ll provide two links here, in case you want to dig through the information and links therein, but take them with a grain (or perhaps a tablespoon) of salt.

- [There is No COVID Test and the Casedemic is a Shameless Scam](#)
- [It’s a COVID Casedemic; not a Pandemic](#)

The [Swiss Policy Research](#) organization, however, gives us the more level-headed assessment that [we have a “casedemic” on top of a pandemic](#). We understand that the virus is real, and that it’s impacting people all over the world; what we’re trying to assess is its severity.

### What Constitutes a COVID-19 Death?

Before we can understand the severity, though, we first need to understand how COVID-19 deaths are tallied. [As the Children’s Health Defense organization reports](#), for some reason “COVID-19 data is collected and reported by a much different standard than all other infectious diseases and causes of death data.” Prior to March of 2020, causes of death in the US were reported according to the [Medical Examiners’ and Coroners’ Registration and Fetal Death Reporting guide](#) and the [Physicians’ Handbook on Medical Certification of Death](#) put out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Under these guidelines, the cause of death would be the last problem in the chain of events that led to death, e.g., renal failure, and that would be listed on the first line in Part 1 of the death certificate. Below that would be listed the other comorbid conditions in the chain of events that led to death, so, e.g., COVID-19 might be at the bottom of that list. Below that, in Part 2 of the death certificate, you would list any other things that happened to be wrong with the patient at the time of death that were unrelated to the chain of events that led to death.

That was how things worked prior to March of 2020, at which point [new guidelines were adopted](#), which state that “the rules for coding and selection of the underlying cause of death are expected to result in COVID-19 being the underlying cause more often than not.” The updated guidelines make two significant changes to the process of filling out a death certificate.

1. If the decedent has COVID-19 at the time of death, that should be listed on the first line in Part 1, and all other comorbidities listed in Part 2.
2. COVID-19 can be listed as the cause of death without a positive lab test.

Why were these changes made? I can't think of a logical reason, and I haven't been able to find any justification. Generally speaking I want to stay away from the "why" questions in this analysis, because at this point in the game it's exceedingly difficult to find direct answers, and one can quickly slip into the realm of opinion and intrigue. Regardless of the motivation, though, we can see what impact the change in coding guidelines had. [Data from the CDC](#) indicate that about 94% of the deaths attributed to COVID-19 in the US would have been attributed to other comorbidities if accounted by the rules in place prior to March, 2020. Hang on to this thought, as I'll come back to it in a moment.

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**Note:** It sounds like there's disagreement on whether or not these updated guidelines were actually followed by doctors and coroners when filling out death certificates. Without interviewing a large number of people who filled out death certificates in the last 18 months to get an idea (I couldn't find a study on this yet), I'm assuming the new guidelines that were put in place were followed. However, if this turns out to not be the case, then my concerns about deaths being over-attributed to COVID-19 are significantly diminished.

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## So How Bad Is It?

Before we get to how bad COVID-19 is, please note that there are many variables that complicate such an assessment when looking at the different countries around the world:

- differences in health care systems
- relative health of the population
- age distribution within the population
- percentage of the population in assisted living facilities
- differences in data collection and reporting
- how bad the prior year's flu season was
- etc.

The [Swiss Policy Research](#) organization has done an excellent job [compiling all the latest information](#), so I'll happily point you to their work and encourage you to click through to the source materials.

An initial observation to make from their collected research is that in the early days of the virus, the information coming out of China led to an estimated hospitalization rate (the number of people needing hospital care divided by the number of infections) of about 20%. This fueled the concerns that healthcare systems the world over would be overwhelmed, and to prevent that we needed to do whatever was necessary to "flatten the curve" (or spread hospitalizations out over a longer period of time). In reality the hospitalization rate has been closer to 2%, and relatively few localities have had their healthcare systems overrun. For comparison purposes, a 1–2% hospitalization rate is what we typically see with seasonal influenza.

The next key point to note is that the median age of death globally is in the 80s, meaning half of decedents are younger and half are older. On a related note, a sizeable percentage of deaths occurred in assisted living facilities. How many varies from country to country, based on the age and health breakdown of the population, but in some countries it's as high as 80%. Correlated with age is also the number of comorbidities a decedent has, or the number of other underlying conditions present at the time of death. [The most recent CDC data](#) indicates the average number of comorbidities for those who have died with COVID-19 in the US is four. This is not a virus that affects the population equally, but instead it has greater impact on those who are in poorer health and are nearer the end of life already.

The next key piece of information to look at when assessing the severity of the pandemic is a measure known as the *infection fatality ratio* (IFR), or the number of deaths divided by the number of infections. For reference, a "bad" IFR is about 0.3%, as exhibited in the influenza epi/pandemics of 1936, 1951, 1957, and 1968. Last October [John Ioannidis](#) provided a [low estimate](#) of 0.2% for the COVID-19 IFR; however, an earlier paper [provided a higher estimate](#) of 0.68%. Ioannidis' paper used substantially more underlying data, so I'm inclined to consider his the more accurate estimate. The [Swiss Policy Research](#) link above gives you the full breakdown by country, so you can see how the IFR varies



from place to place. One final tidbit before leaving IFR is that Ioannidis showed if we restrict our consideration to individuals younger than 70, the estimate drops to 0.04%. For comparison purposes, seasonal influenza typically sees an IFR of 0.05–0.1%.

#### Side Note

I've had a number of people give me anecdotal evidence that they've never known anyone to have died of the flu, but they've known X number of people who have died with COVID-19. See the section on long-term effects below for why you shouldn't rely on such anecdotal evidence, but that aside, keep in mind that the last time the world saw a pandemic of this severity was 50+ years ago. I'm guessing the people who keep telling me this wouldn't have known many people in the most vulnerable population groups back then, but it stands to reason that they know significantly more people in those groups now. Their anecdotal evidence makes complete sense when viewed in the larger context, and it doesn't show what they think it shows.

So how bad is COVID-19 in terms of mortality? The data as of March, 2021, suggest an IFR between 0.1% and 0.35%, and the overall global COVID-19 mortality (total deaths divided by the global population) is about 0.035%. For reference, the global mortality rate for the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 was about 2.3% (granted, medicine has progressed a good deal in the intervening century). Looking at all the data, this looks to be on par with the “bad” flu seasons we see a handful of times per century, and [the Children's Health Defense article](#) referenced above also shows it to be comparable to both influenza and pneumonia.

Finally, some food for thought: Recall at the end of the last section the observation that a sizeable percentage of deaths attributed to COVID-19 would have been attributed to other causes, were it not for a change in cause of death coding procedures. Since all the data we've looked at in this section have been based on COVID-19 deaths as recorded, does that mean the severity of the virus is actually substantially less than indicated here? I'll let you come to your own conclusions.

### How Does This Compare to Other Viruses?

At this point it's beginning to sound like COVID-19 presents like any other virus, as far as the mortality data are concerned, but is it similar to other viruses in other respects? Indeed, yes, and examining how can help us make better sense of the numbers and figures we're inundated with on a regular basis. Again, I'll direct you to [Ivor Cummins](#) for his balanced walk through what the data can tell us about the seasonality of the virus.

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**Note:** This is the same video embedded above, just started from the beginning instead of part-way through.

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He directs us to a book by [R. Edgar Hope-Simpson](#) from 1992: [The Transmission of Epidemic Influenza](#). In it the author notes the distribution of epidemic impact depends on climate; specifically, the temperate climates will see relatively sharp peaks, while the tropical climates will have wider distributions spread across the whole year (see, e.g., Chapter 8, particularly Figures 8.4–8.7). We see these same patterns in the COVID-19 data. The dependence on climate also explains the so-called “second wave” the US experienced last year. Since this US consists of such a large area, with such diverse climate, you wind up adding the distributions for the temperate and tropical climates to get the double-hump curve we see every flu season.

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**Note:** The climate variety *may* also explain the rise in cases and deaths we're seeing associated with the delta variant, but it's too soon to know with any certainty.

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You don't have to just take Cummins' word for it, though; at this point we have a number of studies on the seasonality of COVID-19. For instance, [a paper from May, 2021](#), analyzed the effects of air drying capacity and ultraviolet radiation on COVID-19 dynamics at the seasonal scale. [Another paper from June of this year](#) discusses the impact of sunlight

on transmissibility, morbidity, and mortality, which seems to validate [an earlier study](#) that suggested the importance of vitamin D in fighting the virus.

Cummins also demonstrated the impact the prior year's flu season had on how hard a country was hit by COVID-19. The excess mortality data show that a country with a relatively light prior season—meaning fewer than expected deaths, leading to a build-up of the frail within the population (e.g., Sweden, the UK)—led to a substantial COVID-19 impact. Similarly, a normal to hard prior season led to a minimal COVID-19 impact (e.g., Finland, Norway).

## Are There Any Long-Term Effects?

So far our analysis has been based largely on mortality data, and to a much lesser extent hospitalization rates. But what about the long-term effects of having contracted COVID-19 and then recovered from it? There seems to be significant anecdotal evidence supporting a host of bizarre long-term side effects after recovering from the infection—what's come to be known as “long COVID”—and we should evaluate that as well in assessing the danger of the disease.

First, let me caution you strongly against arguing solely on the basis of anecdotal evidence—this is something known as [the anecdotal fallacy](#). Beyond that, though, I'll gladly refer you to [this article](#), again from [Sebastian Rushworth](#), on what long COVID is and isn't. It's been hard to peg down, as [studies have shown](#) it to be such a hodge-podge of unrelated conditions. Regardless of any particular lingering symptom, [most people recover within a month](#), ~95% are fully recovered by two months, and only ~2% continue to experience side effects after three months. In a nutshell, the studies conducted so far seem to indicate that long COVID is nothing more than [post-viral syndrome](#), which is “a wide range of complex conditions involving physical, cognitive, emotional and neurological difficulties that vary in severity over time.” It's something that you might suffer as your body recovers from a significant viral infection.

## What Can We Conclude?

We've been through a lot in this section, so let's try to pull it all together to reach some final conclusions about the danger of COVID-19.

Our initial fear of the virus looks like it was triggered by either

1. poor mathematical modeling,
2. poor communication of the results of that modeling,
3. poor reaction to the communication of the results of that modeling,

or some combination of all three. As the virus began spreading around the world, it seems our assessment of its severity was exaggerated by loose definitions of both what constitutes a COVID-19 case and a COVID-19 death. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests with a cycle threshold (CT) of 25 or greater produce too many false positives to be useful in surveilling the spread of the disease, and lack of reporting of CTs with test results means doctors and patients alike can't know whether they represent useful information. Beyond that, a positive PCR result can't tell you if you have live virus in your system, or if it merely found fragments of dead virus. In addition to “case” being defined so generously, it looks like new cause of death coding guidelines were implemented that would result in COVID-19 being listed as the cause of death more often than not.

Governments and individuals alike have routinely focused on the questionable measure of cases, rather than the more useful measures of hospitalizations and deaths. When you stick to those harder measures, COVID-19 looks to be on par with the bad epi/pandemics we see a few times per century (e.g., 1936, 1951, 1957, 1968), with an infection fatality rate (IFR) of ~0.3%, and a sizeable portion of deaths occurring in assisted living facilities. However, if you look at the portion of the population below age 70, for those individuals this pandemic is no more severe than a typical influenza season (IFR of ~0.04%). Though the hospitalization rate was predicted to be 20%, which would have overwhelmed healthcare systems the world over, in reality the rate has been closer to 2%, and few hospital system have been overwhelmed.

The seasonality data we have at this point seems to support the claim that this pandemic is behaving generally as influenza epi/pandemics do, with the distribution of cases and deaths being largely governed by climate, specifically air drying capacity and ultraviolet radiation. This is good news, as it gives us clues as to what we can do to mitigate the risks. On the personal level, make sure your diet is healthy, get some good exercise, and spend plenty of time outside in the sun. Excess mortality data show that a light prior flu season—indicating a build up of the frail within the population—seems to be a good predictor for the severity of COVID-19 impact, so at a policy-making level, nations or healthcare systems can monitor the prior season’s excess deaths to get a feel for how severe the upcoming viral season will be, and then take appropriate measures to protect the most vulnerable.

Though there is anecdotal evidence to support the notion of long-term side effects after recovering from the disease (what’s been dubbed “long COVID”), an analysis of such cases shows them to be nothing more than post-viral syndrome, which is well-established in the medical literature. Long-lasting effects are therefore not something to worry about.

**Bottom line:** If you are near the end of life as it is—you’re over 70, have one or more underlying health conditions, or are in an assisted living facility—now is probably a good time to make sure you’re ready to die. (Of course this would’ve been true for you before COVID-19 as well.) If this is you, here are some questions I’d encourage you to wrestle with:

- Why are you here?
- What is your purpose in life?
- What will you do with the time you have left, whether that’s two months or twenty years (and we’ll pray it’s the latter)?
- Does anything, good or bad, await you after death?
- How do you know the answers to these questions?

If you don’t fall into the category above, you likely don’t have anything to worry about in terms of your own health and well-being. You may want to talk through all this with those you know in the vulnerable subset of the population, and you may wind up mourning the loss of one or more loved ones.

## The Effectiveness of Countermeasures

While our prior analysis indicates it’s reasonable to conclude that COVID-19 does not pose near the threat that’s been reported, let’s suppose for the sake of argument that it does. If the danger is as great as reported—if the initial mathematical modeling is representative of reality—then it’s entirely reasonable for governments to consider encouraging various countermeasures to slow the spread of the disease and thereby decrease the overall death toll. The countermeasures used have generally fallen into the categories of mask mandates, lockdowns, and vaccines, and with the last 18 months’ worth of data in hand, we can now ask the question: Are such countermeasures effective?

### Mask Mandates

Let’s look first to the concept of mask mandates. Intuition tells us that if a virus is spread via droplets expelled from the nose and mouth, then covering the nose and mouth should slow the spread of the virus through the population. This is why you’re always told to cough into your elbow, for instance. The question, then, is whether this intuition is empirically verifiable.

Before we get into the evidence, it’s important to make a distinction between two different hypotheses being put forward:

1. Masks protect *me* from *your* infection; that is, they function as *personal protective equipment* (PPE).
2. Masks protect *you* from *my* infection; that is, they function as *source control*.

It may be the case that masks are effective for one but not the other.

It's also worth noting, before diving into the data, that the [pandemic guidelines from the WHO](#), which were in effect before COVID-19 came on the scene, do recommend masks for the general public if a pandemic's severity is determined to be high; for moderate or low severity, they are not recommended. If this pandemic is as severe as is typically claimed, then recommending masks for the general public is reasonable according to prior guidance. However, if this pandemic is not as severe as we've been led to believe, as our prior analysis suggests, then prior guidance indicates the masking of the general public is unnecessary.

Now let's dig into the evidence. Thankfully, the folks at the [Swiss Policy Research](#) organization have done a fantastic job [compiling all the latest studies](#), and I'll happily point you in their direction rather than replicating their work here. The analysis that follows comes from their collection.

A first question we can ask of the data is whether or not the imposition of mask mandates has any noticeable effect on the case or death rates. Intuitively we would expect masking of the general public to significantly alter the curves in daily case and death rates, though we might expect any change in the curves to be lagged by some amount of time to account for the incubation period of the virus. Unfortunately the data do not bear out this hypothesis, instead displaying the standard Gompertz curve we expect from, e.g., seasonal epidemic influenza, as [explained by Ivor Cummins](#) in the video embedded above. Note that this even holds for Bavaria in Germany, which mandated the use of [N95 respirators](#) in public in January, 2021.

Since our intuition turns out to be dead wrong, a natural next question is why on earth that is. It turns out there has been concern, at least since last summer, that the virus is spread not only through expelled droplets, [but also aerosols](#). If that's the case, it poses a problem, as the vast majority of masks are [unable to block or filter aerosols](#), the majority of which "fill a medium-sized room within minutes." The potential problem is well-illustrated in this video:

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**Note:** There's been a [good deal of backlash](#) against this video, so don't take it as your sole source that masks don't work; instead consider it in the broader context of the mounting evidence that supports that claim. When evaluating critiques, try to discern whether those arguing on the other side are giving you empirical evidence, or if they're simply making assertions without giving you grounds to back them up.

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Now *if* it's the case that this pandemic spreads via expelled aerosols, and *if* the vast majority of masks are unable to stop the spread of such aerosols, then we should be able to find ample evidence that masks are not effective for what we think they should be. And indeed we can:

- [Commentary: Masks-for-all for COVID-19 not based on sound data](#) (April, 2020)
- [Nonpharmaceutical Measures for Pandemic Influenza in Nonhealthcare Settings—Personal Protective and Environmental Measures](#) (May, 2020)
- [Perspective: Universal Masking in Hospitals in the COVID-19 Era](#) (May, 2020)
- [Masking lack of evidence with politics](#) (July, 2020)
- [Facemask against viral respiratory infections among Hajj pilgrims: A challenging cluster-randomized trial](#) (October, 2020)
- [Physical interventions to interrupt or reduce the spread of respiratory viruses \(Review\)](#) (November, 2020)
- [Mund-Nasen-Schutz in der Öffentlichkeit: Keine Hinweise für eine Wirksamkeit](#) (2020, unknown month)
- [Using face masks in the community: first update](#) (February, 2021)
- [Effectiveness of Adding a Mask Recommendation to Other Public Health Measures to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Danish Mask Wearers](#) (March, 2021)

Some of these sources are specific to COVID-19; others pertain to aerosol viruses in general. Some focus on the efficacy of masks serving as PPE, others as source control, and others consider both. What they all have in common is they show "little to no evidence for the effectiveness of face masks in the general population, neither as PPE nor as source control." Apparently this even holds true [in hospital settings](#), which was a surprise to me.

Before we leave the subject of face masks, we should take a moment to address the various studies that have been completed showing that masks are indeed effective for combatting COVID-19. A number of them are based on mathematical modeling, and, as a *former computational mathematician*, I'm suspicious of such studies because of how they contributed to the fear and public health policy decisions at the advent of the pandemic. The remainder exhibit either poor methodology or counter-intuitive conclusions drawn from the data presented. [From the Swiss Policy Research organization](#):

Typically, these studies ignore the effect of other measures, the natural development of infection rates, changes in test activity, or they compare places with different epidemiological conditions. Studies performed in a lab or as a computer simulation often aren't applicable to the real world.

I encourage you to [dig through all the sources](#) and draw your own conclusions.

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**Note:** If you'd like another analysis of all of the above from someone more qualified than myself to evaluate the medical evidence, consider reading [Why Masks Are a Charade](#), by [Dr Joseph Mercola](#). For more of a historical perspective, consider [Do Masks Work?](#), by [Jeffrey H. Anderson](#). Both of these articles were published in August, 2021.

If you'd like to do more research on the effectiveness and potential side effects of masks, [this page](#) contains links to 79 studies. I recommend skipping over the introductory material and going straight to the sources.

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## Lockdowns

Another bit of human intuition says that if viral particles are spread via either droplets or aerosols, then simply staying away from other humans should slow the spread of the virus, and thereby decrease the overall death toll (not to mention, keep me healthy). Thus we have the concept of locking down cities and countries to hopefully decrease the total impact of the pandemic.

Before we look into whether or not such measures achieve their desired aim, it's worth noting that the [WHO pandemic guidelines from 2019](#) stipulate that the following measures are not recommended in any circumstances:

- Contact tracing
- Quarantine of exposed individuals
- Entry and exit screening
- Border closure

So historically the medical and public health communities thought lockdowns to have no appreciable effect on the length or severity of a pandemic, but we tried them anyway. The question, then, is whether or not they worked.

### Caveat

This author exhibits a good deal of frustration in his writing, but his treatment of the data appears to be sound.

As we did with masks, we can first ask if the imposition of lockdowns had any noticeable effect on case or death rates. You likely already know the answer, if you've been looking at the data as we've walked through prior arguments, but here's a [fresh take on it](#) specific to lockdown measures. Given the dates of imposition of lockdown measures, the author finds no subsequent impact on the case or death data. Of particular note is a comparison of the states within the US, where the five states with the highest number of deaths per million all issued stay-at-home orders.

If they appear to have no positive effect on the global scale, perhaps it's the case they can be effective on a smaller scale, if adhered to strictly. After all, how many people really obeyed 100% of the time? This is a question worth asking, and the US Marine Corps [sought to answer it](#) in the midst of boot camp last year. Recruits had to quarantine for two weeks before arrival, and then an additional two weeks after arriving at a closed college campus set aside for the

experiment. During the experiment masks were worn at all times except while eating and sleeping, six-foot distancing was maintained at all times, all buildings followed single direction traffic flow patterns, and recruits spent most of their time outdoors. If these recruits stayed clear of COVID-19, this should have been an ideal setup to show that lockdown measures work.

Unfortunately, there was no such luck, as 2.8% of the 1800+ recruits taking part in the experiment wound up testing positive via a PCR test, compared to 1.7% of the 1500+ recruits who elected not to take part. (It would have been better for the study if those who elected not to participate had not followed any of the lockdown measures 100% of the time, such that we could have a better comparison, but that was not the case.) Though recruits shared common grounds, bathrooms, and the mess hall, analysis of the particular genomes in those who tested positive showed transmission to only take place within platoons and sleeping quarters. The analysis also seems to lend support to the notion that most individuals are mildly infectious, while others function as “super spreaders”, as the majority of the genomes could be traced back to two of the 51 recruits who tested positive.

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**Note:** Given what we learned about PCR tests, it might have been the case that there were really only two infected individuals who wound up spreading the disease, and those who tested positive but didn’t trace back to those two were false positives. Unfortunately there’s no way to know for sure.

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Okay, so lockdowns don’t seem to impact the case and death rate data, and this one specific instance shows that COVID-19 broke through anyway, but have there been any systematic studies on the effects of lockdowns? Indeed, yes.

One study from last November sought to measure the impact a variety of non-medical factors had on COVID-19 mortality; while they found correlations in some areas, they concluded the “stringency of the measures settled to fight pandemic, including lockdown, did not appear to be linked with death rate.” Then in December a study found that more restrictive non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) like stay-at-home orders and forced business closures had no effect on case growth. At the same time the American Institute of Economic Research pulled together a couple dozen studies providing evidence against the efficacy of lockdowns. At the end of the year, a study from Denmark showed the infection decline to occur before any mandated lockdown measures went into effect, not after. More recently, an analysis from this April sought to examine the impacts of coronavirus restrictions across the US; they found the measures correlated well with unemployment, but not with mortality.

On top of all that, there is even some evidence to suggest that harder lockdowns increase COVID-19 mortality. Given what we learned of the importance of vitamin D in combatting the infection, and what the medical community has known for decades about how your mental and emotional state contributes to your ability to overcome sickness, this makes some intuitive sense, but more investigation is likely required.

“Well wait,” you might ask, “why have I heard so much about Sweden doing so poorly without a lockdown compared to the surrounding countries?” That’s a great question, and there’s a good write-up on it from March of this year. The answer involves a variety of factors like:

- the age and health breakdown of the population
- the percentage of the population in extended care homes
- how many people traveled to the Alps and brought the virus home with them
- whether or not the virus had reached neighboring countries yet
- etc.

Before we leave the subject of lockdowns, we should, as we did with mask mandates, examine the evidence that suggest they are indeed effective in controlling the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, we find much the same thing as we did with masks: that such studies are largely based on modeling (e.g., this rapid review consists primarily of modeling studies, though the authors sought to include other kinds as well), and they involve poor methodology and conclusions that contradict the data. Again, feel free to do your own digging and come to your own conclusions.

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**Note:** If you’d like to do more digging on the effectiveness of various lockdown measures, here’s a thorough collection

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of papers on the subject.

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**Note:** I also endeavored to find empirical evidence on the efficacy of social distancing policies in particular, in terms of slowing viral spread, decreasing overall death toll, etc., but was unable to. There are a number of modeling studies out there predicting the impact of distancing, but given the track record mathematical modeling has had in accurately predicting the course of this pandemic, I'm inclined to disregard them. It seems reasonable to conclude that the evidence supporting the ineffectiveness of both masks and lockdowns can be extended to apply to social distancing as well, but if any observational studies on the impact of distancing are published in the future, they may refute that conclusion.

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## Vaccines

The final countermeasures we'll examine here are the COVID-19 vaccines. A first question I have when approaching the topic is how their manufacturers were able to determine their efficacy and ensure minimal side effects on such a short timeframe. [Sebastian Rushworth](#) gives us a [good overview](#) of both how the vaccines work, and what their trials show. It appears the trials were limited (you might say flawed) in their design:

- The [Astra-Zeneca vaccine trial](#) exhibits a few peculiarities that are concerning: not using double-blind trials throughout, sometimes administering a meningococcus vaccine in place of a placebo, using primarily young, healthy participants (only 4% were over age 70; none younger than 18; ideal body mass index; small percentage with underlying conditions), and being small enough to not detect rare side effects.
- The [Pfizer vaccine trial](#) seems to be much better designed than the Astra-Zeneca one. That said, it did have some limitations: excluding the immunocompromised, those with severe allergic reactions to a vaccine in the past, women who were pregnant or breastfeeding, and people with auto-immune disease. Only 5% of participants were 75 years old or older.
- The design of the [Moderna vaccine trial](#) was very similar to that of the Pfizer one. No participants were over age 80.

All three trials had the problematic endpoint of a positive PCR test after one or more symptoms presented. It's therefore only possible for the trials to give us an indication of whether or not the vaccines decrease the presence of COVID-19 symptoms. They cannot tell us if they prevent you from contracting the virus, and they also can't tell us if they prevent you from spreading the disease to others. The trials only lasted 2–3 months beyond the second vaccine dose, so they also can't tell us anything about long-term immunity.

Based on the design of the trials, it's also worth noting that they can't really tell us if the vaccines are either safe or effective for the most vulnerable. Recall that the median age of death is in the 80s, and the average decedent has four comorbidities. I would assume this vulnerable demographic would be the one targeted by the vaccines, but the trials were conducted almost entirely on young healthy people.

While they can't tell us what we really want to know, they can tell us something: They do seem to decrease the incidence of symptomatic COVID-19 in young healthy people. If symptoms do present, they tend to be less severe. Moderna seems to be the best bet, followed by Pfizer, with Astra-Zeneca pulling up the rear.

A next question I have in evaluating not only the efficacy, but also the safety of the vaccines is what the side effects look like. Since we've established that the virus is of little to no concern to myself and my family, I need to be able to perform a thorough cost benefit analysis if I were to consider receiving one or vaccinating my children. Similarly, if I were an octogenarian with a few underlying health conditions, I would want to know what the odds were that a vaccine would help rather than hurt.

At first glance, the initial trial reports leave me a bit discomfited. An initial concern is the trials were not designed to find side effects. The selection criteria were such that any who were likely to have complications after receiving the vaccines weren't included in the trials. Apparently this is a [common tactic](#) in drug trials, such that the drug can be made to look as good as possible. Even with the deck stacked against finding potential complications, the Astra-Zeneca

vaccine seemingly caused two cases of [transverse myelitis](#) (which in such a small sample size raises a major red flag), and the Pfizer one increased the incidence of severe adverse events, but they failed to specify what those adverse events were. The Moderna vaccine didn't wind up with any black eyes in the trials, so it seems to be the one to go with in terms of both efficacy and safety.

However, these initial trials were limited, and at this point the vaccines have been rolled out all over the world, so we should have substantially more data available to evaluate the potential risks. When any new vaccine is launched, we use the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System \(VAERS\)](#) to catalogue any complications that arise that may be due to the vaccine. Ideally we should be able to query the database and get a glimpse of what the potential side effects of the three vaccines look like today. Unfortunately it looks like [it takes about nine weeks](#) between someone submitting a report of an adverse event and that data becoming available in the database. This means we don't have a real time picture of the safety of the vaccines, and we'll wind up responding too late to any trends that may arise in the data.

Despite the backlog in data processing, it looks like [the vaccines have already accrued](#) more than 120,000 adverse events, more than 12,000 serious adverse events, and more than 3,500 deaths. Typically a drug is pulled from the market after 50 unexplained deaths. The current death count is higher than for any other vaccine in history. This should be significant cause for concern.

Next question: Do the vaccines in fact stop the spread of the virus? We saw that the initial trials were not really designed to answer this question, and even then they indicated that the answer might be "no," but now that we have months of data from around the world, what can we say? Unfortunately the answer is a resounding "no," [from the doctor often credited for inventing mRNA technology](#), which is the technology behind the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. [A recent study out of Massachusetts](#) shows that 74% of individuals testing positive for the delta variant were fully vaccinated, either with two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or the single course of the Johnson & Johnson one. [More recent reporting](#) indicates 77% of new cases in Iceland are in those who are fully vaccinated, and in Israel the number is 86%. Honestly these vaccines are starting to sound less and less like vaccines.

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**Note:** Just last week I heard the phrase that the "delta surge is largely a pandemic of the unvaccinated." If someone can give me data to support that claim, I'd love to see it.

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## Follow-Up

On September 9th, I was pointed to [this WebMD article](#) claiming that "almost all US COVID-19 deaths [are] now in the unvaccinated." The article mentions some numbers to back up the claim, but doesn't give you sources for the raw data, instead referring you to [an Associated Press article](#) as the source of its information. The WebMD article also includes a few anecdotes intended to convince you that vaccination is the best thing for you, but they don't contain information that would be useful in assessing them (e.g., age at time of death, number of comorbidities, etc.).

The WebMD article also includes a link to a [Deadline article](#) making the same claim, but specific to Los Angeles county. This article mentions some numbers from a statement from the LA Department of Public Health, speaking to cases, hospitalizations, and deaths between December, 2020, and June, 2021, but it doesn't indicate how the data were collected and analyzed, and it doesn't give you access to the raw data to analyze it for yourself (though one commenter requests it). It then refers to the same Associated Press article for the rest of its information.

As far as I can tell, the Associated Press article doesn't cite a single source (neither via footnotes nor links), but says that the information comes from "an Associated Press analysis of available government data from May, [2021,]" and that they also "analyzed figures provided by the [CDC]." Without any links or citations, there's no way to know what data they're looking at, and without any specificity, there's no way to know how they carried out their analysis. Both of these complications mean there is no way to evaluate the trustworthiness of the information provided. They do note, however, that "the CDC itself has not estimated what percentage of hospitalizations and deaths are in fully vaccinated people, citing limitations in the data."

Aside from the complete lack of transparency, the Associated Press article also suffers from a number of rhetorical problems. Like the WebMD article, it too includes anecdotal evidence without giving you full information to properly evaluate what the anecdotes do and do not show. Amplifying the anecdotal evidence are strong uses of [appeals to emo-](#)



tion. The article also associates a dramatic drop in COVID-19-attributed deaths after January, 2021, to vaccinations, but offers no explanation of similar drops after both April and August, 2020. Finally, it uses imprecise language to say one thing but imply another. For instance, “cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are rising,” seems to be used to imply the situation is dire and due to people refusing vaccination. How much are they rising? How does today compare to last year? Are they rising based on what we’d expect from the seasonality of the virus? The article fails to answer any such questions that could allow us to effectively evaluate the information being presented.

It seems these articles are referencing people the authors consider to be trustworthy experts, and the authors are asking you to accept the claims made by these experts on faith. However, the authors and their experts provide no empirical evidence to support their claims, so you, if you have a data-driven, scientific mind, have no way of evaluating the truth or falsehood of the claims made. If you believe them, you do so solely on faith; if you doubt them, you have solid reason to, until any raw data is provided.

For what it’s worth, I went looking but couldn’t find data that tracked cases, hospitalizations, or deaths with vaccination status, either [from the CDC](#) or [from Our World in Data](#). Again, if someone can show me the data to support these claims, I’ll happily take a look.

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The next thing I’m curious about is whether or not the vaccines are necessary if you’ve already recovered from COVID-19. We’re being told that everyone needs to be vaccinated, but past experience tells us recovering from a virus should produce a similar immunity, so is that the case here? I’ll run through the evidence briefly, but check out [this article](#) if you want a longer explanation of the results. [A study from April, 2021](#), shows immunity from prior infection to be at least as effective as the best vaccines in preventing reinfection. [Another study from June](#) shows no reinfections at all in the cohort studied that had previously recovered from COVID-19, so it sounds like prior infection provides all the immunity you need.

Final question, and then we’ll draw some conclusions: For anyone who hasn’t yet had COVID-19, are there any alternatives to the vaccines that offer either comparable protection or safe and effective treatment for the disease? In fact, there are a few straightforward measures you can take to decrease your risk of experiencing a severe infection. We saw earlier the importance vitamin D plays in your ability to fight off viruses, this one included. It therefore stands to reason that other preventative measures such as vitamin C, zinc, a healthy diet, fresh air, sunshine, and exercise would help you stack the deck in your favor. Beyond that, though, are there any options for when you get sick?

A first candidate that jumps out is hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), which is typically used to treat malaria and auto-immune diseases, like lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. It was developed in 1946, so we have plenty of experience with it. [A systematic review](#) of HCQ use on COVID-19 patients concluded

HCQ was found to be consistently effective against COVID-19 when provided early in the outpatient setting. It was also found to be overall effective in inpatient studies. No unbiased study found worse outcomes with HCQ use. No mortality or serious safety adverse events were found.

Another contender is ivermectin, which is typically used to treat parasitic infestations. It hasn’t been around as long as HCQ, but we still have 40+ years of experience with it. In May of this year, [this meta-analysis](#) of the studies of ivermectin use on COVID-19 patients showed a substantial reduction in the relative risk of dying, with some inconclusive indication that it might decrease the time for symptom resolution as well.

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**Note:** If you’d like more information about COVID-19 treatment options not involving one of the available vaccines, see [this treatment protocol](#) and the research supporting it.

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**Note:** As we enter into a time of public unease regarding the ethical considerations of vaccine mandates, [this article on liberty of conscience](#), though lengthy, will be well worth your time.

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## What Can We Conclude?

This has been quite the whirlwind tour of the various pandemic countermeasures we've employed in the last year and a half. Let's try to summarize what we've found and draw some conclusions.

Masks were not historically recommended for the general populace for pandemics of low to moderate severity, which our prior analysis indicates applies to COVID-19. Prior guidance aside, it appears the imposition of mask mandates has had no impact on the daily case and death data. This may be because the virus spreads via aerosols, in addition to droplets, and the majority of aerosols are not captured by masks, and instead wind up filling a room within minutes. Numerous studies indicate masks have no effect on viral spread, either for COVID-19 or in general, and some studies even indicate they don't alter the chances of post-operative infection in surgical settings. There are a number of studies arguing for the efficacy of masks, but many tend to be mathematical modeling analyses of questionable value, and they typically exhibit poor methodology, drawing conclusions that contradict the data.

Given all this evidence, it seems clear that [the CDC's changing guidance](#) on masking over the course of the pandemic hasn't been motivated by evidence-based medicine. One has to wonder why there's continued pressure to use them when they don't do what they're supposed to do.

Historically lockdown measures such as contact tracing, quarantining exposed individuals, entry and exit screening, and border closures were not recommended for a pandemic, regardless of severity. For some reason we abandoned well-established guidance and instead imposed various levels of lockdown around the world; however, these restrictions can be seen to have had no impact on the daily case and death rates. On the local scale, strict adherence to quarantine, masking, social distancing, one way traffic in buildings, etc., still leads to spread of COVID-19. A number of studies have been conducted looking for the impact non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) have had on the spread of the disease, but the studies consistently show no correlation whatsoever between the more restrictive NPIs and mortality. (Washing your hands, however, is still good for you.)

Though it seemed justified early on in the pandemic to point to Czechia as an example of a hard lockdown conquering the virus, you could immediately counter by pointing to the UK with a similarly hard lockdown and some of the worst case rates in the world at the time. Also time has shown that the countries we might've initially thought had beaten the virus like Czechia simply hadn't received it yet; they were hit hard later on. Given all the data available from the last 18 months, one has to wonder why cities, states, and countries the world over are now returning to various degrees of lockdown when that does nothing to slow the spread or prevent deaths.

The rush to get COVID-19 vaccines to market as quickly as possible raises a number of questions about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. The initial trials designed to earn them the emergency use authorization suffer from poor design, and in some cases execution. They can really only tell us how well the vaccines reduce COVID-19 symptoms in young healthy people, while we'd like to know if they're safe and effective for the most vulnerable (70+ with one or more underlying conditions). In terms of side effects, the Astra-Zeneca vaccine possibly causing transverse myelitis, and the Pfizer one increasing the incidence of unspecified severe adverse events, are concerning. Beyond that, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) data being lagged by nine weeks mean we won't be able to respond promptly to trends developing in the side effect data, and at this point we've already seen more than 3,500 deaths associated with the vaccines, meaning they should've been pulled from circulation ages ago.

On top of all these concerns, it appears the vaccines don't actually stop you from either contracting COVID-19 or spreading it to others. The good news, though, is having recovered from the disease provides you with equal or better immunity, so in many cases the vaccines simply aren't needed. And if you want to combat the virus without one of the vaccines, hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and ivermectin have proven themselves safe and effective treatments. One has to wonder why, in the context of limited vaccines and a press for global herd immunity as soon as possible, we're pressuring everyone in the world to get vaccinated when it appears it's largely unnecessary, and if treatment becomes necessary, we've had safe, effective, cheap, generic treatments like HCQ and ivermectin on hand since before the pandemic began.

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**Note:** "Coercing" might be a better word than "pressuring," given what I've heard in the past week of people losing their jobs, being [fined \\$200/month](#), being [restricted from air and rail travel](#), etc., for not getting vaccinated.

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**Bottom line:** Masks don't protect me from you or you from me. Lockdowns don't have any impact on case rate or mortality. The available vaccines only appear to be effective therapeutics, but with significant risk involved. Alternative treatments are available with negligible risk. Given this summary of the efficacy of the countermeasures we've employed in combatting the pandemic over the last 18 months, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

- Why do you continue to use various countermeasures if they've proven themselves ineffective?
- How long will you continue?
- When will we reach the point when "enough is enough"?
- If there doesn't seem to be any harm to them, should you just keep going with the flow?

## The Consequences of Countermeasures

At this point we've shown it's completely reasonable to conclude that the danger of COVID-19 has been grossly exaggerated, and there's more than enough evidence to conclude that the countermeasures we've employed over the last year and a half haven't had their desired effect. However, we're still being told we must do whatever is necessary to stop the virus, and it doesn't look like cities and countries the world over will be abandoning non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) any time soon. Something we were deeply concerned about in March of 2020 was what the short- and long-term consequences of any such countermeasures would be, but it was exceedingly difficult then to get people to try to consider the ramifications, as the world was gripped by fear of the potential severity of the pandemic. Now, a year and a half later, we can attempt to assess how any such consequences have played out.

### Overview

As we examine the ramifications of the various masking, lockdown, and vaccination policies that have been put in place around the world, we'll be looking at the evidence in terms of both the medical and then the societal consequences. To begin, though, it will be worthwhile to get a broad overview by starting with excess mortality data. If you've been following along with the data in the earlier parts of this analysis, [excess mortality](#) is a concept you've been exposed to, though we haven't defined it yet. In brief, it is the number of deaths in a given area in a given time period over (or under, if it turns out to be negative) what can reasonably be expected for the number of deaths in that area in that time period, where that estimate for expected deaths is calculated based on prior years' mortality data, accounting for changes in the age and health of the population. The reason we look to excess mortality data first is it's really the only hard measure by which we can compare the impact of the pandemic itself to the impact of our response to it.

#### Side Note

If it is the case, as we noted earlier, that death coding guidelines were changed to result in COVID-19 being the cause of death more often than not, and up to 94% of deaths attributed to COVID-19 should actually have been attributed to some other comorbidity, then the proportions of this excess mortality that are and are not directly attributed to COVID-19 would be changed substantially.

So what do the data show? First it's important to realize that we don't have all the data available yet, as it's generally not available in real time, and we haven't returned to normal yet, but at this point the numbers are in for 2020, so we can see what they have to say. All told, the US saw about [300,000 excess deaths in 2020](#), with two-thirds of them attributed to COVID-19. That means we're looking at about 100,000 deaths that we didn't expect for which we're trying to find an explanation. What's both confusing and distressing about the data from the US is the demographics that saw the largest percentage increases in excess mortality were those who were Hispanic or Latino, and those in the 25–44 age bracket, meaning certain ethnicities and younger adults were impacted more significantly than others by our response to the pandemic. [Additional research](#) backs this up, and also adds that men experienced more excess death than women in the US. [A study in Canada](#) noticed similar patterns.

To get an idea of whether or not this excess mortality is likely due to the NPIs we've put in place, it's worth [comparing countries](#) with more restrictive NPIs (e.g., US, UK) to those with less restrictive NPIs (e.g., the Nordic countries). Indeed such a comparison shows countries with less severe lockdown measures to have generally lower excess mortality on a percentage basis than those with more significant lockdowns. The pattern is noticeable across all age groups, but is particularly pronounced in the younger demographics. [A Stanford doctor has claimed](#) that "lockdowns are the biggest health mistake we've ever made," and our initial look at excess mortality data suggests he may be right.

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**Note:** If you'd like another perspective on the death count attributable to lockdowns, [this article](#) is well worth your time. If you'd like to do your own data mining to draw your own conclusions, these resources will likely be of use to you:

- [US mortality statistics](#)
- [Provisional death counts for COVID-19](#)
- [The Economist's excess death tracker](#)
- [COVID-19 stringency index](#)

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Thus far we've only looked at observational data, which I strongly prefer, but before we leave the overview I'm actually going to point you to a modeling study for your consideration. You've heard a number of times my skepticism when it comes to using mathematical modeling as a basis for public policy decision-making, particularly when the models prove themselves inaccurate as real-world data becomes available, but that doesn't mean I discount them altogether. When considered appropriately within the broader context, they can give us useful food for thought when weighing alternatives, with the understanding that at the end of the day they are merely extrapolations. [This particular one](#) was trying to estimate the impact of school closures on the years of life lost, and concluded that keeping schools open may have resulted in fewer years of life lost in the long run. The excess mortality data we looked at above indicates there are short-term consequences to our pandemic response that we've already realized and will continue to realize if we keep more restrictive NPIs in place. This modeling study suggests there may be longer-term consequences that may only unfold over the next few generations.

But where are all these additional deaths coming from?

## Medical Consequences

A first place to look is to the medical literature to see if there have been any changes in what we typically expect for various illnesses. We'll first examine whatever we can in terms of death data, as that's a concrete measure, and then wrap up with any other consequences we find in the medical arena.

## Deaths

A first category that stands out is cardiovascular diseases. [One study](#) reports an 8% increase in overall cardiovascular mortality, with 35% more deaths occurring in the home, and 32% more occurring in extended care homes, than would be expected. The most frequent causes were stroke, acute coronary syndrome, and heart failure. [Another study](#) noted a peculiar decrease in the number of hospitalizations for acute myocardial infarction (AMI, or heart attack), along with a substantial increase in the risk-adjusted mortality rate. [Another study specific to stroke victims](#) detected the median time from the onset of symptoms to arrival in the hospital more than doubled from about two and a half hours to more than six. In the case of stroke, getting someone to a hospital as soon as possible is absolutely critical to the chances of recovery. Though the studies don't give a direct cause for these changes in behavior and outcomes, it seems we can reasonably infer that individuals were waiting longer after the onset of symptoms to seek medical help, resulting in worse outcomes overall, including excess deaths.

Leaving cardiovascular diseases behind, we see similar patterns [when it comes to cancer](#). In March, 2020, the CDC issued guidance to health care providers around the country for non-COVID-19-related care, with the goals of slowing

the spread, appropriately allocating PPE, etc. These guidelines contributed to the number of routine in-person cancer screenings plummeting, which in turn contributed to the number of new diagnoses of cancer dropping nearly 50% from early March to mid-April, 2020. This sharp decline is indicative of cases that would've been caught earlier, were it not for our reaction to the pandemic. Since with cancer the earlier the diagnosis, the better the prognosis, our countermeasures have led to degraded outcomes for cancer patients.

The next diseases we'll turn to are [Alzheimer's and dementia](#), which saw a 10% increase in excess mortality between March and August of 2020. The degrading conditions of patients stem from the strategy of isolation we've adopted, ostensibly for their own safety. "Doctors have reported increased falls, pulmonary infections, depression and sudden frailty in patients who have been stable for years." This shouldn't come as a surprise to us, as we've known for ages that social and mental stimulation are some of the few tools we have available to slow the progression of the disease; taking them away will naturally lead to rapid degeneration and a hastened death. Throughout this analysis I've attempted to stick dispassionately to the data and medical and other reporting, and to steer clear of making value judgements, but in this case I cannot. In addition to the raw data, the article linked above also gives you an idea of what the human component looks like in all our efforts to protect the most vulnerable. The way we as a society have treated the elderly is downright evil, and constitutes elder abuse of the most heinous variety.

In addition to all of the above, we noted earlier that [the vaccines are resulting in death](#) more often than is reasonable. And while in our last area of analysis we noted the ineffectiveness of face masks, it turns out there are also [a number of risks](#) associated with them as well. In some cases that means mild difficulty breathing or skin irritation, in others there are severe psychosocial consequences (which we'll revisit down below), and in a small handful of cases mask wearing seems to have resulted in death.

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**Note:** It may be worth your time to read over the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), which was written by infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists, recommending an approach of "focused protection". It has garnered over 850,000 signatures.

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## Other Impacts

In addition to the immediate death toll that has already been realized (and will likely continue to be, if we don't do anything), there are likely also a handful of other ramifications that will play themselves out over the coming years. One of those is it appears in our efforts to prepare for and combat COVID-19, [measles vaccination programs were halted](#) in 26 countries around the world, meaning 94 million children were at risk of missing their vaccinations for a disease that largely kills children under the age of five. In 2019 we saw just shy of 900,000 cases of the measles around the world. Using cohort life tables, which insurance companies use to predict how long someone will live, given their age, [this analysis](#) of years of life lost due to COVID-19 estimates that if a mere 0.1% of those who have been denied their measles vaccine wind up dying, that will equal the estimated number of years of life lost to COVID-19 itself. Granted, that's speculation, but since we know the danger of measles and have a safe and effective preventative for it, why should we gamble in such a way, particularly since COVID-19 does not pose near the same threat, and our protective measures that led to the halt of the measles vaccinations have proven themselves ineffective?

## Societal Consequences

Now that we've looked at the problems caused with a variety of medical issues, let's turn our attention to any other factors that might be negatively impacting the world. Again, we'll first examine whatever might be contributing directly to the overall excess death we looked at in the beginning, and then follow that up with any other bad side effects our response to the pandemic may have caused.

## Deaths

Before we get into how things played out, let's take a look at some projections first. One study estimated between 8,000 and 200,000 all-cause excess deaths attributed to COVID-19-related unemployment during the first year of the pandemic, with the most likely estimate being 30,000. Another study predicted between 27,000 and 154,000 deaths of despair (alcohol and drug misuse, and suicide) based on unemployment and economic projections, with 75,000 being the most likely estimate. It did note, however, that "when considering the negative impact of isolation and uncertainty, a higher estimate may be more accurate." I mention these modeling studies not to try to give an accurate prediction of how things would turn out, but rather to point out that people tried to warn us of the consequences if we continued on the course we were headed on early in the pandemic.

Let's see what kind of studies are available. One paper indicates there's been an increase in suicide during the pandemic, spurred by "feelings of uncertainty, sleep disturbances, anxiety, distress, and depression." The authors also caution that the psychological and financial costs may result in long-term psychological conditions. Another indicates a substantial increase in alcohol use, which likely contributes to the worsening case rates for anxiety, depression, and suicide. The most substantial change was in heavy drinking, with a 41% increase over the baseline. Yet another report indicates the drug overdose deaths were rapidly accelerating in the early days of the pandemic.

Perhaps one of the more surprising results is 2020 saw the highest number of motor vehicle deaths in 13 years, and the year-to-year spike of 24% was the highest we've seen in almost a century. "That doesn't make sense," you might think. "Nobody was driving last year." Indeed, the overall number of miles driven was down by an estimated 13–16%, but somehow with emptier roads we wound up with more fatalities. It appears this is due to a substantial increase in riskier driving behavior, with drugs, alcohol, and excessive speed leading to more collisions and more deadly ones. These changes in driver behavior seem to correlate with the lockdown measures that went into effect in the second quarter of 2020.

## Other Impacts

In addition to the side effects of our decisions that contributed directly to the excess death toll, there are also a number of other issues that arise that contribute to the overall deterioration of society. One of our concerns when the world decided to shut down was what that would do to children living in unsafe home environments. If the home is already unsafe, due to substance abuse or any number of things, and you add to that the stress and anxiety brought on by the pandemic, business closures and job losses, and mandatory stay-at-home orders, how much more dangerous does that make the home environment? While I wasn't able to find a direct answer to that question, there was a study that was tangentially related, which found a fifteen-fold increase in abusive head trauma (AHT, which includes "shaken baby syndrome") in infants during the first month of lockdown measures. I hope to see more studies on the correlation between lockdowns and the safety of the home environment in the future.

Another question we had early on was what masks do to communication within society. Humans have enough issues communicating effectively as it is; what happens when everyone hides half their faces? The answer is it gets much harder, but I'm sure I didn't need to tell you that. Masks hide a good deal of non-verbal communication, which can make it more difficult to understand tone and intent. When the little gestures like "social smiling" disappear, that has a significant impact on the health of society. While the authors suggest using more gestures can do something to make up for the deficit, given what we know about the danger of the virus and the efficacy of masks, you're probably better off just removing them.

Now let's turn for a moment to economic impacts. In March and April of 2020, the number of active business owners in the US plummeted by 3.3 million (22%). The US has never seen a drop that significant in a twelve-month period, let alone two. This in turn contributed to the substantial unemployment shock, which then contributed to the various problems listed above. The unemployment shock was predicted to result in ~800,000 additional deaths over the next 15 years, but keep in mind, that's an extrapolation; we'll have to wait and see what really happens.

On the religious front, lockdown measures in particular, and the stress of the pandemic and our response to it in general, have led to increased persecution of Christians in various parts of the world. There was a 60% increase in the number of Christians killed for their faith compared to 2019. Though not all of that increase is attributable to our pandemic

response, Christians being denied COVID-19-related aid in numerous countries in Africa and Asia is. In sub-Saharan Africa, Islamist militant groups took advantage of lockdowns and governments weakened by the crisis to ratchet up the level of violence. This sort of persecution of religious minorities was already happening around the world, but the way we responded to the pandemic gave aggressors an opening to “kick it up a notch.”

And now the final societal side effect from our response to the pandemic: world hunger. Last year, from late spring through the summer, there were a handful of reports predicting significant increases in world hunger throughout the pandemic. The [2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#) report from the United Nations estimated an additional 120 million people would be facing food scarcity, who would not have otherwise were it not for the NPIs we’d put in place. Other reporting predicted [12,000 deaths per day](#) from starvation, more than we were expected to see from the virus. At the time this was generally seen as alarmist reporting, and the developing story saw surprisingly little coverage through the rest of 2020 and early 2021. At this point, though, we have the data on hand to see that [some of the worst fears have indeed come to pass](#). The UN’s [2021 report](#) has just been released, and it shows the single biggest year-to-year increase in global hunger in decades, with 161 million more people experiencing it than in 2019. It’s estimated that about three-quarters of that increase (118 million) is due to the hard policies of lockdowns and related measures and the single-minded focus on the virus.

## What Can We Conclude?

This has probably been a lot to absorb. Let’s take a moment to summarize what we’ve learned.

A sizeable portion of the excess deaths (at least a third, probably more) are not directly attributable to COVID-19, but are instead attributable to our response to it. The unaccounted for excess deaths seem to be particularly prevalent in the younger demographics. A comparison across countries indicates less restrictive NPIs correlate with lower excess mortality and more restrictive NPIs correlate with higher excess mortality; that is, the more we’ve tried to forcibly stamp out COVID-19 (and failed miserably, as our prior analysis suggests), the more we’ve contributed to the deaths of others.

In trying to determine where all the excess deaths are coming from, we find that cardiovascular mortality is up overall, with significantly more deaths happening in homes and assisted living facilities. Stroke victims were taking more than twice as long to make it to the hospital, significantly impacting the chances of recovery. All this means people have been waiting longer than they otherwise would have before seeking treatment, leading to disastrous consequences. Cancer screenings plummeted, due to new guidance for non-COVID-19-related care, leading to substantial increases in missed diagnoses. We saw a 10% rise in excess mortality for Alzheimer’s and dementia patients, as all the forced isolation measures put in place for the patients’ safety directly contributed to their rapid deterioration while their loved ones watched from a distance. It seems our attempts to protect the elderly and frail have instead contributed to their demise.

The COVID-19 vaccines themselves have contributed to a significant number of deaths, and at this point it looks like masks have contributed to a handful as well. Measles vaccination programs that were halted so countries could prepare for and respond to COVID-19 could easily wind up contributing to more years of life lost than this pandemic does.

In addition to the medical issues, we’ve seen increases in suicide, heavy drinking, and drug overdoses. Counter-intuitively, 2020 saw the highest number of motor vehicle deaths in 13 years. Though there were fewer people on the road, those who were driving were engaging in riskier behavior, likely motivated by the stress of the pandemic response, and compounded by the substance abuse problems.

In addition to the direct contributions to the non-COVID-19 death toll, there have also been a number of less tangible impacts on society. Shaken baby syndrome saw a significant increase, likely due to the various stresses added to life by our response to the pandemic. Communication was impaired by masks, leading to a degradation of social graces and an increased tension in social interactions. Small business were hit harder than they ever have been before, contributing to an unemployment shock that we’ll likely still be feeling the aftermath of over a decade later. All of the instability around the world set the stage for an increased persecution of Christians, both through execution, and through COVID-19 aid distribution programs.

Finally, an additional 118 million people faced food scarcity last year than would have otherwise were it not for our self-imposed pandemic countermeasures. It’s hard for people in rich, Western nations to wrap our heads around what’s

meant by global hunger. Try going without food for the next three days—pretend you can't simply open the refrigerator to sate your hunger, and you're not sure when your next meal will be—and then imagine that for a third of the population of the United States.

**Bottom line:** For decision-makers to set policy, whether they're in local or national government or private businesses or other organizations, without a balanced consideration of the consequences such policies may have, is unethical. We knew the majority of these consequences were coming ahead of time, and we ignored them. Instead we decided what's best for the world was a single-minded focus on stamping out the virus, no matter what it takes, and no matter who suffers in the process. Our behavior has been reprehensible.

If you're anything like me, wading through all of the above has likely left you with a profound sense of grief. Don't squander that. Wrestle with the following questions:

- Why is all of the above so troubling?
- Given the myriad ways things have gone so wrong, is there something at the root of what's wrong with the world?
- Is there any way to fix all this?

### 2.2.3 What Does All This Mean?

At this point, we can answer the questions that launched our investigation with reasonable certainty:

1. The danger posed by the disease has been grossly exaggerated.
2. The various countermeasures we have employed—specifically masks, lockdowns, and vaccines—have proven themselves ineffective.
3. The consequences of those countermeasures have been too costly, and will continue to be if we don't do something.

What does all this mean? I'm afraid it means you're being lied to. I'm not going to speculate here as to the “why”, and I'm going to try to assume the best of intentions in any given individual, but the near-constant stream of reporting you've been fed over the last year and a half speaking to the grave dangers of the pandemic: those are lies. The woman at the store who gets irate with you because you not wearing a mask puts her in danger: that's a lie. The community organization that switches to online-only meetings because it will keep everyone safe: that's a lie. The employer requiring you to be vaccinated to keep your job because that's the only way we make it through this pandemic: that's a lie. The implicit assumption that any negative side effects that come from our decisions don't matter, because the danger of the virus is definitely worse: that's a lie.

How should you respond in light of all this? I won't prescribe anything; that's for you to decide. As for me and my household, we will no longer be complying with any government or business requests to wear masks or socially distance, and we will not be getting any of the available COVID-19 vaccines. To do so would be to tacitly agree that the situation is as dangerous as reported, that the countermeasures work to slow the spread and prevent death, and that the consequences of the countermeasures don't matter. *That we cannot do.*

We do not do this for the sake of being troublemakers, but because our consciences no longer allow us to comply, given all that we have learned in the last year and a half. In hindsight, I think we should have taken this stand much sooner. We are aware that taking such a stand will likely lead to confrontation, and we will endeavor to handle such situations with grace and compassion. We hope they will be opportunities to begin an open dialogue on all of these points.

Last spring someone pointed me to this excerpt from “On Living in an Atomic Age” (1948), by C.S. Lewis, in [Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays](#), and told me to replace any references to the atomic bomb with the coronavirus, as I've done below. I find it a fitting way to conclude.

In one way we think a great deal too much of the [virus]. “How are we to live in [a pandemic] age?” I am tempted to reply: “Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.”



In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the [coronavirus] was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by [a pandemic], let that [virus] when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about [viruses]. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

We are not currently living as we are meant to. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said the day before he was exiled to the West, “Live not by lies.” Live instead in accordance with the truth of reality.

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### Disclaimer

These pages represent about 55 hours of research and writing on my part. I think that should be more than sufficient for a project such as this, but it does mean I didn’t have time to find and read every piece of evidence that may have bearing on these issues. If I’ve missed something, or if new results come to light after this piece is published, that may call into question one or more of the conclusions I’ve drawn, and I’ll be happy to revisit them with the new data.

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## 2.3 Where Are We Today?

### Reading Time

~11 minutes

*January 29, 2021.*

**Note:** The following was written to update a few friends on how God has been leading my family and me over the past year. By request, it has been adapted for wider distribution.

I was concerned in the summer of 2020 when I started hearing critical theory—though I had not yet heard the term—coming from various church leaders in my local community, across our country, and around the world. At that time, I knew something was wrong at a gut level, but didn’t yet have the words to express, or research to back up, my gut reaction, other than, “A war is being waged over the hearts and minds of men.” (I’m pretty sure that’s Gandalf, though I can’t find the exact quote at the moment.)

It’s tempting to think that culture has changed radically in the last decade or so, but what we’re seeing in the world today is really the logical conclusion of the last few centuries of philosophical progression. Indeed, some thoughts even trace their lineage back to antiquity, and others, of course, back to the garden of Eden. Critical theory, which really woke me up to the problem, is only one component of the cultural transformation. Others include pandemic response, economic

planning activities, election interference, media communications, and so on. Regardless of the application space, the characteristic that unites these is the inability for dissenting opinions to be voiced, let alone heard. Most of the time, you're not even able to ask the question. Where are we today? I'll borrow and augment a phrase from Michael O'Fallon and say the war for epistemology is well underway, what's at stake is the future of the Christian church and western civilization as we know it, and much of the church unknowingly finds itself on the wrong side.

That's a bold statement, I know, so before I go on, let me clarify some of what I mean. I'm not saying God's not in control. I am supremely confident that God will accomplish all his holy will. That said, I am fully aware that at no time has he promised to preserve for us any particular way of life, either for the church or for our country. Am I afraid of what's going on in the world today? Concerned, but not afraid, for history tells us that the church experiences the most substantial growth, both in terms of new souls justified and lives further sanctified, in times of persecution. I eagerly look forward to how God grows his people in the rest of my lifetime, but I know it won't necessarily be pleasant.

What do we need to do? I've heard a number of people saying things like, "We just need to have faith and focus on the gospel." The mental picture that comes to mind when I hear that is of a squad of swordsmen in the midst of battle. Beleaguered by enemy forces (though they don't realize it), their squadmaster encourages them, shouting, "Hold on to your swords, men!" You look at the squad and realize that's not the most useful advice. One guy has his hand on the hilt, but hasn't drawn it yet. Another's resting his hand on the pommel, using it as a walking stick. A third, the most eager of the group, is holding it like a baseball bat, but he's holding it backwards, grasping the blade near the point, as blood runs down his hands from self-inflicted wounds. A fourth has faith in the countless hours he's logged as a swordsman in a video game, though he doesn't even know how to grip his weapon correctly yet. None of these men have been trained in swordsmanship, let alone battle, and their squadmaster doesn't realize the precarious spot they're in.

So what do we need to do? I want to be really careful here, because I never want to be misunderstood for arguing that the world needs God plus something, the Bible plus something, the gospel plus something. We need the Bible, yes, but we need the truths of scripture to permeate and direct every nook and cranny of our thoughts, words, and actions: we need a biblical worldview. Various polls over the last few decades have warned of the decreasing percentages of Christians holding a biblical worldview. One from ~5 years ago indicated only ~40% of evangelicals held to it; one from last year said that number was down to ~20%. Restrict the respondents to church leaders and you don't get numbers that are too much higher. We need to realize that all truth is God's truth, and that God's truth is total truth impacting all areas of our lives. We can no longer allow the secular/spiritual, public/private, fact/value split to exist in the minds of believers.

How did we get here? That's a rather long story that I'll save for another time, though I'll happily point you to a number of resources to find out. My wife says I have a tendency to give too much homework, so I'll try (mostly unsuccessfully) to restrain myself and only ask that you do two things in the near term: Read *Live Not By Lies*, by Rod Dreher, and *Expository Apologetics*, by Voddie Baucham Jr. The first will give you an indication of where we are today and where we're headed, while the second answers, "What do we do about it?" In addition to the two books, set aside an hour every other day over the next three weeks to listen to the following lectures:

- [Reflexivity](#) | Michael O'Fallon
- [Diversity, Inclusion, Equity](#) | James Lindsay
- [Critical Race Theory and Christianity](#) | Tom Ascol
- [The Grievance Gospel](#) | Josh Buice
- [The Great Reformation](#) | Michael O'Fallon
- [The Problem is Enmity, Not Ethnicity](#) | Darrel B. Harrison
- [The Road to Serfdom](#) | Rod Martin
- [Woke Hermeneutics](#) | Tom Buck
- [Overcoming the Sins of Our Fathers](#) | John Connell
- [Social Justice vs Authentic Biblical Justice](#) | Phil Johnson

These fairly concisely summarize much of what I've been learning over the last many months. The focus is on the critical theory side of things, but occasionally they branch out into some of the history and broader context. I was glad to have stumbled upon these lectures late in the game, after having come to the conclusions myself before hearing them. How did I come to these same conclusions? That's what the rest of the reading list is for:

- *The Law*, by Frédéric Bastiat (1850): An examination of the meaning and implications of the phrase “law is justice”.
- *On Liberty*, by John Stuart Mill (1859): An examination of the relationship between authority and liberty.
- *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1888): “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”
- *The Road to Serfdom*, by F.A. Hayek (1944): A clarion call to the socialists of all parties in England that the cultural trends the author was seeing there closely paralleled what he'd observed in Germany and Austria before the rise of the National Socialist (Nazi) party. 76 years later, it reads like it was written to the world yesterday.
- *The Twelve Days of the Aspen Executive Seminar*, by Mortimer Adler (1972): A brief history of the political and economic questions facing the world today, which have been hotly debated since well before this country was founded.
- *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*, by Thomas Sowell (1987): The inability for people to effectively dialogue on the issues of the day stems from the paradigmatic disconnect between diametrically opposed visions of human nature.
- *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World*, by R.C. Sproul (2000): A whirlwind overview of western political thought from antiquity to today.
- *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*, by David Koyzis (2003): A walk through the counterfeit redemptive narratives of the most prevalent ideologies of our day, supporting the author's thesis that “ideology is idolatry”.
- *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, by Nancy Pearcey (2004): A rich historical examination of how the church inadvertently pushed itself to where it is today, combined with exhortations on what to do about it.
- *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, by Voddie Baucham Jr (2015): A framework for approaching the defense of the faith by identifying, analyzing, and then refuting counterfeit worldviews.
- *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, by Rod Dreher (2020): A warning that the cultural circumstances in the world today bear remarkable similarities to various societies over the last century before their embrace of totalitarianism, and recommended practices from Christians who weathered the storm and kept the faith alive.

And then these two are on deck for me:

- *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, by F.A. Hayek (1973-1979)
- *Strong and Courageous: Following Jesus Amid the Rise of America's New Religion*, by Jared Longshore and Tom Ascol (2021)

I'm ashamed it's taken me so long to wake up to where we are in the world today. From a young age, growing up in a multicultural environment, I was trained well in apologetics, particularly with respect to how Christianity relates to other world religions. That informed much of my growth, particularly from middle school through college. I even applied to some seminaries for postgraduate studies, but wound up setting that aside for fear that such a path would just give me a bigger hammer with which to bludgeon my opponents, who were usually within the church. My relative lack of maturity meant I approached the defense of the faith from the wrong perspective.

In response to that, God started taking us on a journey emphasizing the importance of how he's designed us for intimate community. Some of our thinking here often paralleled questions a friend has asked numerous times: “How does our head knowledge translate into heart/hand knowledge-in-action?” I had plenty of experience, both in myself and in the

church, with people intellectually assenting to the correct things, but then not seeing the impact the kingdom of God should be having in our lives and on the world around us. The pendulum started swinging in the direction of “it’s less important what you believe than how you live that out.”

Gracefully, in the past few years, God has pulled us back to center, uniting the two sides of the journey that were seemingly at odds with each other. What you believe is of the utmost importance. How you live that out is of the utmost importance. The connection that weds the two is your worldview. To whatever extent we see believers not living out every aspect of their lives in accordance with the truths of scripture, the disconnect is due to holding one or more logically inconsistent ideologies, behind which lie evil spiritual strongholds, in tension with biblical truth.

Through the circumstances of the past few years, and a small mountain of books to go along with them, God has revealed to us his calling on my life: To prepare his people for the current and coming spiritual warfare by training them in the “martial” arts of worldview analysis, logical argumentation, and effective communication. I’ve been working this calling out in building up a local club geared toward just that. It’s encouraging to see people analyzing the worldview implications of things like The Eagles’ “Hotel California” or concepts like the depravity of man. How exactly this develops in the future remains to be seen; we’re just taking one step of faith at a time.

Can one be held accountable for what one did not know? That’s a fun philosophical question to ponder. Regardless, this letter is my attempt to open the door for you and point you in the right direction such that you can know what’s going on and what our responsibility is in the midst of it. One day we’ll stand before God and be held accountable for how we led those he gave us to lead in this time. We can thank him ahead of time for his grace and mercy. Do I expect everyone to have the same response we did? No. How exactly God wants to use you in this time is up to him. Should I have written this months ago? Possibly, but I wanted to make sure my thoughts were well-measured and I wasn’t speaking out of a charged emotional state. Months ago there was too much frustration; today there’s hope for a painful, but ultimately bright, future.

## 2.4 How to Effectively Dialogue on Matters of Belief

### Reading Time

~30 minutes

February 10, 2020.

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**Note:** The following was written as a proposal to the leadership of my church for how to go about addressing some potentially contentious doctrinal issues within the congregation. It has been adapted for wider distribution.

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- *Preface*
- *1 Summary*
- *2 Preliminaries*
  - *2.1 Forming the Group*
  - *2.2 The Group Rhythm*
  - *2.3 Establishing Ground Rules*
- *3 Laying the Foundation*



- 3.1 *What do you currently believe about this topic?*
- 3.2 *Why do you believe what you believe?*
- 3.3 *What questions do you have?*
- 3.4 *What concerns do you have?*
- 3.5 *What are your motivations?*
- 3.6 *Have you reached a place of indifference?*
- 4 *The Study Itself*
  - 4.1 *Looking to Scripture*
  - 4.2 *Looking to History*
  - 4.3 *Answering Related Questions*
- 5 *Drawing Conclusions*
  - 5.1 *What do you currently believe about this topic?*
  - 5.2 *Why do you believe what you believe?*
  - 5.3 *What questions remain unanswered?*
  - 5.4 *Where do we agree?*
  - 5.5 *Where do we disagree?*
  - 5.6 *Where do we go from here?*
- *Appendix 1: Philosophy of Learning*
- *Appendix 2: Scaffolding*

## 2.4.1 Preface

“‘For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.’ (Matthew 18:20, NASB), but then you have the problem of having two or three gathered.”

—Jason M. Gates

Life in community is hard. Conversation in community is hard. Effective dialogue about beliefs in community is hard. So how do we go about it? How can we discuss deeply held beliefs and convictions, where others likely disagree, all the while extending love, grace, and understanding to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Really good questions. Short answer: carefully. Long answer: read on.

With a local body of believers with more than say a dozen or so families, there are bound to be significant differences in viewpoint across the congregation. Such diversity of belief on secondary matters is to be expected, perhaps even encouraged. However, when such an issue is cause for significant consternation within the congregation, what should we do? Here are some example issues that may be floating around under the surface within the congregation:

### **What is the purpose of the local church?**

Is it to be a “service oriented architecture” of sorts (sorry if my software analogy doesn’t make sense), where we can plug in a “service” (ministry) for any given demographic group (young adults, senior adults, newly married folks, gardening enthusiasts, the argyle sock community, etc.)? Is it to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all people? What is it? Our answer to this question has significant implications for who we are and what we do.

### **What are the roles and responsibilities of deacons, directors, pastors, elders, overseers, etc.?**

How do these positions differ? In what areas is there overlap? What are our expectations of people in these positions? How should these different roles interact? Our answers here have implications for our church polity and how our church functions.

### **What are appropriate roles for women in ministry?**

This is a question that church leaders are often unwilling to touch for fear of “poking the hornets’ nest”. What do we believe here? How should women be involved in the life of the church? Can they be deaconesses? Can a woman lead the deacon board? Can women speak from the stage during Sunday services? Can a woman preach the sermon? Can women lead ministry areas? Can we have female pastors? Questions abound—what do we believe and why?

How do we go about answering any of these questions? This document is a walkthrough of how I’d go about it if it were up to me. I’ve tried to map this out as generally as possible, such that you can insert anything as the question for consideration. Is this the only way to try answering such questions in a congregational setting? No. Is it a good way? I think so. Is the methodology set in stone? Nope. I’d encourage tweaking things depending on the topic you’re tackling and the people involved in the conversations.

But who on earth am I, such that I have so many thoughts and opinions on how to approach topics such as these? My name is Jason Gates, and I’m a teacher. Now when I say “teacher”, I don’t mean that I’m the subject matter expert who has all the answers, which I will then impart to you—far from it. When I say “teacher”, I mean one who comes alongside a group of learners to aid in the learning process. It’s about helping people investigate, ruminate, discuss, learn from one another, consider multiple viewpoints, and arrive at conclusions. When I’m teaching I’m operating in the intersection of my skills and passions, where I’m most naturally motivated. It’s who I am; who I’m meant to be.

What experience do I have? In terms of official teaching experience, I taught first- and second-graders in the [Bible Study Fellowship International](#) children’s program for two years. After that I taught everything from College Algebra through Advanced Engineering Mathematics at the university level for five years. (Turns out college students aren’t terribly different from first- and second-graders.) During that time I devoured any book on pedagogy and andragogy I could get my hands on, and took part in whatever classes or focus groups on education were available. After transitioning to software engineering, I still look for opportunities to help others learn to improve. (Turns out adults aren’t terribly different from college students, except I can’t motivate them with grades or pizza any more.) I also coach Eldorado’s speech and debate team, where all of these same skills come into play.

What do I know about learning? For that you can check out the appendices. [Appendix 1](#) has a write-up of my philosophy of learning—how I think it works best. [Appendix 2](#) contains some background information on the concept of scaffolding, which undergirds how some things are structured in [Section 3](#).

Looking forward to fruitful conversations together,

Jason M. Gates

## **2.4.2 1 Summary**

Time is precious and you likely don’t have time to read through this whole document right now. No worries—here are the highlights:

- Invite anyone from the congregation who wants to dive into the subject to take part in a study group. ([Section 2.1](#))
- Make sure they know there will be significant work required to take part (at least an hour of discussion, an hour of reading, and an hour of writing per week). ([Section 2.2](#))
- Establish some ground rules: ([Section 2.3](#))
  - Be punctual.
  - Prepare in advance.
  - Love it for a minute.

- Others agreed upon by the group.
- Start the practice of quarterly fellowships for the sake of growing together in relationship.
- Determine the starting point: (*Section 3*)
  - What do you currently believe? (*Section 3.1*)
  - Why? (*Section 3.2*)
  - What questions do you have? (*Section 3.3*)
  - What concerns do you have? (*Section 3.4*)
  - What are your motivations? (*Section 3.5*)
  - Have you reached a place of indifference? (*Section 3.6*)
- Study the Bible. (*Section 4.1*)
  - Have the group suggest passages.
  - Ask questions of the book:
    - \* Who's the author?
    - \* Who's the audience?
    - \* What was the cultural context?
    - \* What was going on in the church?
    - \* What was the author's purpose?
    - \* How does it fit in context?
  - Ask questions of the passage:
    - \* What does it say?
    - \* What does it not say?
    - \* How does it fit in context?
    - \* What's the particular meaning?
    - \* Does it address the question at hand directly?
  - Take your time.
  - Consult commentaries only after personal study and group discussion.
- Study history using the same principles used for Bible study. (*Section 4.2*)
- If needed to draw conclusions in your current study, take some time to answer related questions. (*Section 4.3*)
- Determine the ending point: (*Section 5*)
  - What do you currently believe? (*Section 5.1*)
  - Why? (*Section 5.2*)
  - What questions remain unanswered? (*Section 5.3*)
  - Where do we agree? (*Section 5.4*)
  - Where do we disagree? (*Section 5.5*)
  - Where do we go from here? (*Section 5.6*)

## 2.4.3 2 Preliminaries

### 2.1 Forming the Group

A first step in having a conversation about what we believe will be determining who will be involved in that conversation. What voices do we need to hear from? Who should be doing the investigative leg-work?

My personal preference would be to open up the group to anyone in the congregation who would like to be involved. If you have the Holy Spirit of God in you, I figure I'd better listen to what he might be saying through you. If we're trying to figure out what we believe as a local body of believers, the membership of that body should be involved.

Beyond the open invitation to the congregation, I'd also strongly encourage church leadership to participate. I don't think we can make it a requirement, just due to scheduling logistics, but if you're available, it'd be good for you to be involved. Does that mean the leaders do all the digging and everyone else is along for the ride? "May it never be!" We're all in this together.

### 2.2 The Group Rhythm

I'm picturing the group having a weekly gathering for about an hour at a time. Between meetings participants would be expected to spend about an hour doing some reading or other investigation, and about an hour doing some writing, in preparation for the next get-together. Three hours a week should be manageable, but as with most learning, the more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

A natural time to hold our weekly meetings might be during the Sunday school hour, but I get the feeling meeting some time other than Sunday mornings will require some extra commitment from folks from the get-go, and that'd be worthwhile. What day and time would be ideal? That bit's negotiable.

In addition to the weekly rhythm, it'd be worthwhile to have at least a quarterly fellowship for folks to get to know each other better. It's hard to trust people if you don't really know them, and it's hard to get to know people if you're only ever studying something together. You need opportunities to build friendships in other contexts, chances to just kick back and relax and enjoy life together. Picnic at the park? Cook-out at someone's house? Bowling night? The sky's the limit.

### 2.3 Establishing Ground Rules

There are a handful of ground rules for participation that I'd like to impose from the beginning:

**Be punctual.**

In order to make the best use of our limited time together, please arrive and be prepared to start on time.

**Prepare in advance.**

If in any given week you are unable to do the requisite reading/writing ahead of our gathering (life happens; no judgment here), you are welcome to join us, but please remain silent. We want to ensure the conversation is driven by those who have prayerfully prepared for it ahead of time.

**Love it for a minute.**

When someone throws out an idea, you may be tempted, in the moment, to react strongly against it and start tearing it apart. Before doing so, you must first "love it for a minute"—try to see and understand things from the other perspective.

Beyond this initial set, it will be beneficial for the group to define any additional ground rules they feel will be important. Some suggestions:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views. Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.

- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating. Comment in order to share information, not to persuade.
- Avoid blame and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.

The list of ground rules can be revisited and amended throughout the investigation if necessary.

### 2.4.4 3 Laying the Foundation

#### Side Note

See *Appendix 2* for some of the motivation behind questions such as the ones suggested in this section.

Before diving into a significant discussion, it's important to know where everyone is coming from. Often we may not even know where exactly we currently stand or why we believe what we do on a particular topic, so it's important to have an intentional time of introspection. The following questions would be homework assignments, one per week, for the participants to ask of and answer for themselves in writing.

#### 3.1 What do you currently believe about this topic?

Don't talk to anyone else about this (yet). Don't refer to any books you may have read. Don't even crack open the Bible. (Gasp! Who let this guy teach in church? Wait till we get to *Section 4.1*.) I just want whatever information is in your head translated onto a piece of paper. What are your thoughts today? Be as specific as possible. Generalities can often be unproductive in dialogue. The more specificity, the more fruitful the discussion can be.

Note that this can just be a brain-dump—getting your thoughts out on paper. If you'd like to take the extra time to rearrange your thoughts into a well-crafted essay, that would be appreciated, but isn't necessary. The importance is in writing things down so we have something concrete to talk through.

#### 3.2 Why do you believe what you believe?

Once you've identified what you believe, the next step is figuring out where those beliefs came from. They didn't just pop into your head out of nowhere. Were they informed by your parents? Perhaps by your peers? Is a past situation closely tied to a particular facet of your beliefs? How have your thoughts developed over time? How have past communities you've been a part of viewed the same topic? Does what you believe in another context impact your thinking here? If so, how?

Again, don't talk to anyone before you jot down your thoughts. No books, no scripture—just whatever's in your head. I realize books/scriptures/community inform why you believe what you believe, but at any given moment you don't have access to all of them instantaneously. What you do have is what's in your head, and that's what I want you to put down on paper.

### 3.3 What questions do you have?

We should already be on the same page in terms of tackling the general question—what do we believe about [fill in the blank]? However to answer the general question it will be helpful to dive into a number of specifics. What particular questions do you have in mind that need answering? Write down as few or as many as you feel are important. Are certain questions more or less important to you? Again, remember that specificity will be our friend.

### 3.4 What concerns do you have?

As we wade into a conversation about our beliefs, it will be good to keep in mind that examining those beliefs can be a bit unnerving. What worries you as you're beginning on this journey with us? Are you concerned we'll wind up in a particular spot? Are you worried we'll go about this the wrong way? Will relationships be marred by coming to different conclusions? Jot down your concerns, and ask God to help you trust him as he helps us through this.

### 3.5 What are your motivations?

It's likely the case, to a greater or lesser extent, that we all walk into this investigation with some sort of personal agenda in mind. What are you hoping for? Do you want us to wind up somewhere particular? Are you hoping we do things a certain way? Why did you decide to take part? If things don't turn out the way you hope they will, what will that mean for you?

### 3.6 Have you reached a place of indifference?

At this point we've tried, individually, to identify what we currently believe and why. We've sketched out numerous specific questions we hope to find answers to in our investigation, and we've admitted that we are burdened with a variety of concerns. We've tried to be honest with ourselves and identify our motivations as we approach the topic. It will be easy, natural even, to read our beliefs and agendas into our study. Are you in a place where you are willing and able to hear with fresh ears what God would reveal to you? Are you indifferent to everything but the will of God?

If not, that's nothing to be ashamed of. Are you still attached to a particular outcome? Are you unsure if you'll be able to reconsider a certain belief? Is there anything that might prevent you from seeing clearly as we begin our study? This may be an assignment you'll need to revisit a handful of times, and that's okay.

## 2.4.5 4 The Study Itself

### 4.1 Looking to Scripture

At this point, we're roughly six weeks into our investigation and we're finally ready to starting digging into source material. The primary source for an investigation such as this should of course be the Bible itself, but how should we go about structuring our study? Here are some suggestions.

## Have the group suggest passages

In the preceding six weeks, be collecting suggested passages from members of the group. Any bits of scripture that folks think might be relevant, jot them down. This helps in developing buy-in; that is, the members of the group will know experientially that they are a part of determining what we believe and why. It's not a matter of some leader telling you what passages of scripture to look at—it's all of us within the body looking at scripture with the Holy Spirit's leading.

## Setting the order

Once you've collected a first cut of passages to look into, how do you go about setting the order for when you dig into which passage? This part can be totally flexible. I'd suggest you group passages within a given book of the Bible together, but that's not absolutely necessary. It might also be worthwhile to hit things in a more-or-less chronological order, but again, feel free to shake things up as needed. It may be the case that you can tell ahead of time that certain passages will be more contentious than others. In those cases, it might be worthwhile to slate those passages for later in the conversation after the group has had more time to learn how to interact well with each other. The flip-side of that is if you know there are certain passages that will prompt significant agreement, those might be good for earlier in the investigation. I don't want to be prescriptive here. Every group is different and the instructor needs to be able to adapt to the dynamics within.

## What questions should we ask?

Once an order has been set, how do you go about studying any given passage of scripture? Here are some common questions we should ask and attempt to answer, though this list isn't meant to be exhaustive.

### At the book level:

The following questions help us to establish the overall context of the book in which the passage sits.

#### Who is the author?

What do we know about him? What's his background? Where was he in his life when he sat down to write the book?

#### Who is the audience?

Who was the author writing to? Who were those people? What do we know about them? What was their background? Keep in mind, there might be multiple audiences intended, e.g., a book written to a particular person, but then intended to be shared with a local church or churches.

#### What was the cultural context?

What was going on at the time? What was life like where the audience lived? How does that context differ from our own? Are there aspects of the cultural context that are hard for us to wrap our heads around today?

#### What was going on in the church?

If applicable, what did the current situation in the church look like? How did the church context differ from the cultural context? How did it not?

#### What was the author's purpose?

Why did he write the book to the audience? Was he intending to inform? Persuade? Rebuke? Encourage? Note that in some cases you may not be able to come to concrete answers, but you should be able to get a general idea.

#### How does it fit in context?

Given the overall context of the Bible as a whole, how does this particular book fit in?

### At the passage level:

Once the overall context has been established, we can dive into the specifics of the passage itself.

#### What does the passage say?

Try not to impart your own meaning to the passage. What does it actually say? What did it say to the original audience?

#### What does it not say?

Perhaps more important than the last question, let's be clear about what a passage does not specifically say.

#### How does it fit in context?

Given the context established at the book level, how does the particular passage fit? How does it contribute to the overall message?

#### What is its particular meaning?

If this passage were omitted, how would that affect the overall meaning or purpose of the book?

#### Does this speak to the question directly?

Or does the current passage just touch the question you're looking into tangentially?

### How long do we spend?

Hang on a second. If the group is coming up with all the source material we'll look into, and for any given passage we're going to try to answer all the questions above, how long is this study going to take? As long as it takes. I'd be very hesitant to attempt to time-box the study, because it feels like that would be telling God, "I trust you to reveal your will to us, but I'm requiring you to do it within the next three months." Sounds just a wee bit arrogant to me.

### What about commentaries?

Bible commentaries are great, but can I make a request? Don't go to them right away. Take time first with just you, the passage of scripture, and the Holy Spirit. See what he reveals to you with just the Bible itself. Bring all your insights with you to our discussion group and then let's hear from one another what God has been showing us through his word. After that, if you want to go back to see what a handful of commentaries say about a passage, I heartily encourage you to do so. My caution here is that if reading something puts a certain interpretation in your mind ahead of time, it can be hard to see something other than that interpretation in the passage.

## 4.2 Looking to History

While the Bible should be our primary source when investigating questions of belief, we want to make sure we're not attempting to interpret it in a vacuum. Chances are the church universal has been thinking through the same questions you're pondering for hundreds or thousands of years. It'd be worthwhile to take into consideration what the church has thought over time. How should we go about doing that?

I'd suggest following the same principles outlined in *Section 4.1*:

- Have folks suggest sources to look into so it's very much the group doing the investigation and not just the leader.
- How should you sequence the material? Chronologically may be worthwhile so you can trace the progression of the church's beliefs through time. It may also be beneficial to look to earlier sources first, because they will be closer to the cultural context of the Mediterranean region in the first century. Keep in mind that the original readers may have likely read and understood things very differently from how you do initially. All that being said, a thematic organization of the content might make sense too. Again, you can be flexible here.



- Ask and attempt to answer many of the same questions we intend to ask of scripture, with the understanding that you're not necessarily looking at a Holy Spirit-inspired text this time around.
- And take your time. If the church has been ruminating on your question for generations, you probably don't need an answer by tomorrow.

Though the organization of this section makes it look like you should do all your Bible study before you get to any study of church history, that's not necessarily the case. It may be worthwhile to interweave some of the historical study with the scriptural study. Back and forth between the two might be natural in some cases. If you do, though, it will be important to differentiate that which is scripture from that which isn't. The Bible is our ultimate authority—if something doesn't jive with it, it's *no bueno*.

### 4.3 Answering Related Questions

In the course of our investigation, we may find the questions we're asking are intimately intertwined with other questions that we don't necessarily have answers to yet. It may be the case they're related at the big picture level—e.g., to determine what the roles, responsibilities, etc., of church offices are, do we first need to determine what the purpose of the local church is? Alternatively they may be related at a more specific level—e.g., to answer the question of whether it's appropriate for a woman to be a pastor, do we first need to have a discussion on a wife and mother's role in the home? When such questions come up, how do we deal with them? I would recommend one of two options.

On the one hand we could set them aside for another time. We could continue our current study as-is, and when we get to the end, acknowledge as a group that there are questions that remain unanswered because we chose not to dig into them at this time (see [Section 5.3](#)). That's completely fine. I'm not expecting us to answer every single question we could possibly come up with. However, when we get to the point of drawing conclusions, we must acknowledge that there are still gaps in our understanding, and perhaps hold more loosely any conclusions we know to be intimately tied to any such gaps.

On the other hand, it might be worthwhile to consider this process inside a recursive loop. If we come up against a figurative brick wall in our understanding, we can say, "Before we go any further in our investigation of X, it appears we need to spend some time figuring out what we believe about Y." Push pause on the current study, and head back to the beginning to start afresh on the new question. Once you've figured out what you think about Y, return to where you left things off in the study of X.

Well hang on a second, we can't spend the next twenty years trying to answer this question! (Why not? Would that not be a fruitful time?) I understand the hesitancy. Perhaps you abbreviate the process. Maybe you go through the various questions we kicked things off with (see [Section 3](#)) and realize that the group is already more or less in alignment. Perhaps you realize the main points you all agree on are all that is necessary to contribute back to the original conversation, and the handful of places where you disagree are inconsequential. The goal is for you to understand corporately what you believe and why. How you get from here to there can vary from question to question.

### 2.4.6 5 Drawing Conclusions

When it seems the investigation is drawing to a close, it's time to wrap things up by asking and answering a number of questions. These assignments parallel those in [Section 3](#), but here they serve as a means of assessing what progress has been made throughout the study.

### 5.1 What do you currently believe about this topic?

This is the same question we asked to kick things off. It may be the case that your thinking hasn't changed much. Then again, what you believe may have changed significantly. Perhaps the changes in your understanding were broad and sweeping, or perhaps they were slight tweaks to small particulars. Whatever the case, please jot down your current thoughts.

### 5.2 Why do you believe what you believe?

At this point we've spent months digging down into the details so you should have a pretty good idea of the foundations supporting your beliefs. This assignment, along with the last one, is kind of like your "final exam". Tell me what you think and why. This time please do refer to any source material you like. I realize you only have what's in your head at the spur of the moment, but here we'd like to summarize all the details of the last many months of dialogue.

### 5.3 What questions remain unanswered?

It may be the case, even after months of study, that there are some questions you don't feel you have solid answers to yet. That's completely fine—it's okay to not have all the answers. What are those remaining questions? What is your thinking on them currently? What interpretations are you weighing? Why don't you feel you have a solid answer?

### 5.4 Where do we agree?

In discussions about beliefs it can be easy to get bogged down in our disagreements. We don't want to do that. It's likely the case that the group you've dug into this topic with agrees on the vast majority of its beliefs, and that the areas of disagreement are relatively small in scope. (That is not to say they are likely small in importance, though they may be.) From your perspective, what are all the facets of this topic that your group agrees on? What is the common ground on which you all stand? Please be thorough and specific.

### 5.5 Where do we disagree?

Now that we have an understanding of what our common ground is, and that it is substantial, what are those areas in which the group has not come to consensus? What are the differing viewpoints, and why do folks hold to one way of seeing things versus another? For any given point of contention, is it a major issue, rising to the importance of our statement of faith? Or is it a minor issue, where brothers and sisters in Christ can lovingly and peaceably hold differing viewpoints within the same local body? Is it perhaps somewhere in between?

### 5.6 Where do we go from here?

Given the lengthy journey we've been through together, what needs to happen at this point? Are there any changes that we need to make? Are there conversations we need to continue? Should someone sit down and write *There and Back Again: A Congregant's Tale* to record our sojournings for future generations? This assignment is entirely open-ended, but I'd suggest you break it down into two parts: What's next for you, personally? And then: What's next for us as a church?

## 2.4.7 Appendix 1: Philosophy of Learning

The driving passion of my life is to help people learn how to learn. I use the phrase “how to learn” for two reasons. First, I believe learning is a life-long activity, and if we are to do it all our lives, we should learn to do it effectively. Second, it’s likely the case that most people have gone through their lives being taught *what* to learn, but not necessarily *how*.

### Side Note

This list is a generalization of a four-fold study approach used by [Bible Study Fellowship International](#), with which I studied for seven years, and for which I taught 1st and 2nd graders for two years.

Allow me to tell you how I believe learning works. I consider the learning process to be a combination of the following activities:

### Investigation

is the process of seeking to learn new material by yourself. In our current educational framework, this is generally accomplished by reading material written by experts in an attempt to understand the necessary concepts, relationships, etc. However, not all people learn best through books. The process of investigation can incorporate other methods, such as experimentation for those who learn best by doing, or observation for those who learn best by seeing something done.

### Meditation

is a means of study often neglected. When investigating new material, you must continually ask certain questions: What does this actually mean? How might it apply to my life? Does it fit with my current understanding of life, the universe, and everything? If so, how and where does it fit in? If not, is this utter nonsense, or do I need to reformulate the way I view the world? By seeking to understand how new material fits with the vast wealth of knowledge and experience we already have (see [Appendix 2](#) on the topic of scaffolding) we internalize it, thereby strengthening our understanding.

### Conversation

is what naturally happens when multiple people are learning together. Since everyone has a different set of prior knowledge, students will be able to grasp new concepts with differing levels of certainty. It is beneficial to be able to discuss with others any thoughts or questions that arise during investigation of and meditation on new material. What may seem confusing for one may be straightforward for another. Even if you have a flawless understanding of a concept, articulating your understanding to others further reinforces that understanding.

### Consultation

is the act of seeking help from a professional. Generally this happens through students listening to lectures given by their instructors. However, the lecture format is not the only way to accomplish this. Teachers can impart their knowledge in a small group setting, or even one-on-one. Experts have years of experience in their field, during which they have formulated and reformulated their understanding of the material. The crucial part of consultation, then, is for the instructor to aid the students in developing the structure of their knowledge. (Again, see [Appendix 2](#).)

### Imagination

is when students extend their knowledge beyond the bounds of the box in which it was first presented. Instead of just reading the textbook, they find out where the material has been applied in the real world. Instead of the examples discussed in the classroom, they question what might happen if they omit their initial assumptions. Instead of assuming what any given text says is true, they set up counter-examples and attempt to prove or disprove them. Without being able to transfer our knowledge to new situations, our understanding of the material is still incomplete.

Though these five learning activities have been presented as if they come one after the other, we must realize that learning is not a linear process—it is inherently organic. These various learning activities happen, to an extent, simultaneously. We can think of this process occurring within a feedback loop, such that we are constantly reevaluating our

understanding of the material based on the inputs received.

Whether you like it or not, you will be learning for the rest of your life. A wise man once said, “Some people learn the easy way; some people learn the hard way; and some people never learn.” My desire is to help you learn to learn the easy way, and to relish every minute of it.

## 2.4.8 Appendix 2: Scaffolding

When learning new material, you’re never starting from an empty slate. Your understanding of a new concept is built up on top of the sum total of all your prior knowledge. The task of the educator is to assess what a pupil’s prior knowledge is, and then provide sufficient intermediary steps to take them from where they are to where they need to be in understanding the new subject. This is a concept known in education as *scaffolding*, as the new knowledge and understanding is built up, bit by bit, in a manner similar to a scaffold erected outside a building.

If all an educator needed to do was provide adequate scaffolding on top of an already sound base, life would be relatively easy. Unfortunately reality is a little more complicated. It may be the case that in assessing a student’s understanding of a subject you find certain inconsistencies—the structure of the scaffold is unsound. In such cases you still need to get an accurate picture of the structure of a learner’s knowledge, but you do so in order to determine what needs to be deconstructed in order to rebuild a sound structure on top.

This is one of the harder parts of aiding someone in learning. The structure of their current understanding may be long-established. It can be quite difficult to let go of preconceived notions in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of a subject. This part of the learning process must be handled with extreme care and sensitivity. The questions in [Section 3](#) are intended for learners to map out what their scaffolding looks like so the instructor knows where the starting point is.

## RÉSUMÉ

### LinkedIn Profile

My career has taken me from being an engineering physicist to a computational mathematician to a software engineer and finally to a DevOps evangelist. During my undergraduate research into magnetically confined high-temperature plasmas, I discovered I was more interested in the numerical methods working behind the scenes, and decided to pursue that in graduate school. In the midst of that, I realized the majority of the problems you run into aren't so much in the algorithms themselves, but in their implementation in the software, so I made the switch over to software engineering. My experience in that arena showed me it's less about the implementation details and more about the team culture you have and how that contributes to the overall success of the project, and thus the switch to what I'm calling a "DevOps evangelist" role, where my purpose is to help you do the amazing work you already do, but do it better.

I excel in getting plugged into a team, determining what its various pain points are that prevent it from being as successful as it can be, prioritizing which of those need to be addressed first, and then iterating with the team to make incremental improvements to help them move in the right direction. Though many view DevOps as a collection of tools or tasks that enable the "real work" to get done, it's actually a paradigm shift in how we view both the work we do and how we go about doing it. Helping teams realize this paradigm shift, and the resulting productivity boost, is one of my passions.

Throughout my career, I've enjoyed the opportunities afforded for continual learning and improvement, whether that's developing my skills as a leader, or honing my competencies with an ever-evolving tech stack. I excel in self-directed study, come up-to-speed with new technologies quickly, and then often find myself the most proficient person around in whatever language, library, or tool is in question. I pride myself in being not just a developer, but a software *engineer*, who is able to assess a project's needs, determine the optimal technologies to address them, and then design, build, deliver, and maintain solutions with their long-term sustainability and resiliency to the ever-shifting landscape in mind.

I function best as a generalist, leading or interfacing with a team of specialists. I excel at keeping the high-level and long-term plan in mind, breaking it down into manageable pieces, and finding the right people to work those tasks. When needed, I have the experience and attention to detail to dig down into the weeds with the specialists to ensure the solutions we're designing and building will meet the overall project needs. I do all this best through asynchronous communication via project management and team collaboration tools, with synchronous meetings scheduled only as needed.

## 3.1 Education

**Colorado School of Mines**, Golden, Colorado  
Ph.D. in Mathematical and Computer Sciences  
GPA: 4.0; Qualifying Exams: Passed  
*Left incomplete due to family responsibilities*

**University of Tulsa**, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
M.S. in Applied Mathematics  
Graduation: May, 2011; GPA: 3.917

**University of Tulsa**, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
B.S. in Engineering Physics, concentration in Robotics  
B.S. in Applied Mathematics  
B.A. in German  
Graduation: May, 2009; GPA: 3.916

## 3.2 Experience

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2022 – Present

*Senior Member of the Technical Staff: Systems Engineering & Integrated Solutions*

Driving the adoption of software engineering best practices; establishing coding/testing standards for Python package development; developing a process for modularizing and open-sourcing Python infrastructure.

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2021 – December, 2022

*Member of the Technical Staff: Systems Engineering & Integrated Solutions*

Leading an initiative to automate manual integration and release testing; encouraging fuller adoption of GitLab as an all-in-one DevOps and project management platform to improve developer productivity and overall team success.

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

October, 2018 – May, 2021

*Member of the Technical Staff: Software Engineering & Research*

Developing continuous integration/deployment workflows and infrastructure; advising teams on achieving a DevOps transformation; leading teams to design and develop tools to improve sustainability and reproducibility.

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

September, 2017 – October, 2018

*Member of the Technical Staff: Computational Mathematics*

Introducing software engineering best practices into team workflows; developing code integration workflows and infrastructure.

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

June, 2016 – September, 2017

*Limited Term Employee: Computational Mathematics*

Software engineering, development, maintenance, testing; version control instruction.

**Northrop Grumman Corporation**, Aurora, Colorado

June, 2014 – June, 2016

*Engineer Systems II*

Extending software capabilities; developing and testing algorithms; addressing data quality.

**Colorado School of Mines**, Golden, Colorado

August, 2012 – May, 2014

*Graduate Teaching Fellow*

Advanced Engineering Mathematics and Calculus 3; “Problem Solving with Matlab” tutorial series.

**Front Range Community College**, Westminster, Colorado

May, 2013 – August, 2013

*Math Instructor*

College Algebra; online education certified.

**Sandia National Laboratories**, Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2012 – July, 2012

*SIP Graduate Professional Technical Summer Intern*

Code validation via manufactured solutions to partial differential equations.

**Colorado School of Mines**, Golden, Colorado

August, 2011 – May, 2012

*Graduate Teaching Assistant*

Recitation sections of Calculus 3.

**University of Tulsa**, Tulsa, Oklahoma

August, 2009 – May, 2011

*Graduate Teaching Assistant*

Quiz sections of Calculus 1 & 2.

**University of Tulsa**, Tulsa, Oklahoma

May, 2007 – May, 2009

*Plasma Physics Research Assistant*

Computationally solved nonlinear magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) equations.

## 3.3 Skills

### Software Engineering:

- DevOps: Well-versed in the *three ways* and *five ideals*. Extensive experience serving as DevOps lead on computational science teams.
- git: Extensive experience developing, using, and teaching simple to sophisticated workflows, along with managing GitLab/GitHub projects. Prefer GitLab for an all-in-one DevOps solution.
- GitLab CI/CD: Extensive experience establishing GitLab CI/CD pipelines, along with coupling them to Jenkins for more complex workflows when needed.
- Jenkins Pipelines: Extensive experience crafting complex pipelines and maintaining hundreds of jobs via Pipeline scripts. Modest experience administering Jenkins instances.
- Cloud: Experience with OpenStack (similar to AWS, GCP, Azure), Kubernetes, and Helm managing and deploying applications containerized with Docker to an internal cloud.
- Automation: Extensive experience writing custom scripting to ensure all users, developers, and CI services interact with a codebase in the same, replicable way. Basic experience with Ansible and Terraform.
- Quality: Experience with SonarQube, Fortify, BlackDuck, etc.
- Agile: Extensive experience with Scrum, Kanban, and the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe). Specialize in tailoring methodologies to the team to get the most out of them.
- Project Management: Experience with requirements elicitation, design, execution, monitoring, and stakeholder interaction. Flexible within the plan, but will work hard to protect scope and team from external interference.

### Programming:

- Python: Extensive experience writing tools to unify build processes. Substantial experience with Sphinx, pytest, and building modular ecosystems of reusable packages. Some experience with the SciPy stack. Referred to as the “Python ninja”. Current language of choice.
- Groovy: Extensive experience using advanced features to build complex Jenkins Pipeline suites. A close second in language of choice.
- C++: Extensive experience developing and maintaining large object-oriented codes. Experience creating and utilizing templated classes, including template metaprogramming. Proficient with the Standard Template Library and RogueWave containers. Some experience with Boost libraries.
- bash/tcsh: Extensive scripting experience.
- Fortran 77/95/2003: Experience developing large, parallel, object-oriented codes.
- OpenMPI: Experience parallelizing Fortran FEM codes.
- Perl: Some experience patching installation scripts.
- Julia: Basic experience.
- Java: Basic experience
- JavaScript/TypeScript: Basic experience.
- OpenMP: Some experience parallelizing Fortran FEM codes. Prefer OpenMPI.

### Mathematical Tools:

- LaTeX: Extensive experience typesetting a variety of works. Prefer to use `tikZ`, `pgfplots`, and `pgfplotstable` to automate the generation of papers from code-generated data using only LaTeX.



- *Mathematica*: Certified by Wolfram Research. Extensive experience with symbolic manipulations, visualizations, creating dynamic user interfaces to codes, etc.
- *Matlab*: Extensive experience implementing numerical methods and visualizing results. Developed “Problem Solving with Matlab” tutorial series. Some experience with computer vision packages.
- *Trilinos*: Panzer, Teuchos, Thyra, Phalanx, E/Tpetra, NOX, LOCA, Piro, Teko.
- *PETSc/LAPACK*: Experience implementing parallel FEM codes.

**Other:**

- *German*: Once fluent in conversational and some technical.
- *SketchUp*: Extensive experience utilizing for woodworking and carpentry design.
- *Blackboard/Desire2Learn/MyMathLab*: Experience managing courses; online education certified.

## 3.4 Projects

### Open-Sourcing Sandia-Developed Python Packages

*Sandia National Laboratories*, Fall, 2022 – Present

In order to build Sandia’s reputation in the broader software engineering and scientific computing communities and increase the likelihood we can attract and retain top talent, I’m leading a trail-blazing effort to develop a process for open-sourcing internally-developed Python packages. We hope to encourage the design and development of general-purpose, reusable components, and establish a workflow for active co-development of both internal and external repositories by Sandians.

### Transforming Hacky Scripts into a Modular Infrastructure

*Sandia National Laboratories*, Spring, 2022 – Present

Many view scripting as something that just needs to be done to enable the real work to take place. With such a view, there’s a strong tendency to think there’s no need to apply software engineering best practices to the development of your scripts, which, over time, leads to an ever-growing mountain of technical debt. Over the past year, I’ve been refactoring a collection of hacked-together Python scripts into a modular infrastructure, the components of which are focused on doing only one thing and doing it well, and are reusable in multiple contexts. They are fully documented with Google-style docstrings, and fully unit tested with `pytest`. The project is concluding with a series of tech talks to give the high-level overview of how the various pieces interact, and the design considerations that went into building them. The talks highlight that the infrastructure now serves as a case study for adhering to the SOLID principles of object-oriented design, and will hopefully set the stage for further infrastructure extensions in the future as their operations and maintenance is handed over to other individuals on the team.

### DevOps Book Club

*Sandia National Laboratories*, Fall, 2021 – Present

Since building shared understanding is the basis for cultural transformation, I established a book club to help my team build their understanding of the fundamental principles that underpin the DevOps paradigm shift. This is accomplished through reading and discussing books on DevOps proper, on collaboration and leadership, and on software engineering best practices. This effort has been called out in multiple retrospectives as having significantly impacted the competencies of team members and overall effectiveness of the team.

### From Fragility to Flexibility

*Sandia National Laboratories*, Spring, 2023

Everyone has experience with a piece of code that’s absolutely critical, but everyone’s afraid to touch. The original developers have moved on, if you touch it, you might break it, and it’s “working” now. One such example was the

Python script used to orchestrate a series of `helm` and `kubectl` commands in the shell to deploy containerized services to internal Kubernetes clusters. Over time, though, infrastructure feature requests continued to pile up to which the response was always, “We could do that, but that would require modifying the code we’re not supposed to touch.” I took the initiative to completely rewrite the script, breaking it up into a series of modules for reusability elsewhere. The unit test coverage level was maintained at 94%, and no existing behavior was broken. We tested the new system alongside the old one for a number of weeks to prove feature parity before merging. After the reimplementation was merged, the various feature requests were able to be addressed with only a few lines each, and the new flexible architecture will allow the module to continue to grow to meet evolving stakeholder needs in the future.

### **Automated Testing Improvement Initiative**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Summer, 2021 – Fall, 2022*

The [Geophysical Monitoring System](#) is a Kubernetes-based application suite developed in Java and TypeScript that historically has a substantial set of manual acceptance tests that take days to complete for each quarterly release. I led an initiative to establish the infrastructure and associated team policies and best practices to automate component-, integration-, and system-level tests in the GitLab CI pipelines. After the initial phase was completed, the prototype infrastructure was matured to production-ready, the pipelines were optimized, and the robustness of the applications was improved. Work to automate existing manual tests continues as we slowly but surely move toward continuous delivery. It’s worth noting that I had no prior experience with GitLab CI pipelines, but learned the new technology in a matter of weeks and quickly earned the nickname of “pipeline guru”.

### **Unifying the DevOps Infrastructure Within Trilinos**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Summer, 2020 – Spring, 2021*

Over the past few years, two distinct DevOps infrastructures have grown up within the [Trilinos](#) project. Understanding that both solutions had their pros and cons, both were less flexible than desirable, and ultimately the prospect of maintaining two separate solutions long term would be fraught with error, it was determined a year-long effort would be made to replace them with a single solution incorporating the lessons learned from the past. I conducted an initial investigation of the existing solutions over a two-month period, and then followed that with a time of gathering stakeholder requirements. I then drafted a plan to cover two general-purpose components for consistently loading environments across machines, and consistently configuring a `CMake`-based code, and then led the all-remote team, spread across four states in two time zones, in the design and execution. Modularity, flexibility, unit testing, code coverage, and documentation were all hallmarks of the way we tackled the problem. The intent was to not only provide Trilinos with what it needed, but to provide those in the greater scientific software community with general tools they can use to improve the sustainability and replicability of the codes they develop.

### **DevOps Infrastructure Consultant**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Summer, 2020*

The [Dakota](#) project provides a software suite for optimization and uncertainty quantification. Their build and test infrastructure had grown organically over more than two decades to the point of being both fragile and brittle. They sought my services to determine what they would need to do to get from where there were to where they wanted to be. I conducted a number of interviews with team members, and interfaced closely with their newly hired DevOps engineer, to determine both their needs and what they could realistically accomplish. I then developed a 15-month plan to rebuild their infrastructure from the ground up such that it would be easy to maintain and extend for years into the future. I presented the plan to a wide audience largely via an extended metaphor, so the various pieces would be easy to grasp by non-experts, and a secretary’s reaction was, “I hardly ever know what you all are talking about, but this presentation I understood!”

### **Developing JOG-CI: Connecting Jenkins, OpenStack, and GitLab CI/CD**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Spring, 2020 – Summer, 2020*

[OpenStack](#) is a collection of components that allows you to maintain your own private cloud infrastructure. The ability to rapidly stand up cloud tenants, running on corporate hardware behind the scenes, was desirable for lowering the

barrier to entry for teams to get up and running with continuous integration. A lightweight tool for standing up such tenants and connecting them to either Jenkins or GitLab (or both) was developed under my direction by our department's year-round intern, and that tool has been used by a handful of teams to stand up and tear down instances as needed, depending on changing testing needs. We both came up to speed with OpenStack and the ins and outs of private cloud administration in a matter of weeks.

### **Faster Turnaround Improves Developer Productivity**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Winter, 2019 – Summer, 2020*

A complete run of EMPIRE's pipelines used to take about 20 hours. Running only once per day, it was hard to determine where new bugs were introduced in a codebase that would see dozens of requests merged daily. As such, a merge from develop to master would happen every few weeks, if we were lucky. I led a major refactor of our pipelines, restructuring them with modularity in mind, such that they could fail and get actionable feedback to the team as soon as possible. We additionally achieved parallelizing the testing across a collection of machines, again decreasing our time to notification of success or failure. The dozens of Jenkins jobs used by each top-level pipeline are governed by a single Groovy Pipeline script, making maintainability and extensibility a breeze. The end result was a reduction down to about five hours, such that the pipeline suite now runs multiple times a day. With more frequent feedback, we're kept clean more often, and developers spend less time debugging and more time doing science.

### **One Script to Rule Them All: Unifying Build Processes Across Platforms**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Summer, 2019 – Spring, 2020*

The BuildScripts repository for the EMPIRE codebase had grown organically over time, with bash scripts for running on different platforms, with different configurations, etc. Developers also had their own scripts for setting up their environment and configuring the code. I led an effort to unify our build process across platforms and create a "one build script to rule them all," so to speak, to be used by users, developers, and automation services. Python was used for the sake of documentation ([Sphinx](#)), testing ([pytest](#)), and unified style guides. Replicability was enhanced by building in both a comprehensive logging utility and the ability to replay prior runs of the script. The tool was designed with modularity and flexibility in mind, such that it's easy to extend existing pieces or plug in new ones when future needs arise. Investing the time, money, and energy in developing such an infrastructure paid dividends in productivity, both for the scientific developers and the DevOps engineers.

### **Developing the SPiFI Library and Associated Jenkins Pipelines**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Spring, 2018 – Spring, 2019*

In order to adequately test the git workflow mentioned directly below, a flexible pipeline was needed, and the [Jenkins pipeline plugin suite](#) with the [Apache Groovy](#) language under the hood provided the power necessary. The plugin suite has a high barrier to entry, so a colleague and I worked closely together to develop the SEMS Pipeline Framework Infrastructure (SPiFI) library, I developing the pipeline itself and driving the requirements for the library, and he developing the library to ease and automate routine pipeline tasks. The library has since been rolled out to half a dozen teams or so, and is used to drive hundreds of jobs on a daily basis.

### **Stability with Respect to the Tip of Develop**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Fall, 2017 – Fall, 2018*

[Trilinos](#) is a collection of math libraries for large-scale, complex multi-physics problems on next generation high-performance computing architectures. Its development is largely driven by a handful of physics application codes that are tightly coupled with it. Because the applications drive the algorithm development, they would like to be able to use the latest commit on the develop branch, but at the same time they would like to make sure commits to Trilinos never break them and stall application development. I developed a git workflow involving a fork of Trilinos and a secondary approved version of the develop branch, which is updated automatically via nightly testing. In the event testing fails, the branch isn't updated, and the application team can continue development unhindered. They can file an issue against Trilinos that will be resolved through Trilinos' usual process. Flexibility is also afforded for the rare

instances where simultaneous changes must be made to both the application and Trilinos codebases. This approach has been used successfully by two separate application teams for the last few years.

### **Defining Policies to Turn a Team and Project Around**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Summer, 2017 – Fall, 2018*

EMPIRE is a collection of next generation electromagnetic/electrostatic/fluid dynamic codes. Prior to the summer of 2017, there was confusion as to who was on the team, what people were working on, what needed to be done, how one could get started, etc. Pushes happened directly to the master branch, and there was minimal testing, code review, documentation, etc. I played a large part in driving the adoption of the following: *GitLab issues*, description templates, and Kanban boards were used to track work and capture design discussions. *GitLab merge requests*, complete with code review and approval, were required to get changes into the develop branch. *Style guides* for both the code and documentation were developed to move toward a common look and feel. A *git workflow* was developed to ensure no direct pushes to master or develop, and master would be updated via nightly testing. *Automated testing* was established to test multiple machines and configurations to improve stability. A *monthly retrospective* was established to regularly check in on how well our policies were working for us and allow us to tweak them as needed.

### **Git Instruction**

*Sandia National Laboratories, Spring, 2017 – Fall, 2019*

I led the Center for Computing Research University (CCR-U) group in teaching courses introducing participants to version control via git, utilizing the [Software Carpentry](#) instruction style. We developed both introductory and intermediate courses, which were very popular and received excellent feedback, and helped hundreds of Sandians to level up their software engineering competency over the course of a few short years. It's worth noting that I went from having never used git to teaching courses in it in under a year, quickly earning the tongue-in-cheek moniker of "git fu master".

### **Panzer Memory Usage Refactor**

*Sandia National Laboratories, September, 2016 – July, 2017*

Local to global communication in parallel finite element simulations occurs through the use of *owned* vectors, containing all the information owned by a given process, and *ghosted* vectors, containing the information from neighboring processes. The original implementation duplicated all the data in the owned vector in the midst of the ghosting process, meaning more data was being stored in memory than was necessary. I refactored classes such that ghosted vectors contain only the ghosted information, and any time a user wants to grab an element of a vector given a local ID, the logic of whether it lives in the owned or ghosted vector is hidden from the user. Avoiding the data duplication significantly reduces the run-time memory usage.

### **Generalized Current Constraint Boundary Conditions in Charon**

*Sandia National Laboratories, October, 2016 – June, 2017*

The Charon semiconductor device physics simulation code previously had the ability to attach a constant current constraint to a terminal of a device (diode, transistor, etc.). I generalized this capability such that any number of constraints can be added to a device (at most one per terminal). A resistor contact constraint type was added, corresponding to hooking up a resistor with a voltage source on its far side. A block LDU preconditioner was generalized to work for any of these constraint scenarios. This capability helps users more readily simulate real-world configurations.

### **LOCA and Charon Integration**

*Sandia National Laboratories, July – September, 2017*

Previously if a Charon user wanted to sweep a voltage contact boundary condition on a device, they would use a rather brute-force Python script to get the job done. I integrated the Library of Continuation Algorithms (LOCA) with Charon to provide this capability natively, and with more flexibility. LOCA is able to intelligently ramp up the parameter step size, and, in the case of a solver failure, backtrack, cut the step size, and proceed with the continuation run. This also provides the capability to track bifurcations in the future, should we need to.

### Algorithm Development

*Northrop Grumman Corporation*, September, 2014 – June, 2016

Given real-time input data from multiple sources, how do we clean and manipulate the data to yield the answer we seek? Details of the algorithm and its application are classified. A colleague and I reviewed relevant literature, determined most information was no longer applicable to our new geometric configuration, and developed an elegant iterative algorithm to walk its way intelligently through the solution space to the correct answer. I also developed a Matlab tool to read in pieces of data from in the midst of the algorithm to generate a multi-page PDF detailing just how the algorithm is working its way to the solution, which aids tremendously in discovering scenarios for which the algorithm needs improvement.

### Automating Large-Scale Distributed Software Installation

*Northrop Grumman Corporation*, Summer, 2014

An installation and configuration of HP's Network Node Manager software suite across multiple virtual machines (VMs) took an operator four days using a series of manuals to guide them through the process. Having no experience with VMs or Linux sysadmin activities, I came up to speed in weeks. I then developed a series of scripts to be deployed and run on the VMs to update various packages in Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL) to the appropriate versions, patch some of HP's Perl scripts used in the installation, and install and configure the software suite. Automating the process reduced the time needed to about two hours with minimal human interaction.

### Adaptive Local-Global Multiscale Finite Element Methods

*Colorado School of Mines*, August, 2012 – May, 2014

When solving the classical uniformly elliptic boundary value problem in a medium that is either highly oscillatory or has high contrast the standard Galerkin finite element method (FEM) is insufficient and  $h$ -,  $p$ -, and  $r$ -refinement become prohibitively expensive for large problems. Multiscale FEMs consist of solving local homogeneous problems on the course mesh elements to create multiscale basis functions that already have some knowledge of the medium. Determining the appropriate boundary conditions for these local solves is an area of active research. The adaptive local-global multiscale FEM projects an initial global solve onto extended course mesh elements, makes that projection nodal on the coarse mesh elements, and then averages across the edges of the course mesh. The resulting local solves yield nodal basis functions with expanded support that satisfy the partition of unity. In theory there exist ideal basis functions that can reconstruct the exact solution exactly—iterating this method allows us to work toward those ideal basis functions. This computational effort can be done ahead of time such that the near-ideal basis functions can be used for any source terms and time-evolution scenarios. Effective parallelism was achieved through the use of OpenMPI and PETSc.

### Automated Generation of Homework Assignments and Solution Procedures

*Colorado School of Mines*, August, 2013 – May, 2014

Problems in Advanced Engineering Mathematics are highly formulaic—given a problem of a certain type, there are certain steps to follow to the solution. As such the generation of such problems, *and their full solution procedures*, is simply a matter of programming. *Mathematica* was utilized to randomly generate problem sets and solutions for the class.

### Manufacturing Solutions to Fluid Flow Problems

*Sandia National Laboratories*, Summer, 2012

Assuming solutions of a certain form and working them through systems of nonlinear coupled partial differential equations (PDEs) allows one to determine the source terms necessary for the equations to be satisfied. I developed a *Mathematica* suite for manufacturing such solutions to incompressible Navier Stokes, some of its turbulent extensions, and to MHD. Solutions and source terms were exportable to C for interfacing with a code being validated, and all details were exportable to LaTeX for paper generation.

### **Boundary Integral Equation Methods for Solutions to Laplace's Equation**

*University of Tulsa, Fall, 2010*

This general solution method consists of transferring all the computation from the domain to its boundary. Both inner and outer Dirichlet, Neumann, and Robin problems were considered. Solvability was proven, and uniqueness was shown for all but the inner Neumann problem, whose solutions differ only by a constant. Solutions were determined in terms of harmonic potentials from Green's representation formulas.

### **Boundary Element Method and Visualization Tool**

*University of Tulsa, Fall, 2010*

The numerical equivalent to the project above, when attempting to solve a PDE on a given domain, one can instead subdivide the boundary into a number of boundary elements and do all the necessary integration there. Determining the solution somewhere in the domain is then just a matter of evaluating a function at that point. I developed an interactive *Mathematica* suite for solving various PDEs. Users have the ability to specify the boundary, various PDE and boundary condition terms, where to evaluate the solution, etc.

### **Nonlinear Evolution of Unstable MHD Equilibria**

*University of Tulsa, May, 2007 – May, 2009*

I created a user interface between an eigenvalue code, an equilibrium code (SCOTS), and a nonlinear MHD evolution code (NIMROD) allowing for an exploration of parameter space to determine where modes were stable or resistive- or ideal-unstable. We then ran nonlinearly from a starting point near the stability boundary and observed how the plasma evolved.

## **3.5 Clearance**

**DOE Q:** July, 2018 – Present

**DOD TS/SCI:** May, 2014 – June, 2016

*Deactivated after leaving Northrop Grumman Corporation*

## **3.6 Certifications**

- GitKraken Foundations of Git—Certification Course
- Carpentries Instructor
- CompTIA Security+ (June 2014 – May 2017)
- *Mathematica*—Advanced Foundations

## 3.7 Continuing Education

### Kubernetes:

- [Kubernetes Hands-On—Deploy Microservices to the AWS Cloud](#)
- [Certified Kubernetes Administrator \(CKA\) with Practice Tests](#)
- [Istio Hands-On for Kubernetes \(in progress\)](#)

### Python:

- [Python for Scientists and Engineers](#)
- [Pandas Mastery Workshop](#)
- [Machine Learning Mastery Workshop](#)

### Project Management:

- [Project Management Overview](#)
- [Managing a Project from Start to Finish](#)

### Leadership:

- [The Art of Being an Effective Mentor \(internal\)](#)
- [Preparing for Management \(internal\)](#)
- [Crucial Conversations](#)
- [Five Conflict Styles and How to Use Them \(internal\)](#)
- [Social Styles](#)

### Miscellaneous:

- [The Software Engineering Body of Knowledge](#)
- [Basic Instructor Training \(internal\)](#)
- [System Administrator Policies \(internal\)](#)
- [Clean Code](#)

## 3.8 Presentations & Publications

1. Jason M. Gates. “Using GitLab Issues for Iterative, Asynchronous Software Design.” *Whitepaper*. 2023 Colleagueville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2023.
2. Jason M. Gates. “The Complexities of Replicability.” *Presentation*. The Department of Applied Mathematics @ CU Boulder. April 2023.
3. Reed Milewicz, Jonathan Bisila, Miranda Mundt, Sylvain Bernard, Michael Buche, Jason M. Gates, Samuel Andrew Grayson, Evan Harvey, Alexander Jaeger, Kirk Timothy Landin, Mitchell Negus, and Bethany L. Nicholson. “DevOps Pragmatic Practices and Potential Pitfalls in Scientific Software Development.” *Paper*. International Congress on Information and Communication Technology. February 2023.
4. Jason M. Gates, David Collins, and Josh Braun. “ShellLogger: Keeping Track of Python’s Interactions with the Shell.” *Presentation*. ASC-S3C 22. May 2022.
5. Jason M. Gates and William McLendon. “Enhancing Python’s ConfigParser.” *Lightning talk*. US-RSE Community Call. April 2022.

6. David Collins, Josh Braun, and Jason M. Gates. “Logger: A Tool for Keeping Track of Python’s Interactions with the Shell.” *Presentation*. US-RSE 2021. May 2021.
7. Jason M. Gates, William Mclendon, Josh Braun, and Evan Harvey. “LoadEnv: Consistently Loading Supported Environments Across Machines.” *Presentation*. US-RSE 2021. May 2021.
8. Jason M. Gates, David Collins, and Josh Braun. “CI Tools as Lego Blocks: Build Your Ideal Custom Solution.” *Presentation*. SIAM CSE 2021. March 2021.
9. Jason M. Gates, Josh Braun, and David Collins. “One Script to Rule Them All: Unifying Build Processes Across Platforms.” *Whitepaper*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
10. Jason M. Gates, Joe Frye, Brent Perschbacher, and Dena Vigil. “Git Productive!” *Whitepaper*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
11. Jason M. Gates. “Faster Turnaround Improves Developer Productivity.” *Poster*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
12. Vivek Sarkar, Jason Gates, Charles Ferenbaugh, Vadim Dyadechko, Anshu Dubey, Hartwig Anzt, and Pat Quillen. “Technical Approaches to Improve Developer Productivity for Scientific Software.” *Panel discussion*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
13. Jim Willenbring, Ross Bartlett, and Jason Gates. “Git Solutions.” *Interview*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
14. Jason M. Gates. “Training Best Practices.” *Tea time discussion*. 2020 Collegeville Workshop on Scientific Software. July 2020.
15. Jason M. Gates. “Introduction to GitDist.” *Presentation*. Trilinos User-Developer Group Meeting 2019. October 2019.
16. Jason M. Gates. “Intro to SPiFI.” *Presentation*. Trilinos User-Developer Group Meeting 2019. October 2019.
17. Jason M. Gates. “Stability w.r.t. the Tip of develop: An Experience Report from Two Years In.” *Presentation*. Trilinos User-Developer Group Meeting 2019. October 2019.
18. Patrick McCann, Rachael Ainsworth, Jason M. Gates, Jakob S. Jørgensen, Diego Alonso-Álvarez, and Cerys Lewis. “How do you motivate researchers to adopt better software practices?” *Speed blog*. Collaborations Workshop 2019. July 2019.
19. Jason M. Gates. “Training in Version Control and Project Management.” *Lightning talk*. Collaborations Workshop 2019. March 2019.
20. Jason M. Gates. “Defining Policies to Turn a Team and Project Around.” *Poster*. Third Conference of Research Software Engineers. September 2018.
21. Jason M. Gates. “Stability w.r.t. the Tip of Develop.” *Presentation*. Trilinos User-Developer Group Meeting 2017. October 2017.
22. Jason Matthew Gates, Roger P. Pawlowski, and Eric Christopher Cyr. “Panzer: A Finite Element Assembly Engine within the Trilinos Framework.” *Presentation*. SIAM CSE 2017. March 2017.
23. D P Brennan, P K Browning, J Gates, and R A M Van der Linden. “Helicity-injected current drive and open flux instabilities in spherical tokamaks.” *Plasma Physics and Controlled Fusion* 51.4 (2009):045004.



### 3.9 Favorite Work-Related Books

- [The Phoenix Project](#) (A Novel About IT, DevOps, and Helping Your Business Win), by Gene Kim.
- [The DevOps Handbook: How to Create World-Class Agility, Reliability, and Security in Technology Organizations](#), by Gene Kim, Jez Humble, Patrick DeBois, & John Willis.
- [The Unicorn Project](#), by Gene Kim.
- [Clean Code](#) (A Handbook of Agile Software Craftsmanship), and [Clean Architecture](#) (A Craftsman's Guide to Software Structure and Design), by Robert C. Martin.
- [Dare to Lead: Brave Work, Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts](#), by Brené Brown.
- [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable](#), by Patrick Lencioni.
- [1501 Ways to Reward Employees](#), by Bob Nelson.

### 3.10 Honors & Awards

- Team Employee Recognition Award for EMPIRE
- Team Employee Recognition Award Nomination for Advanced Simulation and Computing DevOps Visionaries
- Spot Award for Git Training
- Department of Applied Mathematics and Statistics Graduate Student Teaching Award
- Graduate Teaching Fellowship & Assistantships
- Outstanding Senior in German
- Academic Excellence Award
- Member of , , ,
- University of Tulsa Presidential Scholarship
- Byrd Scholarship
- Oklahoma Academic All-State Scholarship
- ACT Perfect Score