

Why?

The Question That Started Everything

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Before I Knew How to Ask the Question

Long before I possessed degrees, before I had studied theology, philosophy, cosmology, biology, comparative religion, biblical manuscripts, archaeology, or the historical Jesus, there was a much simpler question haunting me.

I grew up an atheist, and God was not the organizing reality of my childhood. Christianity certainly was not the worldview through which I understood life. As a teenager, I had no developed theology to reject because I scarcely understood what theology was. Christmas was largely about Santa Claus, Easter about the Easter Bunny, and religion belonged somewhere out there in a world other people apparently inhabited. The public-school environment in which I was educated taught me mathematics, science, history, literature, and countless other useful (and non-useful!) subjects, but the deepest question forming inside me was not one I remember being seriously placed upon the academic table: **Why am I here at all?**

I can still picture myself at about sixteen years old sitting alone in a neighborhood park with my acoustic guitar. I would play for a while, look up into the night sky, stare at the stars, and think

about life. I did not know much about cosmology then. I certainly did not know that decades later I would be reading physicists, philosophers, geneticists, historians, textual critics, archaeologists, and theologians trying to understand the universe and humanity's place within it.

I simply looked upward and kept returning to one overarching question: **Why?**

Why was there a universe? Why was I in it? Why was I conscious of being in it? Why did I possess this strange ability to step outside the immediate concerns of eating, sleeping, working, playing music, dating girls, or planning tomorrow and ask what any of it ultimately meant? If we were born, lived for a few decades, accumulated some experiences and possessions, and then disappeared, was that really the entire story?

At sixteen, I did not know enough even to formulate all those questions properly. What I possessed was something more primitive and, in retrospect, more powerful: the question itself. I had no idea then that I would spend much of the next forty years trying to answer it.



When Science Reaches the Border of “Why”

One of the most important lessons I have learned during those decades of investigating questions about God, science, religion, Scripture, and human existence is that we do not honor science by asking it to become something it was never intended to be. Science is an extraordinary means of investigating the physical universe. It measures, observes, tests, compares, predicts, corrects, and continually refines what we know about the natural world. It can tell us how stars burn, how genes transmit biological information, how neurons communicate, how ecosystems function, how diseases spread, and how physical processes have unfolded through the long history of the cosmos.

That achievement deserves admiration rather than suspicion. I have never believed Christians should fear legitimate scientific discovery. If God created the physical world, then learning how that world operates should ultimately be an investigation of something He made. That is how the classic scientists centuries back studied it.

But admiring science does not require believing science can answer every conceivable human question. There is an important difference between asking how a physical process works and asking what that process ultimately means. Science can investigate the neurological and biochemical events associated with love, for example, but describing the physical correlates of love is not the same as explaining why we ought to love another person, why sacrificial love seems morally superior to selfishness, or why betrayal feels like something more than an unfortunate rearrangement of brain chemistry.

The same distinction appears almost everywhere in human experience. Science can tell us what happens to the human brain during grief, but it cannot determine whether the person we grieve possessed ultimate value or whether death is the final word over that life. Science can study altruistic behavior and reconstruct possible biological histories for cooperation, but that does not establish why I ought to sacrifice my welfare for another human being when doing so brings me no obvious personal advantage. Science can analyze environmental systems in extraordinary detail and tell us what happens if we pollute a river, destroy a forest, or exhaust a resource, but the scientific data themselves do not generate the moral proposition that human beings therefore have a duty to steward the earth responsibly.

That distinction became increasingly important to me because during my atheist years I had unconsciously treated materialism as though it were simply another word for science. If science examined matter, I assumed matter must be all there was. If neuroscience could increasingly explain the brain, I assumed consciousness would eventually prove to be nothing more than brain activity. If evolutionary explanations could be proposed for human behavior, I assumed morality, love, reason, and religious belief must ultimately reduce to survival mechanisms.

What I did not recognize at the time was that I had quietly moved from scientific observations into philosophical conclusions without noticing that I had crossed a boundary.

Dr. Max Planck (1858–1947), the German theoretical physicist whose work on energy quanta helped launch modern quantum theory and earned him the 1918 Nobel Prize in Physics, expressed this boundary with remarkable humility. In *Where Is Science Going?*, Planck wrote, “**Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature**” because, in the final analysis, “we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.” Planck was not disparaging science; he was one of the scientists who transformed it. His point was that the investigator is himself embedded within the reality being investigated, and that increasingly precise descriptions of nature do not automatically answer every ultimate question about existence, meaning, or reality itself. (Max Planck, [Where Is Science Going?](#), 1932, Epilogue, p. 217; sourced quotation reproduced at *Today in Science History*)

This is precisely where **Dr. Huston Smith (1919–2016)**, the University of Chicago-trained philosopher and internationally influential comparative-religion scholar who taught philosophy

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for approximately fifteen years before later serving at Syracuse University and the University of California, Berkeley, became so useful to my thinking. Smith spent his career studying humanity's great religious traditions from within major American universities, and he was hardly an enemy of intellectual inquiry. His concern was not science itself but what he called **scientism**.

Smith warned that modern culture often takes the legitimate authority of science within the physical realm and quietly extends it into an all-encompassing worldview. In a 2005 interview, when an interviewer suggested that he seemed critical of the scientific mentality, Smith immediately clarified that **"Science is good."** What he opposed was giving science a kind of blank check, as though scientific investigation were the fountain of all truth. Scientism, he argued, goes beyond the discoveries of science and adds the philosophical propositions that science is the uniquely or supremely reliable route to knowledge and that matter is the most fundamental reality. Smith's crucial point was that those conclusions are themselves not scientific findings. (Huston Smith, "God Speaks to Each Person in Their Own Language," *Beliefnet*, <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/2005/11/god-speaks-to-each-person-in-their-own-language.aspx>.)

That distinction helped me understand what had happened inside my own atheism. Science can tell us that particular regions of the brain become active while a person experiences love, but the additional statement that love is therefore **nothing but** neurological activity is not something an MRI machine discovered. Neuroscience can establish remarkable correlations between brain states and conscious experience, but the assertion that consciousness is exhaustively reducible to matter is a philosophical interpretation of those findings. Science can restrict itself to natural causes when conducting experiments, but it does not follow that science has experimentally demonstrated that nothing beyond nature exists.

Science investigates the physical world; philosophical materialism makes a claim about **all reality**. The first is a method of investigation. The second is a worldview. Confusing those two had once allowed me to believe that science had answered a question it had never actually addressed.

The **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy** appropriately treats questions concerning the scope, justification, assumptions, and limits of scientific method within philosophy of science rather than as additional laboratory discoveries. (See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Scientific Method," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-method/>.) The **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine** has likewise acknowledged that empirical science does not answer every human question, particularly questions concerning ultimate meaning, ethics, or theology. (See National Academies, *Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science*, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/5787/teaching-about-evolution-and-the-nature-of-science>.)

None of this weakens science. It protects science from being burdened with philosophical conclusions it never established. Once I understood that distinction, the question of God reopened for me in a way I had not anticipated. **I had believed science had pushed God out of the universe, only to discover that science had actually done something quite different: it**

had given humanity an increasingly magnificent description of the universe while leaving unanswered the ultimate question of why that universe exists at all.



The Human Questions That Remain

The deeper I pursued that distinction, the more I realized that many of the most consequential questions in life are not merely questions about mechanics. We can know a great deal about the biological processes that make human existence possible and still not know what human existence is for. We can describe how an infant develops, how the nervous system forms, how memory works, and how social attachments arise, but none of those descriptions by itself tells us why a human life possesses intrinsic worth.

The same is true of love. We can study oxytocin, dopamine, attachment behavior, mating patterns, and neurological responses associated with affection, yet those discoveries do not finally explain why we admire a husband who faithfully remains beside his dying wife, why we regard a parent who sacrifices for a disabled child as noble, or why abandoning a vulnerable person simply because caring for that person has become inconvenient strikes us as morally wrong. The scientific description of love and the human meaning of love are not enemies, but neither are they identical.

We can likewise study morality as a human phenomenon. Anthropologists can compare moral systems, psychologists can investigate moral development, sociologists can examine social norms, and evolutionary biologists can propose pathways by which cooperative behavior may have benefited human communities. All of that is valuable. Yet after all the measurements have been taken, another question remains: is there really such a thing as **good and evil**, or are those words merely convenient descriptions of behaviors our particular society happens to prefer?

When we say that torturing an innocent human being for pleasure would be wrong, we ordinarily mean something stronger than saying our culture currently dislikes it. We mean it would remain wrong even if a government legalized it, a majority approved of it, or the perpetrator profited from it. Once we speak that way, we have moved from describing human behavior into asking about moral obligation—from what people happen to do to what people **ought** to do.

Dr. Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the German-born theoretical physicist whose work on relativity transformed modern physics and who received the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics, drew almost exactly this distinction. Writing about the relationship between science and values, Einstein observed, “**Science can only ascertain what is, but not what should be, and outside of its domain value judgments of all kinds remain necessary.**” His point was not that science lacks value, but that empirical description alone cannot generate moral obligation. Science can tell us what human beings do, what consequences follow, and what physical processes are involved; it cannot, by measurement alone, tell us what human beings **ought** to do or why one moral choice is ultimately better than another. (Albert Einstein, [*Ideas and Opinions*](#), 1954.)

Dr. Francis Collins (born 1950), physician-geneticist, former director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, leader of the Human Genome Project, and later director of the National Institutes of Health, made the same distinction from the standpoint of biomedical science. Collins has emphasized that science is exceptionally good at telling us what **can** be done, but that the question of what **ought** to be done requires moral reasoning that scientific measurement alone cannot supply. He has also argued that the human awareness of moral obligation raises questions that cannot simply be reduced to evolutionary advantage, especially when people feel compelled to sacrifice themselves for strangers from whom they expect no return. (PBS, [“Interview: Francis Collins”](#); PBS, [“Francis Collins”](#).)

The same movement appears when we speak of stewardship. Science can tell us what deforestation does to an ecosystem, what pollution does to a river, or what careless exploitation does to a species. But the proposition that human beings therefore ought to care responsibly for creation introduces a moral dimension. It assumes that possessing power does not automatically justify using that power however we wish and that human beings bear responsibility for what has been entrusted to them.

It was here that the question **WHY?** began growing far larger for me than I had first imagined. Why can human beings reason about truths extending far beyond immediate survival? Why can we contemplate the universe that produced us? Why can we compose music, write poetry, paint landscapes, construct cathedrals, solve equations, formulate moral principles, and then argue with one another about whether those principles are objectively true? Why can we love someone who cannot repay us, forgive someone who injured us, or voluntarily sacrifice ourselves for another human being?

Perhaps most remarkably, why are we creatures capable of asking any of these questions in the first place? The universe contains unimaginably vast galaxies, burning stars, planets, oceans, mountains, atoms, molecules, and living organisms, but human beings possess the extraordinary capacity to turn consciousness back upon itself and ask what existence means. We do not merely

live; we know that we live. We know that we will die. We remember the past, anticipate the future, grieve those who are gone, worry about generations not yet born, wonder whether our lives matter, and ask whether anything lies beyond death.

Those capacities do not by themselves prove Christianity. I would be overstating the evidence if I claimed they did. But they belong among the realities any adequate worldview must eventually explain. A philosophy of reality should not be judged only by how well it explains atoms and galaxies. It should also be judged by how well it accounts for the beings examining those atoms and galaxies while asking questions about truth, morality, consciousness, beauty, love, justice, sacrifice, purpose, and God.



What Science Can Tell Us—and What It Cannot Finally Settle

For that reason, I would now state one of the central convictions behind this book more carefully than I might have forty years ago. It is tempting to say simply that science answers **WHAT?** while religion answers **WHY?** That captures something important, but it requires refinement because science certainly answers many legitimate “why” questions. It can explain why the sky appears blue, why planets follow particular orbits, why certain diseases develop, and why particular chemical reactions occur.

The distinction I now see is deeper. **Science is extraordinarily powerful at discovering what exists and how physical reality operates, including the immediate physical causes behind countless events. But science, by its empirical methodology alone, cannot settle the ultimate WHY.** It cannot determine why there is anything rather than nothing, why rational laws govern

physical reality, whether human persons possess objective value, why moral obligation should bind us, whether love possesses meaning beyond chemistry, whether the universe has an ultimate purpose, or whether human existence belongs to a larger story.

Those are not anti-scientific questions. They are questions scientific instruments were simply not designed to adjudicate. A microscope can tell me an enormous amount about the structure of a cell, but it cannot tell me whether I ought to forgive my enemy. A telescope can reveal light that has traveled billions of years across the cosmos, but it cannot determine whether my life possesses eternal significance. Genetic analysis can tell me something about my biological ancestry, but it cannot tell me what I ought to do with the years I have been given.

Sir Peter Medawar (1915–1987), the Nobel Prize-winning British biologist whose pioneering work in immunology earned him the 1960 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, drew almost exactly this boundary. In *The Limits of Science*, Medawar argued that there are questions “science cannot answer” and that “no conceivable advance of science would empower it to answer,” specifically naming questions such as **“What are we all here for?”** and **“What is the point of living?”** He concluded that questions concerning such “first and last things” require us to move beyond empirical science into philosophy, metaphysics, literature, or religion. Medawar’s point was not that science is weak, but that its extraordinary power operates within a particular domain; asking it to determine the ultimate purpose of human existence is asking a scientific method to answer a fundamentally different kind of question. (Sir Peter Medawar, [*The Limits of Science*](#), Oxford University Press, 1984/1987.)

And perhaps that is where the word **WHY** becomes unavoidable. Science can tell us an astonishing amount about the world in which we live, but science, by its empirical methodology alone, cannot tell us what we were ultimately made **for**.



The Extraordinary Human Capacity to Live (and Love)

That realization eventually brought me back to something I wrote many years ago, long before I could have imagined how many additional decades I would spend studying these questions. Someone once interrupted a discussion I was conducting about evidence for God and asked quite simply, “So why did God create us?” My answer at the time was so straightforward that I suspected it disappointed the person who asked it.

I told him, “God created us to live.” What is more obvious and basic than the fact that we have been given five senses and an experiential playground all around us to experience it?

The more years that have passed, the less simplistic that answer has seemed. To live is far more than merely to remain biologically alive. Human beings experience a range of existence so rich that familiarity can cause us to forget how astonishing it is. We can love another person and know that we love them. We can build a home, raise a child, plant a garden, write a book, compose music, climb a mountain, stare into the night sky, grieve a parent, forgive an enemy, care for someone who cannot care for himself, or spend decades pursuing a question that refuses to leave us alone.

We can create because we recognize possibilities that do not yet exist. We can steward because we understand that power can carry responsibility. We can sacrifice because we are capable of regarding another person’s welfare as more important than our own immediate comfort. We can reason because we recognize logical relationships that are not themselves physical objects, and we can contemplate beauty because the sight of a sunset or the sound of music can move us in ways that cannot adequately be described merely in terms of usefulness.

We can remember people who have died and continue loving them after their absence. We can stand beside a grave and refuse to believe that the value of the person buried there can be adequately summarized as a temporary arrangement of molecules. We can examine our own lives morally, regret what we have done, seek forgiveness, make restitution, change direction, and attempt to become different people. Most of all, we can love one another!

We can even make decisions for people we will never meet. We can protect forests for generations not yet born, preserve historical documents for descendants who may someday want to know where they came from, build institutions we ourselves will never live long enough to enjoy, and sacrifice present convenience because we believe the future possesses moral significance. All of this belongs to what it means to **live**, and then comes perhaps the most remarkable capacity of all: we can ask why any of it matters.

That question eventually carried me from science into philosophy, from philosophy into religion, and from religion into the biblical account of humanity.



And Christianity Answers with Purpose

Christianity does not merely tell me what human beings are made **of**. It tells me what human beings were made **for**.

The biblical story begins by locating humanity within creation while also distinguishing humanity within it. Human beings are described as creatures made in the **image of God**. Whatever theological dimensions one explores within that profound expression, it immediately gives human existence a context greater than biology alone. Humanity possesses value because human beings belong to the Creator and reflect something of Him within creation.

That concept began making sense of many of the capacities that had fascinated me. Human beings reason within a reality Christianity says ultimately proceeds from rational Mind. We create while bearing the image of the God first introduced in Scripture as Creator. We love within a worldview whose New Testament can make the extraordinary declaration that “**God is love**.” We exercise moral judgment within a universe in which good and evil are not ultimately detached human inventions but relate to the character of a moral Creator.

Human stewardship takes on another dimension for the same reason. Genesis does not portray the earth merely as raw material waiting to be consumed. Humanity receives dominion, but that dominion exists beneath God’s ownership. We are therefore not absolute possessors of creation but entrusted caretakers within it, which gives stewardship a moral dimension rather than merely a practical one.

Human dignity likewise becomes far more difficult to reduce to productivity, intelligence, beauty, strength, wealth, health, or usefulness. If human worth is grounded in the image of God,

then the weak do not possess less dignity than the strong, the elderly less than the young, the disabled less than the able-bodied, or the poor less than the wealthy. Human value comes from something more fundamental than what one human being can produce for another.

That was a very different anthropology from the one I had assumed as an atheist. Christianity was not merely offering another religious ritual or another list of rules. It was proposing an explanation of what a human being **is**, what has gone wrong with us, why we nevertheless retain extraordinary dignity, and what our existence is ultimately for.



“God Created Us to Live”—But Life Has a Destination

My old answer therefore still stands, but after all these years I would finish the sentence. God created us to live, **but not merely to exist**.

The Christian vision of life is relational. We were created to know God, to love Him, to know and love one another, to cultivate what is good, to exercise responsible stewardship, to create, to serve, to learn, to rejoice, and ultimately to enjoy communion with our Creator.

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism**, completed in AD 1647 by the Westminster Assembly as part of one of the most influential theological projects of the English-speaking Reformation tradition, compressed that conviction into one magnificent sentence: “**Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.**” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1, <https://www.opc.org/sc.html>.)

When I first encountered that statement, I understood it primarily as theology. I understand it somewhat differently after living more of life because the words “**enjoy Him**” matter. If

Christianity is true, God's purpose is not merely to assemble an obedient population of religious subjects. Creation culminates in relationship. Humanity was made to know the One from whom life came and, through that relationship, to experience life in its fullest sense.

We were created not merely to breathe, consume, reproduce, work, accumulate possessions, grow old, and die. We were made to know, love, create, reason, steward, forgive, serve, enjoy, worship, and enter into relationship with the One from whom our lives came.

That is why my simple answer from decades ago now seems to contain considerably more than I realized when I first gave it. God created us to live, but the Christian story says that life reaches its intended fullness when the creature knows the Creator.



Why Does God Not Make Himself Impossible to Deny?

That conclusion raises another question I have wrestled with for years. If God wishes human beings to know Him, why does He not make His existence overwhelmingly undeniable? Why does He not simply appear in the sky every morning, announce Himself to the world, and settle the matter permanently?

I do not pretend that every dimension of divine hiddenness can be solved in a paragraph. Philosophers and theologians continue to debate the question, and it remains one of the more serious objections to theism. Yet the question looks somewhat different if Christianity is correct about the kind of relationship God seeks with humanity.

There is a difference between forcing acknowledgment and inviting relationship. A person can be compelled to acknowledge another person's existence, but love involves something more.

Love entails knowledge, response, trust, and freedom in a way that mere recognition does not. If God's purpose were simply to make disbelief psychologically impossible, He could presumably overwhelm every human consciousness. The biblical story instead presents something subtler: a God who reveals Himself through creation, conscience, history, Scripture and, Christianity claims, supremely through Jesus Christ, while still permitting human beings to resist Him.

That is why an idea from my much older version of *WHY?* remains important to me. I wrote that God had given humanity not **exhaustive evidence**, which might function almost as coercion, but **sufficient evidence**, allowing what I called "reasonable faith." My early manuscript described this as enough evidence upon which to believe without eliminating every possible avenue of resistance or doubt.

I would state the philosophical implications somewhat more cautiously today, but I still believe the distinction is useful. Christianity does not ask us to believe without evidence, yet neither does it claim God has made every alternative psychologically impossible. Faith, therefore, does not necessarily begin where reason has failed. It begins when a person must decide what to do with what reason has uncovered.

And that is where the story becomes intensely personal.



Before the Evidence Came a Girl at Bass Lake

Long before I could have described any of this academically, another remarkable thread had entered my life. It began in the summer of **1979**, about eighteen months before the event that would change the course of my life. I was at Bass Lake, California, the place that would eventually become woven deeply into the story of my marriage, my faith, and my family.

Late one night, a group of young people had gathered around one of the large public fire pits at **Wishon Cove**, and that was where I first saw her. Her name was **Tracy**, and there was an enormous attraction almost immediately. We spent much of that week together, and for a young man my age it felt as though I had encountered someone unlike anyone I had known before.

Yet there was something about Tracy I found almost as puzzling as I found attractive. She was **religious**, and at that point in my life I honestly did not know what that meant. She was a Christian, although I scarcely understood what a Christian actually was. What I did understand was that she really, really believed in God. God was not simply a word she used at Christmas or an abstract possibility she acknowledged because it seemed socially polite. She seemed to believe He was actually there and that this fact affected the way she lived.

That created problems between us almost immediately. We returned to our hometowns after that week—me to **Pleasanton** and Tracy roughly fifty miles away in **Antioch**—and within about a month she ended the relationship. To make a long and complicated story short, my values, or in some cases my lack of values as an atheist, were colliding directly with hers.

At the time, I probably understood the breakup much more in terms of losing a girl I desperately wanted than in terms of worldview. But something peculiar happened after Tracy disappeared from my daily life: God did not.

Looking back, I can see that Tracy did not persuade me by presenting a formal argument for God's existence. She did something more preliminary and, in its own way, just as important: she made belief intellectually and personally conceivable to me. Until then, "God" had largely belonged to a category I had already dismissed without much investigation. Tracy forced me to confront the uncomfortable fact that an intelligent, attractive, emotionally real person my own age could organize her life around the conviction that God truly existed. I did not yet share her belief, but I could no longer treat belief as merely an abstraction belonging to distant churches, old books, or people I did not understand. For the first time, faith had a face, a voice, a personality—and that made the question much harder for me to ignore.

During the roughly eighteen months when we had virtually no relationship with one another, I increasingly found myself thinking about **the God Tracy had talked about**. At first those thoughts appeared unexpectedly, and then they became more persistent. I would catch myself wondering whether the God she so confidently believed in might actually exist.

In one sense, Tracy had put a name on the great **WHY?** that had been following me since adolescence. I had already been the sixteen-year-old sitting beneath the stars asking why I existed. Now, for the first time, I had met someone my own age who seemed convinced there actually **was an answer**.

Strangely enough, before I possessed much formal evidence at all, her life attracted me to the question. She believed differently, behaved differently, and saw the world differently. I missed her, certainly, but I also found myself missing something about the world she inhabited—a world in which God was not merely an idea but a reality.



The Bass Lake water tank where I prayed on January 1, 1981, asking God to “take me into His soul” and guide my life. What began as a private moment on a quiet hill became one of the defining places of my life.

January 1, 1981: Back to Bass Lake

By the beginning of **1981**, I had begun seriously wrestling with whether God might actually exist. I had certainly not become a theologian. I still possessed more questions than answers, and many of my old atheistic assumptions remained intact. But the door I once thought closed had opened slightly.

I returned to Bass Lake. High in the hills above the Wishon Cove campground stood a large water tank, and one day I hiked back into those hills by myself. There was no congregation following me, no worship team, and no preacher waiting to tell me what words to repeat. There was only a young man who had spent years asking why, a quiet mountain landscape, and the growing possibility that perhaps Someone was listening.

At some point an investigation becomes personal. You can ask whether God exists indefinitely, but if you begin to suspect He does, another question eventually appears: **What are you going to do about it?**

Standing there above Bass Lake on **January 1, 1981**, I finally attempted to answer. My prayer was hardly sophisticated theology. In fact, I would later smile at my awkward wording. I asked God to **“take me into His soul”** and guide me through my life. My own letter written shortly afterward preserved that moment remarkably well: I wrote that I had gone “way, way back in the hills by myself,” sat down, and asked God to take me into His soul and guide me through life.

What I meant was simple enough. If You are there, take me. I give myself to You. Make my life Yours.

I did not arrive on that hill having solved every intellectual problem that had troubled me. In fact, I had solved remarkably few of them. I still did not understand the Bible very well, had not worked through the historical arguments for Christianity, had not studied the resurrection in any serious way, and certainly had not yet undertaken the decades of research that would eventually follow. What had changed was more basic: I had reached the point where atheism no longer seemed self-evident to me. The possibility of God had become sufficiently real that continuing to stand at a distance and merely analyze the question began to feel inadequate.

That moment also taught me something I would understand much more clearly only years later: intellectual investigation and personal commitment are not opposites. Evidence can bring a person to the edge of a decision, but evidence does not make the decision for him. No scientific instrument could pray that prayer for me, no philosophical argument could surrender my life on my behalf, and no other person could decide what I would do with the possibility that God was actually there. On that hillside, the question that had followed me since adolescence was no longer merely, “Does God exist?” It had become, “If He does, am I willing to respond?”

I also asked Him for something intensely personal. I prayed that I would find the right girl for me. That, too, survives in the letter I wrote soon afterward, where I connected that prayer directly with what happened when I returned home.

Before walking back down the hill, I wanted somehow to memorialize what I had just done. The water tank had recently been painted, so into that fresh surface I etched a simple inscription that captured, in the most primitive way I knew, what had just happened:

TD → JC 1/1/81

Todd DuBord pointing toward Jesus Christ.

January 1, 1981.

Tracy later preserved the story in *I'll Meet You at the Dock*, recording that after I prayed and gave my life to Jesus I carved my initials into the tank, with an arrow pointing toward the initials for Jesus Christ, followed by the date. Her book even calls it the “**first graffiti**” on the newly painted tank.

I did not know it then, of course, but that little inscription would survive while layer after layer of other graffiti eventually accumulated around it. More than forty years later, despite weather, rust, paint deterioration, and the markings of countless other visitors, “**TD → JC 1/1/81**” **remains recognizable.**



The inscription I etched into the freshly painted tank after praying and giving my life to Christ: “TD → JC 1/1/81.” It was the first graffiti on the newly painted tank and remains recognizable more than forty years later.

I walked back down the hill perhaps expecting something dramatic to happen, but nothing did. There was no audible voice, no extraordinary sensation, and no sudden rush of emotion that made me feel instantly transformed. As best I remember it, I felt very much like the same young man who had climbed the hill, and for a moment I even wondered whether anything had happened at all.

In retrospect, I am grateful it happened that way. Had I been overwhelmed by some extraordinary emotional experience, I might later have wondered whether the entire event had been little more than adolescent excitement, loneliness, or the power of a beautiful setting. Instead, what remained was something much quieter and harder to dismiss: I had consciously crossed a line. Whatever questions still remained—and there were many—I had stopped relating to God merely as an intellectual possibility and had addressed Him as Someone who might actually be there. The evidence would come later in abundance, but on that hillside the investigation had become a relationship.

Years later, that absence of emotional fireworks would become important to me. Some of the most consequential decisions of our lives occur quietly, and their significance becomes visible only as subsequent years unfold. I had just made one of the largest decisions of my life, yet I could not possibly have understood where it would lead.

What I certainly did not know was what would be waiting for me when I returned home.



“I Don’t Know If You Remember Me...”

When I returned home from Bass Lake, there was a letter waiting for me, and when I saw who had sent it, I could hardly believe it. It was from Tracy, the girl I had met around that public fire pit at Wishon Cove nearly eighteen months earlier—the same girl whose faith had puzzled me, attracted me, frustrated me, and, without my fully realizing it at the time, caused me to begin thinking seriously about God.

I opened the letter and immediately encountered words I have never forgotten. Tracy and I no longer possess that original letter, and neither of us remembers every sentence, but we both remember the opening thoughts because they were what mattered most. Her memoir reconstructs them approximately this way: **“Remember me? I’m the girl you met up at Bass Lake. I’m still the same girl. But I have been praying for you for the past year and a half that God would open your eyes and reveal himself to you....”**

I knew exactly what she meant when she said she was “still the same girl.” She was telling me she was still the same “religious” girl I had known before, though by then I was beginning to understand that what I had casually called religious was actually a deeply held Christian faith. She still believed in God with the same conviction that had seemed so foreign to me when we first met, and she was still living by values that had collided so sharply with my own.

Then came the part that changed the way I understood those eighteen months apart. Tracy had been **praying that God would reveal Himself to me.**

That statement landed with unusual force because during those same months I had repeatedly found myself thinking about God. I had wondered whether He existed, why I was here, whether

there was any larger purpose to human life, and whether the atheistic assumptions I had carried for years really explained as much as I thought they did. Something even more personal had been happening beneath my intellectual questions: I kept thinking about the God Tracy had spoken about.

Until that letter arrived, I had simply assumed those thoughts were arising naturally within me as part of my own maturing curiosity. Now I was discovering that during virtually that entire period, Tracy had been praying that the very thing happening inside me would happen—that God would somehow make Himself known to me.

Her memoir preserves another detail I remember vividly. As I read those words, I experienced what seemed like the presence of God for the first time, almost as though a hand were upon my shoulder saying, **“This is why you have been thinking so much about Me. Tracy has been praying for you.”** Tracy’s account records that I have told people through the years that this was the first time I believed I experienced God’s presence.

I want to be careful about how I tell this because I do not present that letter as scientific proof of God’s existence. It cannot be repeated under laboratory conditions, measured by instruments, or offered as evidence that should compel a skeptic to believe. I would never tell someone, “You must become a Christian because Todd DuBord prayed on a hill and came home to find a letter from a girl.”

But this is not merely an argument in a philosophy textbook. It is also the story of my life, and within that story the timing was extraordinary.

Only shortly before, on that hill above Bass Lake, I had asked God to take my life and had also asked Him to bring the right woman into it. Now I was reading a letter from the very young woman who had first made God seem personally relevant to me, and she was telling me that throughout the months I had unexpectedly begun thinking about Him, she had been praying that God would reveal Himself to me.

For the first time, those seemingly unrelated threads began to come together. Tracy appeared not only to be connected to the prayer I had made about the woman I hoped someday to find, but also to the deeper question that had been stirring inside me for nearly two years. Her faith had first unsettled my atheism, her absence had left me thinking about the God she believed in, and now her letter was telling me that while I had been wondering about God, she had been asking God to reach me.

I cannot prove what happened behind those events, and I do not need to. What I can say is that the letter became one of those moments in my life when the intellectual and the personal suddenly converged. The questions I had been asking about God were no longer completely abstract. Someone I had loved had been praying about those very questions while I was beginning to ask them.

From that point forward, I wanted to know whether the God Tracy believed in was actually there.



The Girl, the Bible College, and a Thousand Questions

The rest did not unfold overnight. In fact, our surviving correspondence shows how confused I still was. I believed in God in some undefined sense, yet I resisted much of what Tracy believed Christianity required. In one letter I told her that I had “my own little relationship with God” and did not need anyone lecturing me about Him, while continuing to argue with her about Christian sexual ethics, Scripture, and religion.

That young man was hardly a finished Christian.

He was searching.

Tracy and I would eventually get back together. On July 1, 1981, after months with no communication, she happened to be telling a friend our entire story when, at almost precisely the moment she finished, her telephone rang. It was me. Two days later we saw one another again for the first time in nearly two years, and the relationship that had seemed finished began again. Tracy remembers that reunion as the point when she finally allowed herself to admit that she had loved me from the beginning.

Later that summer, Tracy was preparing to leave California to attend Bible college in Oregon, and I hitched a ride north with her.

That decision became another turning point. I went partly because of Tracy, of course, but by then something larger was happening inside me. I had decided that I was going to **seek God** and begin taking my questions seriously.

I can only imagine what those professors thought when a long-haired young man who was somewhere between agnostic, skeptical inquirer, and very new quasi-Christian suddenly arrived carrying what seemed like a thousand questions. I had not yet learned the comfortable religious habit of avoiding difficult subjects, and perhaps that was a blessing. I wanted to know whether what Christians believed was actually true.

Those poor professors were peppered with questions about virtually everything. Where did the universe come from? Why should anyone believe God created it? What about evolution? What about all the other religions? Why Christianity? Where did the Bible come from? Who decided which books belonged in it? Had it been changed? What about archaeological evidence? What made Jesus different from Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, or other religious leaders? Did Jesus actually claim divinity? And above all, what evidence was there that He really rose from the dead?

I did not yet know it, but those questions were becoming the intellectual map of much of the rest of my life.



The Question Became an Evidence Trail

Over the undergraduate and graduate years that followed, I began doing something I had never been taught to do with religion as a young atheist: **test it**.

I had grown up in a world where religious claims were largely outside the classroom. Science, mathematics, history, and literature could be examined, compared, challenged, and tested, but God and religion often seemed relegated either to private belief or church. When I began my academic journey, I decided I would not grant Christianity a special exemption from scrutiny

merely because I had begun to believe it. If Christianity was true, investigation should not destroy it; if it was false, I wanted to know.

The questions gradually arranged themselves almost deductively because one question naturally created the next. First came the universe itself. **Was there actually evidence that physical reality pointed beyond itself?** I began examining cosmic origins, fine-tuning, mathematical intelligibility, physical law, biological information, origin-of-life chemistry, consciousness, and the philosophical implications of the universe we actually observe. Those questions would eventually grow into [THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR GOD.](#)

That investigation then forced another question upon me. **What about evolution?** I had grown up assuming that evolution had rendered God unnecessary and that serious science had simply settled the larger philosophical question of origins. Over time I discovered that the subject was far more complicated than the simplified versions I had absorbed. I came to distinguish observed mechanisms such as mutation, natural selection, adaptation, genetic drift, population change, and speciation from broader claims concerning universal common ancestry and from the entirely separate question of abiogenesis—the origin of the first life from nonliving chemistry. Those continuing investigations eventually became [THE ERRORS IN EVOLUTION—SCIENTISTS SPEAK UP.](#)

Yet even if I became convinced that a Creator existed, that did not establish Christianity. It merely opened another door: **If God exists, why this religion rather than another?** That question forced me into comparative religion. I had to examine Hinduism as Hinduism, Buddhism as Buddhism, Islam as Islam, Judaism as Judaism, and Christianity as Christianity rather than accepting the comforting modern slogan that all religions were merely different roads ascending the same mountain.

That investigation eventually became [DO ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO THE SAME TRUTH—AND THE SAME GOD?](#) The more carefully I compared the traditions, the clearer it became that they do share some moral observations and spiritual concerns, but they also make profoundly contradictory claims concerning God, ultimate reality, humanity, salvation, history, judgment, rebirth, resurrection, and eternity.

Once I recognized those contradictions, another question followed naturally. If religions were not simply interchangeable, **what made Jesus different from the founders and leaders of those other traditions?** I began comparing Him with Gautama Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Krishna traditions, Laozi, Moses, and other towering figures associated with humanity's religious history. I wanted to know what each taught, what each claimed concerning himself, what the earliest sources actually said, how each understood God or ultimate reality, and what significance each assigned to his own life and death. That investigation eventually became [HOW JESUS TRULY COMPARES TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS.](#)

The comparison did not require denigrating other religious figures. In fact, the opposite was necessary. Intellectual fairness required allowing each figure and religious tradition to remain what its own earliest sources actually portrayed it to be rather than blending radically different claims into a vague modern spirituality.

Then came the texts themselves. If religious traditions disagreed, and if Jesus appeared historically unusual, **how did we know what any of these religions originally taught?** I began comparing sacred writings, asking about historical proximity, authorship, transmission, manuscript evidence, canonical development, and the relationship between a religion's foundational events and the writings that describe them. Those questions eventually became [HOW THE BIBLE TRULY COMPARES WITH OTHER SACRED WRITINGS](#).

That investigation forced me to stop treating every sacred book as though it possessed the same origin, history, literary structure, manuscript tradition, authority claims, and relationship to its foundational events. Once I began examining the writings on their own terms, their similarities remained interesting, but their differences became impossible to dismiss.

My questions about the Bible then became considerably more specific. Where did the Old Testament actually come from? Who wrote these texts, how were they transmitted, what manuscripts survive, how do the Dead Sea Scrolls affect the discussion, what textual traditions existed, and where does archaeology intersect with the world described in the Hebrew Scriptures? Those questions eventually became **HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE—PART 1: THE HISTORICITY AND EVIDENCE FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT**, available through [CrossFireUSA Free Downloads & Research](#).

Then I had to ask the same questions about Christianity's foundational writings. **How did the New Testament arise?** A Why these twenty-seven books? How early were the Gospels and Pauline letters known? What did first- and second-century Christians quote? When does the fourfold Gospel appear? How did canon recognition actually develop, and what does the surviving manuscript tradition reveal? Those investigations eventually became **HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE—PART 2: THE HISTORICITY AND EVIDENCE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT**, likewise available through [CrossFireUSA Free Downloads & Research](#).

Those questions were never merely theoretical for me. In **1987**, during my undergraduate work under an Old Testament scholar, I devoted an entire year to a private canonical study of the Old and New Testaments, producing two lengthy treatises of approximately 120 pages each on their compilation, recognition, transmission, and preservation. What began as an effort to settle some of the lingering "demons" left over from my atheist objections became one of the formative research experiences of my life.

That year also changed the way I approached every question that followed. I learned that serious investigation rarely rewards the person who begins by deciding what the evidence must say. It requires patience with inconvenient facts, a willingness to distinguish strong arguments from weak ones, and the humility to revise conclusions when the sources demand it. I increasingly came to believe that Christianity did not need me to protect it from difficult questions; if its central claims were true, they should be able to survive historical scrutiny, textual comparison, archaeological testing, and philosophical challenge. That conviction became one of the governing principles of my entire Evidence Trail: never ask merely, "Can I defend what I already believe?" but rather, "What does the best available evidence actually permit me to say?"

But manuscripts alone could not answer another question that kept surfacing: **Does this book inhabit real history?** Archaeology cannot prove that God spoke to Moses or that Jesus is the Son of God. Those are theological and historical questions of another order. But archaeology can test whether biblical writers knew actual cities, rulers, kingdoms, political circumstances, inscriptions, customs, geography, and material cultures. That continuing investigation eventually became [THE RECENT TOP 10 ARCHAEOLOGY PROOFS OF THE BIBLE](#).

Eventually the road narrowed until almost every question converged upon one Person: **Jesus**.

If God exists, if religions genuinely disagree, if the biblical documents deserve historical investigation, and if first-century Christianity arose around Jesus of Nazareth, then the decisive question becomes unavoidable: **Who was He really?**

That question eventually became **WAS JESUS REALLY THE SON OF GOD?**, available through [CrossFireUSA Free Downloads & Research](#). I began examining Jesus' self-understanding, His claims and divine prerogatives, the Son of Man language, the earliest Christology, His crucifixion, the devotion directed toward Him within the earliest Christian communities, and whether the idea of His divinity truly emerged centuries later, as I had sometimes heard, or appeared astonishingly early within the Christian movement.

Yet Christianity ultimately refuses to allow even that investigation to end merely with the sayings of Jesus because it forces one final historical question: **Did He actually rise from the dead?**

The Apostle Paul himself made Christianity vulnerable at precisely this point. If Christ has not been raised, Paul wrote, Christian faith collapses. That is a remarkable thing for a religion to say because it places an event allegedly occurring within history at the center of everything.

My investigation of the death and burial of Jesus, the empty-tomb tradition, the post-Resurrection appearances, the transformation of His disciples, the conversions of James and Paul, the earliest proclamation of the Resurrection, and the principal alternative explanations eventually became [THE 10 BEST PROOFS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS](#).

Looking back, I can now see a logical progression that I certainly did not see while I was living it. The universe raised the Creator question, and the Creator question raised the revelation question. Revelation raised the religions question, while the religions question raised the Jesus question. Jesus raised the Scripture question, and Scripture raised questions of canon, transmission, and historical reliability. Biblical historical claims naturally invited archaeological investigation, and the historical Jesus eventually brought everything to the empty tomb.

That is the Evidence Trail lying behind this book. It began long before I knew there would ever be a book, and long before I knew those questions would become the chapters immediately preceding this one. In a very real sense, they all began with a teenager, an acoustic guitar, a sky full of stars, a girl at Bass Lake, and one stubborn question: **Why?**



The Question Becomes Personal Again

For more than forty years I have continued investigating the questions that first arose while I was an atheist. Some arguments I once considered strong I have modified. Some claims I would now state more carefully. Some discoveries have complicated questions I once thought were simple, while other evidence has become stronger than I understood when I first encountered it.

That matters to me because I never wanted Christianity merely to inherit the privileged status I once unconsciously gave atheism. I wanted both subjected to scrutiny. If an argument failed, I wanted to know it failed, and if evidence pointed somewhere I had not expected, I wanted to follow it.

The farther I traveled, the more the question **WHY?** changed. At first I was asking why anyone should believe in God. Eventually I was asking why there is a universe at all, why that universe is intelligible, and why conscious, reasoning, morally aware beings exist within it. From there I began asking why humanity across cultures has persistently reached toward transcendence, whether any of humanity's religious claims actually correspond to reality, and finally why Jesus Christ stood so strangely at the center of the investigation.

Yet the evidence never erased the personal story that had started all of it. Instead, the scholarly investigation and the personal story gradually became inseparable, and whenever I looked backward I found myself returning to Bass Lake.



Back to the Water Tank

Years later, Tracy and I returned to Bass Lake together. In fact, that place became woven throughout our marriage. Our honeymoon brought us back there in 1983, when we again climbed the mountain to the water tank where I had given my life to Christ. Tracy's later account remembers that honeymoon excursion simply but significantly: **"We hiked up the mountain to the water tank where Todd gave his life to Christ."**

What neither of us could have imagined in 1981 was that Bass Lake would eventually become far more than the place where I made that decision. It became one of the great geographic anchors of our family story. Tracy and I married, raised our family, and in time became grandparents to **five grandchildren: Luca, Titus, Tobias, Hope, and Nandi**. Tracy's revised memoir now names all five in its dedication.

Today, every year, our family returns to Bass Lake.

The place where Tracy and I first met around a public fire pit in 1979, the place where I climbed a hill and prayed in 1981, and the place we later revisited as newlyweds has now become a cherished vacation destination for our children and grandchildren. A location that once belonged to the private story of two young people became part of the memory of an entire family.

And every year, we make the hike back up to the water tank.

That annual walk has become something far richer than nostalgia. We climb the same hill, approach the same weathered tank, and search through the graffiti until we find the old inscription. The paint has aged. Rust has appeared. Other names, dates, symbols, and markings

have accumulated everywhere around it. Decades have passed, and almost everything about our lives has changed.

Yet there it still is:

TD → JC 1/1/81

I sometimes think about how little I understood when I carved those characters into the paint. I had no idea Tracy and I would eventually marry. I did not know we would have children, much less five grandchildren. I could not have imagined decades of ministry, study, research, writing, teaching, preaching, or the many joys and trials our family would eventually experience.

I certainly had no idea that more than forty years later I would stand there surrounded by descendants who did not even exist in my imagination when I first climbed that hill.

That changes the meaning of the place for me. The water tank is no longer merely where a young atheist-turned-seeker prayed an awkward prayer. It has become a physical marker connecting generations. My grandchildren can stand where their grandfather once stood when he was barely more than a boy and see the letters he scratched into the paint before they, their parents, or most of the life they now know had come into existence.

The story has become bigger than the inscription.

Every year, when we make that climb together, I am reminded that some decisions echo far beyond the moment in which they are made. In 1981 I thought I was marking the place where I had given my life to Christ. I now realize I was marking the beginning of a story whose consequences would eventually reach my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my ministry, and these very pages.

The tank itself has changed almost beyond recognition, but the little line pointing from **TD** toward **JC** can still be found, though more faded with every passing year.

I find that deeply fitting.

The fuller story of Tracy, our meeting, separation, letters, reunion, marriage, and everything that followed belongs in the remarkable love story she has told in *I'll Meet You at the Dock: A Bipolar Love Affair*. Readers who want to follow that story can learn more at www.MeetYouAtTheDock.com. Her memoir records not merely our romance but the extraordinary ways Bass Lake, faith, struggle, marriage, and family became intertwined across the decades. The title page of that work identifies it as Tracy DuBord's story, and its dedication now reaches from our marriage into the next generations of our family.

For purposes of *WHY?*, however, what matters most is where those two journeys intersected. My search for Tracy became entangled with my search for God, and my search for God eventually became a search for truth.



Forty Years Later

Now, more than forty years later, I sometimes stand at that same tank alone or with Tracy and members of the generations that came after us. What was once a solitary hilltop moment has become part of a family tradition. Every year we return to Bass Lake, and every year we make that climb with our family, including our five grandchildren, search through the graffiti, and find the old inscription still holding its place among all the others.

I look at those weathered characters—**TD → JC 1/1/81**—and think about how little that young man knew of what lay ahead. He had no idea who he would marry, what family would eventually surround him, what work he would do, what trials he would endure, what questions he would study, what churches he would serve, what books he would write, or what grandchildren would one day climb that same hill beside him.

When I etched those characters into fresh paint, I thought I was preserving a moment. I did not understand that the moment itself would help shape almost everything that followed.

There was another prayer from those early years that has returned to me again and again. As a young converting atheist, still trying to understand what God might want from my life, I prayed something essentially like this: **“God, if You will show me the purpose for life, I will spend the rest of my life helping other people who want to know the evidence.”** I could not possibly have known then what keeping that promise would eventually look like. I did not know how many libraries, classrooms, pulpits, hospital rooms, scientific studies, archaeological reports, ancient manuscripts, religious texts, historical documents, sermons, books, articles, arguments, conversations, and late nights of research would eventually lie between that prayer and these pages.

The young man who made that promise eventually completed a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree and entered pastoral ministry. For approximately forty years, ministry became the principal arena in which questions I had once asked for myself became questions I helped other people face. I preached and taught, counseled people through marriages and deaths and doubts, raised a family with Tracy, served churches, and continued studying the evidence that had first drawn me away from atheism. The research never really stopped because the questions never stopped.

Somewhere along that road, God brought another extraordinary and completely unexpected chapter into our lives.

In **2006**, through what I have always regarded as another remarkable divine appointment, Tracy and I came to know **Chuck and Gena Norris** personally. I could never have imagined, while watching a Chuck Norris movie on one of my earliest dates with Tracy in 1979, that decades later the man on that screen and his wife would become dear friends, that I would serve their family as pastor and chaplain, or that we would eventually work side by side for nearly twenty years.

What began as friendship gradually became a ministry partnership, research collaboration, and adventure that carried us far beyond anything I could have planned. Over the years, I had the privilege of serving as their chaplain and working with them as a researcher and co-author on **three books and more than 2,000 culture, health, and fitness columns**. Those projects carried me into subjects ranging from faith, family, health, and fitness to culture, history, patriotism, public policy, and the moral questions confronting America. Readers who want to see more of that work can visit [Books & Other Helps — CrossFireUSA](#), and I have told the fuller story of those remarkable years in [My 20-Year Adventure With Chuck Norris](#).

One of those chapters even took us into the **Middle East during war**, where we traveled to encourage American servicemen and women. I can still remember receiving the telephone call from Chuck asking whether I would go to Iraq with him and joking that Hawaii sounded like a considerably safer alternative. Yet we went, and what followed was an unforgettable opportunity to meet and encourage thousands of American troops serving far from home. That experience became another reminder that the life God had given me was not intended merely for accumulating information, but for using whatever opportunities came my way to serve people. Readers who want that part of the story can read [My Trip to Iraq With Chuck Norris](#).

Through those same years, another line of research began growing, and interestingly, it did not begin primarily in a library. It began on the ground at some of America's best-known historic sites. During visits to a number of **U.S. national and state historic parks, monuments, and government-run heritage sites**, I began noticing occasions where explicitly religious elements of the historical record appeared to have been omitted, minimized, or separated from the context in which they originally existed.

Rather than merely complain about what I believed had been left out, I began documenting the omissions, contacting park officials and government representatives, presenting primary-source evidence, and pressing for corrections where the historical record warranted them. Several of

those efforts resulted in restorations or revisions. One of the most visible disputes involved the **Washington Monument**, where questions surrounding the presentation of its religious history that I discovered eventually drew national attention and reached **FOX News**. Other investigations took me into historic locations connected with Jamestown (the first English colony in America), Independence Hall (where the Declaration of Independence & U.S. Constitution were born), the Supreme Court and additional government-administered sites. I have collected many of those cases, documents, broadcasts, correspondence, and restoration efforts at [**U.S. God Omissions — CrossFireUSA**](#).

Those experiences changed the direction of my research. I began asking not only what Christianity claimed about God and humanity, but also **how much of America's religious history modern Americans were actually being shown**. That question took me deeper into colonial records, sermons, state constitutions, congressional actions, presidential writings, Founders' correspondence, early educational materials, national monuments, inscriptions, court records, and the religious convictions of many of the people who helped shape the American experiment.

The more primary material I examined, the more convinced I became that significant portions of America's Christian heritage had never disappeared from the historical record at all. Much of it remained plainly visible in stone, bronze, letters, laws, speeches, diaries, legislative acts, public proclamations, church records, and the original words of the people who lived through America's founding generations. Yet modern Americans could pass through historic sites or classrooms without ever encountering substantial portions of that record.

That investigation eventually became another major part of my work through **CrossFireUSA**: encouraging people to examine America's documentary record for themselves and helping recover religious history where I believed it had been omitted, obscured, or incompletely presented. I have tried to approach that history the same way I approached Christianity itself—as something to be tested through evidence, original documents, contemporary testimony, inscriptions, speeches, correspondence, public records, and the actual words of the people who lived it rather than through slogans from either side.

By the time I reached **sixty-two**, I had stepped away from roughly four decades of local pastoral ministry, but I had not retired from the prayer I made as a young man. Instead, the form of the ministry changed. Through [**CrossFireUSA.org**](#), I began placing much of what I had accumulated over those decades into accessible research, articles, historical investigations, apologetic studies, and educational materials so that people I might never meet personally could examine the evidence for themselves.

More than **100,000 seekers and readers** have now encountered those resources since May 2025, and every one of them represents to me another extension of that old prayer: *If You show me the purpose for life, I will help others who want to know the evidence*. CrossFireUSA became not only a place to share the apologetic evidence that helped lead me from atheism to Christianity, but also a vehicle for documenting the religious and moral foundations of America that I believe too many modern Americans have never been given the opportunity to examine firsthand.

When I think about that progression, the water tank takes on an even deeper significance. The eighteen-year-old sitting on that hill knew none of this. He did not know there would be degrees, nearly forty years of pastoral ministry, churches, books, thousands of columns, travels with Chuck and Gena Norris, American soldiers in Iraq, battles over historical omissions at government sites, national media attention, CrossFireUSA, grandchildren, or a book called *WHY?*. He simply knew that he had begun to believe there was a God, that Jesus Christ stood somehow at the center of what he was discovering, and that if God would show him what life meant, he wanted to spend that life helping others search for the same truth.

Looking backward now, that hill at Bass Lake seems almost like a miniature of the entire journey recorded in these pages. I had spent years trying to determine **what** was true. I wanted facts. I wanted evidence. I wanted to know whether God existed, whether Christianity could withstand investigation, whether the Bible deserved to be trusted, whether Jesus truly occupied the extraordinary place Christianity assigned Him, and whether faith required me to abandon my intellect.

What I gradually discovered was that Christianity did not require me to abandon my intellect. Quite the opposite, the more seriously I investigated its claims, the more I realized that faith and inquiry did not have to occupy opposite sides of an intellectual battlefield. The questions that once seemed threatening became the very instruments through which I tested what I was beginning to believe.

The evidence eventually carried me to a threshold, but it could not make the decision for me. There finally came a moment when the question was no longer merely whether God existed. It became what I was going to do if He did.

That distinction remains important to me after more than forty years. Evidence can give me good reason to believe a bridge is structurally sound, but evidence cannot physically make me step onto it. Evidence can persuade me that another person is trustworthy, but relationship begins when I actually entrust something of myself to that person. Christianity never finally asked me merely to acknowledge a proposition about Jesus Christ. It confronted me with the question of whether I would trust Him.

That is why the final answer to *WHY?* cannot merely be cosmology, philosophy, archaeology, textual criticism, comparative religion, or even theology. Those disciplines have mattered enormously to my journey, and I have spent much of my adult life examining them. But Christianity's final claim is personal. It says that behind the physical universe stands not merely a First Cause, abstract Intelligence, or impersonal force, but a personal Creator who has acted within history and made Himself known supremely through Jesus Christ.

That is where my investigation eventually came to rest, not because I stopped asking questions, because I never have, but because I discovered that questions and faith are not opposites. Some questions strengthened my belief. Others forced me to modify arguments I once thought were stronger than they actually were, and still others remain unanswered. Yet after decades of investigation, the cumulative trail continues to point me toward the same center I first began approaching as a young man on that hill.

For me, Christianity finally answered that question not principally with a formula but with a story. The Creator made life, humanity became alienated from Him, and God did not abandon His creation. In Jesus Christ, Christianity makes the extraordinary claim that the Creator entered creation, bore humanity's brokenness, conquered death, and opened the way home.

That is why Christianity's answer to the human problem eventually appeared so radically different from the idea I once had of religion. I had imagined religion principally as human beings trying to climb upward toward whatever gods they had invented. Christianity turned the picture upside down. Its central proclamation was not that humanity finally constructed a ladder tall enough to reach God, but that **God came down to us**.

Perhaps that is also why my own journey unfolded as it did. I spent years looking for God in arguments before realizing that, according to Christianity, God had already entered history looking for me. Wow, talk about a lightbulb moment!

And yet even that story had begun earlier, before the books, before the degrees, before the libraries, before the professors I peppered with questions, before Tracy, and before Bass Lake. I was sixteen years old, sitting in a neighborhood park with an acoustic guitar in my hands and staring into a sky filled with stars.

I did not know the age of the universe. I did not understand fine-tuning, biological information, or the mystery of consciousness. I knew nothing of textual criticism or canon formation. I could not have explained the differences among Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, much less compared them intelligently. I knew very little about Jesus.

What I did know was how to ask a question. I wanted to know **why**.

The original question never disappeared. It simply grew deeper. And perhaps that is one reason I feel such urgency now about passing the spiritual and intellectual baton to others. I am not asking anyone to believe merely because I believe, nor would I want someone to inherit Christianity without examining it. I began this journey precisely because I wanted to test what was true, and after more than four decades I would be honored if another skeptic, student, pastor, parent, grandchild, or seeker took the material I have gathered and subjected it to the same examination.

The sixteen-year-old atheist sitting beneath those stars could never have imagined that one question would eventually take him to a hill at Bass Lake, to an inscription on a newly painted water tank, to a letter from a girl named Tracy, through bachelor's and graduate study, into nearly forty years of ministry, across the world with friends he had once seen only on a movie screen, into thousands of pages of research, through disputes over the preservation of America's religious history, and finally back up that same hill decades later with grandchildren walking beside him.

Nor could he have imagined that the promise he quietly made to God—to spend his life helping others understand the evidence if God would first help him understand the purpose of life—would still be directing his work more than forty years later.

I am still here fulfilling that prayer He so graciously answered.

And so, as I pass the spiritual and intellectual baton, I would ask only this of the person holding these pages: **do not take my word for it. Investigate. Ask difficult questions. Follow the evidence wherever it leads. Read the sources. Test Christianity rather than merely accepting or rejecting the version of it you may have inherited.** Examine the arguments for God. Compare the religions honestly. Investigate Jesus. Study the Bible's history. Look at the archaeological record. Examine the Resurrection claims. And when someone tells you what America's Founders believed or what role Christianity did—or did not—play in the nation's history, go to the original documents and examine those claims too.

If the research collected through these chapters and through CrossFireUSA.org can help another person make that journey more carefully than I was able to begin it at sixteen, then a prayer made by a young converting atheist will still be bearing fruit long after he first prayed it. And if someone who has never seriously examined Christianity decides to investigate because of something contained in these pages, then perhaps another person's **WHY?** will begin a journey I could never have imagined when mine began.

The young man beneath those stars only knew that existence seemed to demand an explanation. The eighteen-year-old on that Bass Lake hill knew only a little more, enough to point an arrow from his own initials toward the initials of Jesus Christ and trust that somehow the rest of the journey would follow.

And after all these years, I still believe **WHY?** is the right question because the search for its answer ultimately led me not merely to an argument, an equation, a religious system, a political cause, a career, or a philosophical proposition. It led me through a lifetime of questions, evidence, people, places, unexpected opportunities, failures, discoveries, ministry, family, and grace toward the Person I had pointed to with an arrow scratched into fresh paint on January 1, 1981.

Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria.

