

TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD,  
FAITH, AND LIFE

CHARLES  
COLSON



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*Tough Questions about God, Faith, and Life*

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The bulk of the material in this book has been compiled from Chuck Colson's *BreakPoint* radio programs; some content has been taken from speeches and some from previously published books. This material has been compiled and edited into convenient answers for parents to provide their kids to help them live effectively in today's culture.

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## A WORD FROM A PARENT OF A TEENAGER

Like many parents, I have a difficult time talking to my teenager, especially about what I most value: my Christian faith. My hesitation is based on assorted grounds, which constantly shift and, like the earth's tectonic plates, clash in earthquake rumblings that shake me to the core.

I like to think my reluctance stems from my teenage son's defensive posturing. The looming expectations of adulthood—that he will be able to earn a living, be the head of a family, find his own distinctive place—daunt him. He reacts by mocking the adult world or by keeping a steel-drum silence that's only one degree stronger, I suspect, than the explosive fear within.

Then there's the matter of when such a discussion might take place. As any parent of a teenager knows, I cannot talk to him any old time I please—not if I want him to respond with something more than suspicion.

Since my son was a toddler, I've learned that our best talks result from completely mysterious changes in the emotional climate. Once, when my son was about four years old, I planned a big outing to the children's zoo in New York's Central Park. I thought of all the fun we would have watching the seals in their habitat as they flopped off high-standing rocks and zoomed, to our pleasure, through the depths of their transparent aquatic tank. I thought of the petting-zoo section, of placing a baby chick in my son's hand and seeing his smile register delight at its fuzzy coat and warm stirring.

The day my son and I went, he had a cold and found all the walking in the chill New York winter more a test of endurance than anything else. We weren't having much fun, and the distance between the day's reality and our hopes made us both glum.

We stopped to have a cup of hot chocolate. When I received

change for the snacks, my son asked for a dime. After we sat down, I showed him how to flip his dime, and we started calling heads or tails. This so delighted him that he began to talk to me about his preschool, his friends, and his dawning awareness that kids could sometimes be mean—all things I had asked him about a million times without ever receiving more than a yes, no, or I guess in response.

Nothing much has changed. My best talks with my son still come at odd times, in odd places, and by virtue of spiritual prompts that are impossible to manufacture. For reasons I'm never quite sure of, vistas of inquiry suddenly appear like splayed-out shafts of sunlight.

Talking to any child—much less a teenager—is no easy thing. Sometimes, though, I have taken the risk. I've walked out into those expected vistas of inquiry and invited him to join me.

While running the risk has been worthwhile, I cannot always report happy endings. Indeed, what I've discovered has often been as troubling as I imagined. His thinking, while it hasn't arrived at many firm conclusions, comes at problems or questions from a wholly different direction from my own. I'm finding out how secularized his viewpoint can be.

My son's mind has not been shanghaied by cultists, communists, or other conspiratorial pirates. No one's been out to convert him away from my Christian faith directly.

What rivals my Christian faith as an influence on my son is so pervasive that it's almost as invisible as the air. It's nothing less than our culture's dominant way of thinking, and as such, its expressions are everywhere and endless.

Paradoxically, the ever-present character of this mode of thinking makes it hard to identify sometimes. But here are a few examples:

When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia talked about believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, editorialists across the nation laughed at his supernatural beliefs, and some commentators thought such commitments made him unfit to rule on church-and-state questions.

When Congressman Dick Armey said he believed homosexuality

was a disordered condition, former president Clinton's spokesperson called such beliefs "primitive" even though this belief has always been part of historic Christianity.

Almost every time my son and I watch a movie, we see that if two characters fall in love, they go to bed together. If the movie characters were to worry about whether their sexual relations were sanctioned by marriage, that would be truly peculiar—at this point, almost unprecedented.

All of these developments reflect the dominance of secularism—or naturalistic materialism, to call this way of thinking by its proper philosophical name. Most people in Western society now believe that the world came about by chance. The human race, as the product of chance, must make its own choices and determine its own destiny guided only by whatever collective wisdom it chooses to adopt. The same, the secularists say, applies to individuals. Each person decides what's right for himself or herself. As long as one person's choices don't infringe on someone else's, everyone's choices are equally valid. There is no right and wrong that applies to everybody, not apart from the law, and the law itself is only an expression of majority will. To most people, there is no such thing as a universally valid truth. There is only my truth and your truth and the truth that governments adopt in order to maintain power and, to a lesser degree, the security of the government's citizens.

The conflict between my own Christian faith and this secular faith enters into every important conversation my son and I have. This may sound like an exaggeration, but it's true. Every significant question leads back to where we start from—our answers to the three perennial questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? The way the Christian faith answers those questions differs radically from the answers offered by the secular faith.

For example, my son once asked me what I thought about the fact that the town's mayor was a lesbian and a gay-rights activist. That question led to many more and described the boundaries between

my worldview and the one my son encounters almost every waking moment of every day.

I started the conversation by saying that while I thought the mayor had real administrative abilities, I believed her understanding of sexuality to be mistaken and that inevitably her private choices about sexual activity would form her character in a way that would have public consequences.

But she couldn't help being a lesbian, he said. She had a right to lead her private life the way she wanted to.

We quickly agreed that the issue came down to compassion. Was it more compassionate to accept this woman's homosexuality, or was it more compassionate to warn her against the dangers of her homosexuality? Were there dangers? If so, what were they?

I saw that to explain my point of view to my son, I had to begin with very basic questions. I tried to show him that we would answer the question differently depending on how we thought the world came into being. Did God create the world, or did it come about by chance? If God created the world, then God created people and knew what was best for them.

If the world came about by chance, then heterosexuality and homosexuality have only the meanings we give them. We might see them as equally good or bad depending on how we decide to look at them.

I told my son once again that I believe God created us, knew what was best for us, and in the Bible revealed the best way for us to live.

That opened up questions about the reliability of the Scriptures, what exactly they say about God's character, how Jesus fits in, and so forth. We started talking about the cause of a gay-rights activist and ended up talking about . . . well, everything.

I'm sure every parent can remember a similar incident, in which a TV show, a pop song, a news item, or a development at school opened up a question that quickly led to many others.

Chuck Colson has spent decades answering just such questions; he

has a particular gift for grounding his answers in the bedrock of Christian faith. He knows how to trace the lines of argument back to their foundations. He is also a tremendous storyteller, using incidents from today's world to address issues of ultimate concern.

This book presents Chuck Colson's thinking in a question-and-answer format to help parents—as well as educators and youth workers—answer their teenagers' questions and put their Christian faith at the heart of their parenting and teaching. The questions gathered here have been phrased as teenagers might ask them. They have also been grouped in subject areas (God, the Bible, science and evolution, etc.), with one answer building to some degree on the one before. The one hundred questions and answers here, although hardly exhaustive of everything a teenager might ask a parent or teacher or youth worker, cover the truly important differences between a Christian way of looking at life and the secular outlook.

The book can be (and will be, I expect) used in a variety of ways. You might begin preparing for the talks you would really like to have with your teenagers by reading through all of the sections. I suggest tackling one section at a sitting, focusing on the checklist of key points at the end of each section. You will notice that the big-picture questions are addressed first because the answers to those questions form the foundations to the answers about the more urgent questions your teenager may have about contemporary issues.

You might also use the book as a supplement to daily devotions, reading one question and answer a day and praying about how the answer might address problems you are having with your teen. Even the most abstract discussions have some application in this way. For example, God's role in creation means that we can trust God to know what's best for us, and archaeological evidence for the reliability of Scripture reinforces the Bible's ability to speak to issues such as sexual morality and other topical concerns.

You can also turn to the book as a reference when a particular question comes up. The table of contents lists all of the questions answered

so that you can find them at a glance. I imagine your copy will be well thumbed all through your child's teenage years.

Also, while this book is intended chiefly for parents, teenagers can read it for themselves. When a question comes up, you and your teenager might read the appropriate question and answer together as a means of continuing your own discussion. You may find yourselves tracing through much of the helpful, informative, and, at times, humorous material gathered here.

I know how hard it is to talk with my own teenager, and I'm grateful for the help I've received through reading Chuck Colson's reflections on life's truly important questions. The apostle Paul charges us to be ready to give an account of our faith to anyone who asks—an admonition a parent can't help but take to heart.

We know the responsibility we have, but we need resources to address that daunting task. This book will be an invaluable tool.

If you find that you would like to explore more fully the worldview issues discussed in this book, I recommend that you read Colson's book *How Now Shall We Live?* In this profound book he and Nancy Pearcey explore how the Christian worldview addresses the many opposing worldviews that our teenagers—and we—confront every day, and how we can live out our Christianity and transform our culture. If your teenager wishes to explore some of these issues, he or she may want to read *The Way I See It*, the student edition of *How Now Shall We Live?*

Harold Fickett

## A WORD FROM CHUCK COLSON

Harold Fickett, who collaborated with me on this book, has shared with you why this book is important to him as the father of a teenager. He is not alone. Many people have been asking for this kind of book.

It started a few years ago when several people from different walks of life challenged me to do something—and whenever that happens, I stop and listen because I suspect God may be trying to get my attention.

The first person was the woman in charge of education in my own church. “What can I tell my daughter when she brings all these tough questions home from school?” she asked. “Can you please give me the information I need so I can protect her from the assaults on her faith she encounters every day in school?”

Another challenge came from a woman who approached me when I was traveling on a plane. “Mr. Colson,” she said, “you give us wonderful apologetics material on your radio program, *BreakPoint*. Could you put it all together by category and give us something we could use to teach our kids—to keep them from being taken in by the false ideas they’re getting from the culture?”

Finally, on a trip to Scotland some Christian friends who run an excellent publishing company there challenged me to write an apologetics book that would help parents teach their kids the basic truths of a biblical worldview.

That was it. It seemed clear that I was being called to take my articles and the *BreakPoint* scripts and shape the material into a form that parents can use to help train their children to see all of life from a biblical worldview. For that matter the material is useful to all of us—grandparents, youth pastors, and counselors alike—who have to answer the questions young people are asking.

This information is something young people are eager to have.

Teenagers growing up in Christian families today are acutely aware that their faith is under attack as never before—even in officially sanctioned arenas like the public schools. Consider the controversy over the Kansas education standards a few years ago. The state board of education merely stood up against the aggressive nationalizing of science standards, which showcased naturalistic evolution in a more dogmatic way than ever. The board decided to give local schools a choice about whether or not they would teach the broad, speculative aspects of evolution. But dozens of hysterical editorials decried the vote as religious prejudice and accused the board of pandering to the Religious Right and banning science from the classroom.

But what happens when schools become evangelists for naturalism, the idea that we came from a blind, random process? One of my colleagues at Prison Fellowship found out. One day her six-year-old son came home from his first-grade class and asked, “Mom, who’s lying—you or my teacher?” His mother had taught him that a loving God created him for a purpose. But his teacher said just the opposite—that he was the product of an impersonal, uncaring evolutionary process. This young boy had wisely concluded that both philosophies could not be true, and he was struggling to determine which one he should accept—in first grade!

It goes without saying that the Christian worldview is under even more relentless attack in the popular culture—on television and in movie theaters. Television programs like *Sex in the City* teach young people that they are little more than bundles of raging hormones. The film *Pleasantville* carried a blatant message that unrestrained sexual indulgence leads to increased health, creativity, intelligence, and inner peace. (There was not a word about the real history of the sexual revolution, which has brought us AIDS, skyrocketing divorce rates, unwanted pregnancies, and all the other social ills that have followed.)

Parents can’t even let their guard down on vacation. If you take your kids to Disney’s Epcot Center in Florida or to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., they will see colorful and engaging



displays, all teaching evolution as fact. Not a hint about contrary evidence or about the scientific disputes that are today undermining standard Darwinian theory.

Walk down the street to the art museum, and the attack on Christianity is even more outrageous. In the highbrow culture of the arts, it is fashionable to thumb one's nose at traditional religion and morality. From ancient times until our own century, the art world accepted the Christian view that art is a way of representing transcendent ideals such as truth, goodness, and beauty. But not anymore. An infamous exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York featured a portrait of the Virgin Mary smeared with elephant feces and surrounded by photographs of human sexual organs. Art has been reduced to a political tool aimed at shocking the sensibilities of the middle class.

If we are going to train up children who have the resources to enter the cultural warfare, we parents must learn to apply the Christian worldview to every aspect of our lives. We can't give our children what we don't have ourselves.

This takes wisdom and discernment, as I recently discovered myself. One day my wife, Patty, came home from a Bible study with a story from one of the mothers there. The woman's thirteen-year-old son had received a low grade for giving a wrong answer on his weekly quiz in earth-science class. In reply to the question "Where did Earth come from?" Tim had written, "God created it." His test came back with a big red check and twenty points marked off his grade. The "correct" answer, according to the teacher, was that Earth is the product of the big bang.

The women in Patty's Bible study urged Tim's mother to march into the classroom and show the teacher what the Bible says. "It's right there in Genesis 1," they said. "God created the heavens and the earth."

But as soon as Patty told me the story, I reached for the phone to call Tim's mother. "Don't go to the teacher and read Genesis," I cautioned.

She was taken aback. "But the Bible says—"

"As believers, we know that Scripture is inspired and authoritative,"

I explained, “but Tim’s teacher will dismiss it out of hand. She’ll say, ‘That’s religion. I teach science.’ What you need to do is bring in the scientific evidence showing that the big bang idea actually supports Christianity.”

In science class we ought to raise questions such as, What came before the big bang? What caused it? If the big bang was the origin of the universe itself, then its cause must be something *outside* the universe. The truth is that the big bang theory gives dramatic support to the biblical teaching that the universe had a beginning—that space, matter, and time itself are finite. Far from challenging the Christian faith, as Tim’s teacher seemed to think, the theory actually gives startling evidence *for* the faith.

In such situations we need to avoid giving the mistaken idea that Christianity is opposed to science. If we are too quick to quote the Bible, we will never break out of the common negative stereotype of Christians—especially the caricature of believers as mindless dogmatists from the play *Inherit the Wind*. We should not oppose science with religion; we should oppose bad science with better science.

It might help to remember that we are not the only generation to worry that the surrounding culture is corrupting our children. It may surprise you to learn that America was first settled by people who were concerned about their kids. Before the English-born Pilgrims ever came to the New World, they had *already* achieved religious freedom—by immigrating to Holland. But they pulled up stakes once more, in large part because they were disturbed about the effect Dutch culture was having on their children. As Pilgrim father William Bradford records in his diary, their teenagers were influenced by the “great licentiousness of youth in that countrie” and were drawn away by evil examples. Some were leaving their families and living dissolute lives, “to the great grief of their parents and dishonor of God.” Under the circumstances, immigrating to America—a country free from Europe’s corrupting influences—seemed like the best solution.

Most of us don’t have the luxury of packing up our kids and finding

an untouched wilderness to live in. That's why I've put together this book—to help you look at today's toughest questions from a consistently Christian perspective.

Use it as after-dinner reading with your children around the table. Take a few questions and answers and work through them, helping your kids understand the issues. Or read a question at breakfast and discuss the answer as you drive your kids to school. Or consult the list of questions in the table of contents when your teenager poses an unexpected tough question.

The Old Testament commands us not only to impress God's words on our hearts and souls; we're also told, "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11:19). In modern lingo, that might include when you are taking them to soccer practice, watching a video, or sharing a pizza together.

It is my prayer that this book will give believing parents the tools they need to bring up a new generation of young people with biblically trained minds, capable of creating a genuinely Christian culture.

Chuck Colson  
Washington, D.C.

1

DOES GOD EXIST,  
AND CAN WE KNOW HIM?

*God and Contemporary Thinking*

1

**Does life really have any meaning? Sometimes everything seems so pointless.**

This question can be so disturbing, particularly when our own kids ask it, that we respond by wishing it away. “You don’t mean that,” we say, effectively stopping an important conversation before it starts. We sense it will take us rapidly into areas where we are in over our heads.

But when our teenagers ask this question sincerely, they deserve our full attention. Asking the question may be the beginning of a true religious quest. If our teenagers have been brought up in the church—even if they have accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Savior—this question may still be part of their growth in spiritual understanding.

No one—man or woman, boy or girl—can live for long without a sense of purpose, without an understanding of life’s ultimate meaning. Let me tell you a story about the lengths (or heights) to which people will go in order to invent a meaning for themselves when they sense life has none.

Larry Walters was a thirty-three-year-old truck driver who lived in a small development of tract homes in Los Angeles just beyond the

L.A. airport. Every Saturday afternoon he would sit in a lawn chair in his small, chain-link-fenced backyard, sunning himself and drinking a six-pack.

The boredom—or purposelessness—of the situation drove Larry to try something novel. He came up with the idea (I suspect after a second six-pack) of attaching some balloons to his lawn chair and floating up about one hundred feet in the air, drifting over his neighbors' backyards and waving at them. He went out and bought forty-five hot-air weather balloons, had them inflated with helium, and brought them back to his house.

Larry's neighbors came over to watch and helped him hold down the chair as he attached the forty-five balloons. He armed himself with a BB gun so that if he went too high, he could shoot out a few balloons and keep from rising more than one hundred feet above the ground. He also equipped himself with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and another six-pack.

Then he was ready. He shouted to his neighbors, "Let go!"

They did, but he didn't rise one hundred feet; he went up eleven thousand feet! He never shot out even one of the balloons because he was too busy clutching the chair! He was first spotted by a Continental Airlines captain who reported that someone in a lawn chair had just gone by his DC10. (The captain was asked to report immediately to the tower when he landed.) For four hours (this is a true story!) Los Angeles International Airport diverted flights coming in because Larry Walters was hanging on to his lawn chair at eleven thousand feet.

The authorities sent up helicopters and all sorts of rescue aircraft and eventually guided him back to the ground. When Larry landed at dusk (I remember seeing all this on television), it was an extraordinary scene. There were sirens, police cars with their bubble lights spinning, and hordes of camera crews converging on this man as he landed in his lawn chair.

They shoved a microphone in his face and asked, "Were you scared?" His eyes were as big as saucers. "Yep."

“Are you going to do it again?”

“Nope.”

“Why did you do it in the first place?”

Larry Walters replied, “You can’t just sit there.”

Something within us tells us there has to be more to life than mindless relaxation. Something within us drives us to find life’s meaning—or to go to extraordinary lengths to create our own.

You can’t just sit there.

Human beings cannot live without a sense of purpose. Scripture teaches that we were made to know God and to return God’s love—that’s the sum and substance of every person’s reason for living. Made in God’s image (see Genesis 1:26-27), we sense this truth about ourselves even when we cannot explain it clearly. Our built-in sense of purpose is so strong that when people turn away from God, they will turn to something else in order to make sense out of their lives, to define some purpose for their existence (see Romans 1:18-22).

The earliest chapters of Genesis set forth this purpose and extend its meaning into our work and daily activities. We are to cultivate the earth, to name the animals (as we do even today in discovering new species), to exercise dominion, becoming cocreators (or partners) with God in caring for the earth’s resources. Our work actually furthers God’s great creative purpose. When we do our work well, it reflects God’s glory and gives him praise. God’s purpose can sustain us in triumph or tragedy, in despair and disappointment, and in moments of great joy. Our life and work indeed have purpose: to bring glory to God.

So when your teenager asks, “Does life really have any meaning?” answer, “Yes! To know God and return his love!” (or, in the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, to “glorify God and enjoy him forever”). And then go on to discuss how this gives purpose to the young person’s life in the present.

For example: Has he or she just broken up with a girlfriend or boyfriend? (Such an event often provokes this question.) Talk

together about how relationships aid or hinder our relationship with God. What purpose do they have in the larger scheme of things? Relationships—like everything else—can assume their appropriate meanings once we understand our ultimate reason for living. If we don't understand humankind's ultimate purpose, the meaning of our lesser purposes will always become distorted and assume either too much or too little significance.

## 2

### **But how can I know and love a God I'm not sure exists? Is there really a God?**

This is a huge question, and we can approach it in several ways. First, the Scriptures teach that God has revealed himself so clearly that only fools deny his existence (see Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:20). Then the Bible says that we can discover God's reality through (1) the testimony of creation and (2) the witness of conscience—for we are made in the image of God.

In the book of Romans the apostle Paul writes, “From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they [people who are in rebellion against God] have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God” (1:20, NLT).

The entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, echoes Paul's argument, which in philosophical terms is known as the argument from design. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” the psalmist writes (Psalm 19:1). And Christ asks us to consider how God cares for the sparrows and the lilies of the field. What we see testifies to what we cannot see.

The apostle Paul also writes in this same passage: “The truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts [again, referring to people who have turned away from God]. . . . Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of

what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused” (Romans 1:19-21, NLT).

Paul alludes here to a foundational scriptural notion that goes back to Genesis. The human person is made in the image of God. In other words, when God created us, he made us to be mirror images of himself; we are creatures who resemble our Creator in distinctive ways. We have free choice; we are creatures of reason; we are creative; we are made for meaningful work; we are meant to exist in relationship—in all these ways and others we are made in God’s image. For this reason we sense, without being taught, that there must be a God.

Don Richardson, a Canadian missionary, spent several years studying the beliefs of different cultures. He discovered that all of the ancient tribes of history believed in the existence of a supreme being. This belief assumed various forms, but belief in some type of god was universal. He also discovered many stories of people journeying from isolated locations to hear a missionary preach. When they heard the gospel of Christ for the first time, they would say, “That is the One [meaning God] I have been wanting to know about.”

One of the best stories showing that the truth of God is evident within us is told in my book *The Body*. It is the story of my friend Irina Ratushinskaya. Irina, a Soviet dissident imprisoned for five years in the Gulag, mentally wrote and memorized three hundred poems, which were published to worldwide acclaim upon her release. Her autobiographical *Grey Is the Color of Hope* details her life and imprisonment.

Irina’s parents and schoolteachers were atheists. When Irina was nine years old, after listening to atheistic teaching from her teachers and her family, she figured, *My parents told me there aren’t any ghosts. They told me there aren’t any goblins. They only told me those things once, though. They tell me there isn’t a God every week. There must be a God.* In other words, if there weren’t something to it, they wouldn’t be fighting so hard against it.

She started to read the great Russian authors Pushkin and Tolstoy



and Dostoyevsky, whose writings contain much of the gospel. Irina became a believer because of this great literature.

Years later when she was in prison, the authorities tried to freeze her to death. She was huddled up against a wall, shuddering with cold, when she had an incredible sense that people around the world were praying for her. It was true. A group praying for Christians in prison had an extensive prayer chain for Irina—I was part of it—and somehow she knew it.

Whether in the worst of circumstances or even in cultures that have not been evangelized, people know there is a God. My own memories teach me this. Long before my conversion, when I attended church only occasionally and it didn't mean anything to me, I went sailing one day with my six-year-old son. I can remember saying, "Thank you, God, for giving me this son." I didn't know who God was, but something within me declared I should be grateful to him for my child.

Just before Bertrand Russell—an avowed atheist and author of *Why I Am Not a Christian*—died, he sent a letter to a friend. He wrote in his autobiography, "Something in one seems obstinately to belong to God, and to refuse to enter into any earthly communion—at least that is how I should express it if I thought there was a god. It is odd, isn't it? I care passionately for this world and many things and people in it, and yet . . . what is it all? There *must* be something more important, one feels, though I don't believe there is."

God is there. We know it even if we are in rebellion.

The inherent truth that God's existence is evident to everyone reveals itself especially through conscience—one of the most profound ways in which the image of God in us testifies to our Creator. The apostle Paul refers to this as the works of God's law written on our hearts, which justify or condemn our particular behaviors (see Romans 2:14-15).

A number of years ago a teacher asked fifteen students in a class, "If a one-thousand-dollar bill is lying on the ground and someone comes along and picks it up and turns it in, did that person do the right thing?" The students answered yes. The teacher questioned

further. “Let’s say you are hungry and have hungry children and you find that one thousand dollars and yet you turn it in. Did you do the right thing?” Still the students answered yes. “What if you know that it was dropped by a drug dealer who had gotten it in an illegal drug transaction—Is it still the right thing?” It still is.

How do we know this?

C. S. Lewis, an Oxford scholar, was one of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century. An atheist who set out to prove that there was no God, Lewis instead became a deeply professing Christian. In his book *Mere Christianity* he says that a sense of right and wrong, a sense of “oughtness,” is universal. Where does this sense come from? Lewis argues that it doesn’t come from biology or genetics or psychology. It comes from God—the image of God in which we are made.

Lewis uses the term *Tao*, a word taken from Eastern religion, to sum up this inherent and universal human sense of right and wrong. He shows that the universal phenomenon of conscience proves there must be a Law-giver, a God who gives us this unaccountable understanding.

So when your kids raise the question of whether or not God exists, help them to see that the evidence of history and the conclusions of great minds concur with what creation and conscience declare: Yes, God exists, without a doubt.

### 3

#### **But what if people created God out of their own need to feel cared for?**

Sometimes our kids say to us, “Don’t talk to me about the Bible. Of course the Bible says there’s a God. But what if he’s just a creation based on people’s own needs?” If your kids have picked up on this objection to God’s existence, they have been influenced by a strong intellectual current that’s been around for the last two hundred years.

The influential German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach believed that God was made in the image of man, that God was a creation of the human mind. So did Sigmund Freud, who wrote, “A theological dogma

might be refuted [to a person] a thousand times, provided, however, he had need of it, he again and again accepts it as true.”

Is religion then just a psychological prop? Is it merely a crutch for the weak?

Consider the nature and character of the God revealed in the Bible. If we were making up our own god, does it make sense that we would create one with such harsh demands for justice, righteousness, service, and self-sacrifice as we find in the biblical texts? Would the members of the pious New Testament religious establishment have created a God who condemned them for their own hypocrisy? Would even a zealous disciple have invented a Messiah who called his followers to sell all, give their possessions to the poor, and follow him to their death? The skeptic who believes that the Bible’s human authors manufactured their God out of psychological need has not read the Scriptures carefully. That skeptic may have penetrated to the heart of New Age religion, but he or she has not understood the teaching of the Bible.

If we were going to invent a god to prop up our spirits, we wouldn’t create one who asked Mother Teresa to spend her life picking dying people out of Calcutta gutters just so they might die with dignity, knowing they were loved.

We would invent the god of superstition—the god who forecasts our future and can be persuaded (or bribed) through prayer or chanting or séances to do our own bidding, a god who never condemns but only condones our most selfish inclinations and desires. We’d invent the god of the New Age.

But the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a God who demands everything from us—most of all that we confront, not flee from, reality.

## **4** Why does the universe exist?

Ultimately this question also deals with God’s existence. The popular theologian and apologist Francis Schaeffer used to say it’s the first

question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is there anything at all?

Through the centuries people have attempted to answer this question. Astonishingly, the deepest thinkers in all of human history have been able to come up with only four possible answers. As difficult as this question may be, there are only a limited number of possible replies:

*First, the universe is an illusion.* That is, we are not here. What we see out there is simply a giant picture that somebody has painted on a screen. It isn't there. It's only an idea in one's mind, just as you or I may be only an idea in someone else's mind.

*Second, the universe is self-created.* That is, the universe generated itself. First there was nothing, and then nothing became everything.

*Third, the universe is preexisting, eternal.* This is the dominant view today in all quarters. Carl Sagan, in his video series and book *Cosmos*, became famous teaching that the cosmos "is all there is or ever will be." That's it! The cosmos. (Incidentally, this is why so many people are turning to earth worship. If the universe has always been there, then it is entitled to some status as our god on the basis of its eternity.)

*Fourth, a preexisting and eternal force outside the universe or the cosmos—namely God—brought the cosmos into being.*

The first answer, that the universe is an illusion, may be an interesting philosophical conjecture, but no one but philosophers—who allow themselves to suspend their own sense of living in space and time for the sake of argument—has ever considered it seriously. As a blueprint for meaningful existence, the notion of creation as illusion is eminently unworkable.

In the Enlightenment era, two centuries ago in France, a group of thinkers called the Encyclopedists—Diderot and D'Alembert being principal among them—came up with the second answer, the notion that the universe simply created itself. There are two problems with this idea.

The law of causality argues that something that exists presupposes a force that brought it into existence. If we stumble upon a house in the

middle of a field, we are sure that at some point in time one or more people built it.

Another problem with this idea, an even more important objection, stems from the “law of noncontradiction.” This law states that an orange cannot be both an orange and a steel girder at the same time. It also cannot be itself and its own cause—both a house, for example, and the builder of the house. For the Encyclopedists to be right, the universe would have to be not only itself but also the force that brought it into being—two different things—and at the same time. So most people eventually discarded this theory.

Some still argue that in the midst of nothingness—before the universe came into existence—chance created the something that became everything. So chance, a property that still belongs to the universe, according to these thinkers, brought about what it then became a part of. But how? This theory demands that we credit a purely mathematical concept with godlike capacities. It solves nothing (and requires more faith than the biblical view!).

Most people today have disposed of this notion and believe the third answer—that the cosmos, everything that you can see, is all that there is or ever will be: The cosmos is eternal. However, this belief creates another major problem. I call it an intellectual cop-out. Because many people are unwilling to acknowledge that there had to be some first cause, they insist that what we see is all we can know. But the character of the universe itself argues against this.

To say that the universe is eternal and preexisting might be possible if within the universe we could find anything that was eternal. There is nothing in the universe (except perhaps in the area of quantum physics in which we are still investigating the motion of molecules) that is not contingent, that is not dependent on something else.

During Carl Sagan’s lifetime he used to answer this objection by saying that the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Yes, of course, the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts, but it can’t be of a different character. This is a fundamental

intellectual flaw in Sagan’s argument—the dominant argument of unbelievers today. There is nothing in the universe that is preexisting and eternal. The universe declares its dependence on something or someone else.

The most reasonable answer turns out to be the fourth one: The universe exists because a preexistent, eternal being—God—created it. People didn’t make up God; God created the world and us, too.

Do these arguments then prove God’s existence? Not in the way mathematical formulas can prove  $2 + 2 = 4$ . But they do show that God’s existence is the most reasonable assumption—especially when compared with the alternative.

The reasonableness of God’s existence can’t be equated with knowing God. But the best arguments on this subject may motivate us to spend our life seeking to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Your kids may be encouraged in their seeking to know that belief in God is neither irrational nor out-of-date. And this can help to keep them active in the quest to know him.

## **5** So who created God?

Have you heard this comeback from a teenager? It’s worth comment because it introduces another argument that addresses God’s existence and what makes him who he is.

An eleventh-century clergyman named Anselm of Canterbury said, “God is that [being], the greater than which cannot be conceived.” This is called the ontological argument for the existence of God—that is, an argument about the kinds of things that exist. If we cannot conceive of anyone or anything greater than God, then nothing and no one could have created him because that creator would have to be something even greater. The idea of God is the logical end of our speculations.

The early seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes, who was an influential figure at the beginning of the Age of Reason, expanded on this argument by saying that the very idea of God could come only from God

because we couldn't conceive of a God if God didn't give us the ability to do so.

Perhaps the best way to understand this argument is to look at its flip side. Jonathan Edwards, the first president of Princeton and one of the greatest intellects ever produced in the Western world, preferred the flip side of the argument; he said one cannot conceive of nothingness. "Nothingness is what sleeping rocks dream about," Edwards wrote. In other words, the inescapable fact of existence forces us to consider where everything came from, and this, as we have seen, leads us by turns to God.

If you want my formulation, it is simply this: We humans cannot conceive of nonexistence. The highest thing we can conceive of is God. We may not know God yet, but we know that he is there. Because we exist, we realize (because the law of causality is such a universal law) that we can't exist unless something or someone has brought us into existence.

## 6

### Why doesn't God show himself more clearly?

During a question-and-answer period after I had given a speech at a university, a philosophy professor stood up and said, "If your God exists, I, as an atheist, would be convinced if you could ask him to perform a miracle at this moment."

In response, I said two things. First, I referred to Jesus' wilderness temptation. "If you are the Son of God," Satan said, "throw yourself down" from the highest roof of the temple, so the angels will save you. Jesus replied: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:5-7). God does not need to perform miracles to validate his witnesses or prove himself to anyone. He is not under our command; if he were, he would not be much of a God—one who had to jump and perform whenever we demanded.

But I went on to say that if the man really wanted to see a miracle, all he had to do was look at me. If someone really knew what had been

in my heart before my conversion, he would have to say, “Here stands a miracle.” And millions of believers from every age and walk of life could tell a similar story of transformation.

People in every age pose the same question: Why doesn’t God prove that he exists through some powerful demonstration? In Jesus’ day, the Jews expected the Messiah to appear as a king surrounded by soldiers in glinting armor and mounted on horses.

But every Christmas season God reminds us what *his* answer to that question is: His transforming power appears in ways that confound our expectations, just as his Son, Jesus Christ, came not as a crowned king but as a frail baby in a smelly stable, among the common folk. He came quietly—born in the most out-of-the-way place and laid in a manger—not with trumpets or banner headlines but in all simplicity, so as to fully empty himself of his glory as God’s own Son. Later in his life Jesus would perform many miracles as signs of his mission, but the greatest miracle of all was his willingness to give up the glories of heaven and identify completely with his creatures, alienated by sin. C. S. Lewis puts it this way: “The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.”

When God became human, he found the perfect means to invite humankind back into relationship with himself. When God appears to everyone at the consummation of history, people will have no choice but to believe. Until then, God has chosen to respect human freedom by offering an invitation that isn’t shadowed by coercion—the overpowering force of a revelation that would leave us all cowering in submission. No, he chooses to use the “foolish things” of the world—the obscure, the poor, the marginal—to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). God does not show himself more clearly because of his love. Because he wants us to choose to love him, he preserves our capacity for faith or faithlessness by offering a sufficient and complete revelation in Christ rather than by giving a coercive demonstration of his power.



## 7

**If everything you say is true, why don't more people believe?**

Our democratic society can sometimes lead children to believe that truth is the result of popular opinion; if something isn't popular, it can't be true. When answering this question, we need to start by showing that truth often runs counter to popular opinion. For example, the world appears to be flat, but in fact it's round. So what seems right to a lot of people—in this case, the whole world before Copernicus—isn't always so.

Atheism, or the refusal to believe in God, is almost always based on moral objections to the existence of God. During the last twenty years I have found some people with intellectual objections, but not many. Most objections are moral.

The late Mortimer Adler—philosopher, cofounder of the Great Books series, and arguably one of the great minds of our time—was pressed to become a Christian late in life. He was born Jewish, and he admitted being “on the edge of becoming a Christian several times.” Why didn't he convert? He wrote, “If one converts by a clear conscious act of will, one had better be prepared to live a truly Christian life. So you ask yourself, ‘Are you prepared to give up all of your vices and weaknesses of the flesh?’ ” It took Adler a long time to feel he was prepared. He experienced the great gulf between the mind and the heart. Adler went through an incredible agony because intellectually he knew there was a God, but morally he was unwilling to take up the demands of Christianity. Six years after he wrote in such a hesitant manner, he gave his life to Christ and became a professing Christian. He realized that the truth of God is more important than our moral objections. I have run into hundreds, maybe thousands, of people like Mortimer Adler.

Once I debated the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the famous atheist. It was a fascinating experience because she was so vicious, even when the debate was over. I tried to talk to her nicely. I couldn't get her to respond

in kind. “Tell me,” I said, “why are you fighting so hard against something that, as you see it, doesn’t exist? Why are you so angry about it? I don’t understand it.”

Actually, I do understand it because such animosity represents moral rebellion against God. And that rebellion is a fight to the death—the death of one’s own willfulness.

Young people today are under great pressure—from peers and from the popular culture—to throw off every moral restraint and do whatever they feel like doing. For many teenagers, accepting the existence of God and doing battle with the daily pressures coming at them is a great struggle. Rebellion is much easier. But we have to subdue that rebellion, a task that can take a lifetime and be completed only by God’s grace.

### **Key Points in Brief**

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We were created to know God, to return God’s love, and to enjoy communion with God. That’s the meaning of life.

We were created in God’s image.

When people turn away from God, they feel compelled to turn to something else to define their purpose for existence.

The Bible says we can discover God’s reality through (1) the testimony of creation and (2) the witness of conscience.

The God of the Bible demands too much ever to be considered a crutch. He calls us to moral perfection and self-sacrifice.

The god of superstition—who also happens to be the god of the New Age belief system—is the kind of god we would invent: a god who never condemns but only condones our most selfish inclinations and desires.

The universe exists because a preexistent, eternal being, God, created it. This is the most reasonable explanation as well as the witness of Christianity.

God reveals himself to us in ways that do not compromise human freedom. He often demonstrates his transforming power in ways that confound our expectations, as he did in the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Atheism is almost always based on moral objections to the existence of God.

to be right and not be intimidated and cowed by the often bullying secular elites. Your children can be evangelists with their peers, not only sharing the good news about Christ's redemptive grace but also sharing information about Christian truth and how it applies to all of life.

I pray that you will use this book to help equip young people to become lovers and defenders of the truth.

God's blessings on you!

## WITH GRATITUDE

I am deeply grateful to all of the Wilberforce Forum team who participate with me in research and in helping me write articles, books, and *BreakPoint* commentaries. As I mentioned earlier, much of what you have read in these pages has come from *BreakPoint* broadcasts or from my published material. This book is an attempt to distill the work of the *BreakPoint* and the Wilberforce teams into a usable format so that you can respond to the questions your kids will raise with you.

I owe a special debt of thanks to Harold Fickett, a superb writer who has collaborated with me on three other books. Harold did much of the selective culling of the work of our team and of my writing, as well as skillfully reshaping the material to make this more teenager-friendly.

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writing team and who have contributed material and writing to my work over recent years.

For a more in-depth treatment of the various questions in this book, I recommend the book that Nancy Pearcey and I coauthored: *How Now Shall We Live?* That book, which I consider to be the most important work I have undertaken in my ministry, deals with virtually every question here in greater depth.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles W. Colson graduated with honors from Brown University and received his Juris Doctor from George Washington University. From 1969 to 1973 he served as special counsel to President Richard Nixon. In 1974 Colson pleaded guilty to charges related to Watergate and served seven months in a federal prison.

Before going to prison, Charles Colson was converted to Christ, as told in *Born Again*. He has also published *How Now Shall We Live?* (coauthored with Nancy Pearcey); the *How Now Shall We Live? Devotional*; *Life Sentence*; *Crime and the Responsible Community*; *Who Speaks for God*; *Kingdoms in Conflict*; *Against the Night*; *Convicted* (with Dan Van Ness); *The God of Stones and Spiders*; *Why America Doesn't Work* (with Jack Eckerd); *Being the Body* (with Ellen Vaughn); *A Dance with Deception* (with Nancy Pearcey); *A Dangerous Grace* (with Nancy Pearcey); *Gideon's Torch* (with Ellen Vaughn); *Burden of Truth* (with Anne Morse); and *Loving God*, the book many people consider to be a contemporary classic.

In 1976 Colson founded Prison Fellowship Ministries, an interdenominational outreach, which now, through Prison Fellowship International, is active in 108 countries. The world's largest prison ministry, Prison Fellowship manages over fifty thousand active volunteers in the United States and tens of thousands more abroad. Ministry volunteers lead more than a thousand ongoing Bible studies for prisoners and conduct nearly two thousand in-prison seminars per year. The ministry organizes major evangelistic outreaches and reaches nearly 500,000 kids at Christmas with gifts and the love of Christ. The ministry also has a subsidiary, Justice Fellowship, which works for biblically based criminal-justice policies. Also a part of the ministry is the Wilberforce Forum, which provides worldview materials for the Christian community,

including Colson's daily radio broadcast, *BreakPoint*, now heard on a thousand outlets.

Colson has received fifteen honorary doctorates and in 1993 was awarded the Templeton Prize, the world's largest cash gift (over \$1 million), which is given each year to the one person in the world who has done the most to advance the cause of religion. Colson donated this prize, as he does all speaking fees and royalties, to further the work of PF.

For more information about Prison Fellowship,

*write:*

44180 Riverside Parkway

Lansdowne, VA 20176

*visit their Web site:*

[www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org)

*or call:*

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