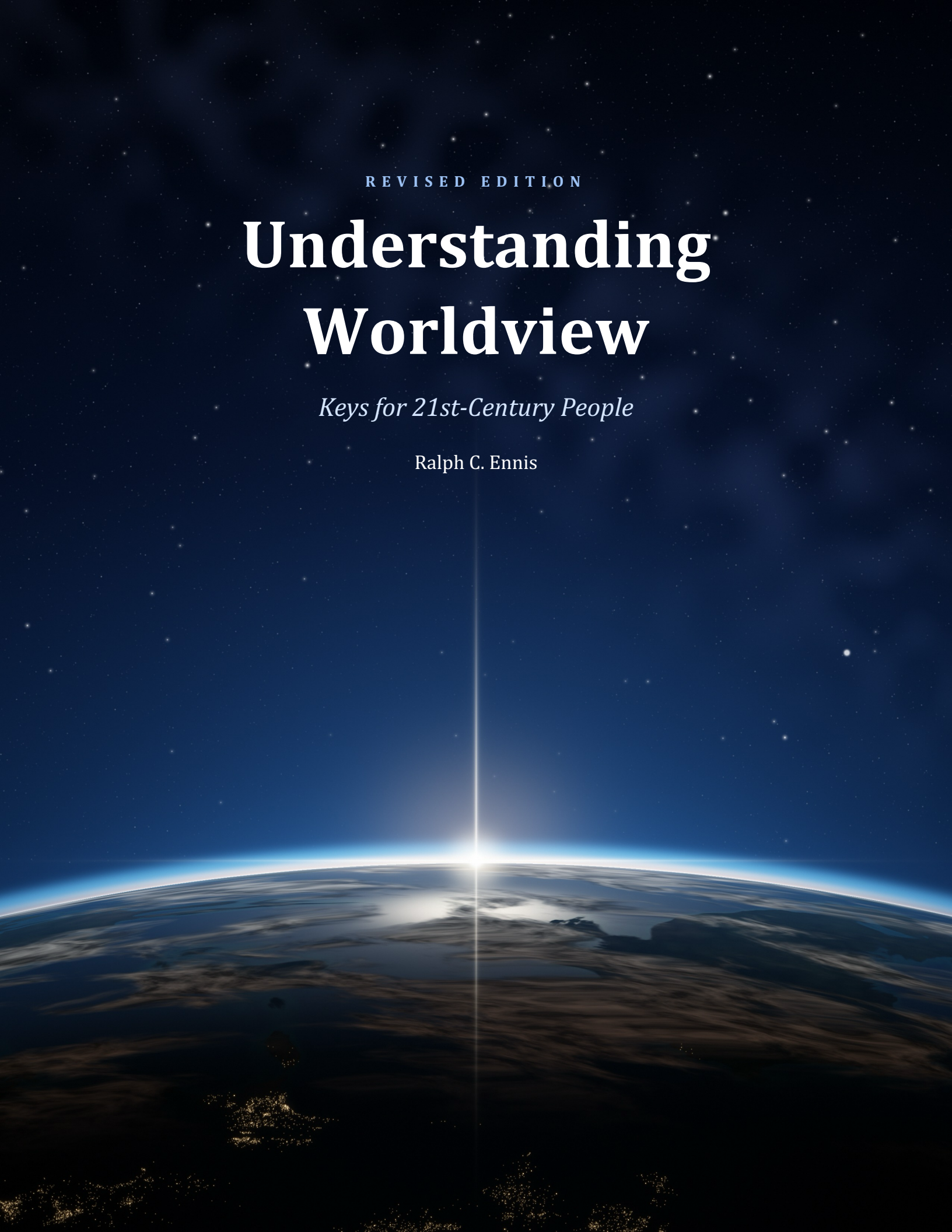


REVISED EDITION

Understanding Worldview

Keys for 21st-Century People

Ralph C. Ennis

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PART ONE

Chaos at the Core

> Sam is twenty-five. Three years out of college, he lives alone in a one-bedroom apartment that looks out on a parking deck. He works as a supply-chain analyst for a logistics software company, and he is good at a job he cannot imagine doing for the rest of his life. On weekdays he moves numbers from one spreadsheet to another. On weekends he plays pickup basketball, watches whatever the algorithm serves him, and tells himself he will figure things out soon.
>
> There have been three serious relationships since college—Lauren, then Priya, then Kate. Each began with real hope and ended with the same quiet sense that something was missing, though he could never say what. His parents divorced when he was twelve. He loves them both, but he learned early that the people you count on can come apart, and he has kept a careful distance from needing anyone too much. His friends are scattered across three time zones. He talks to more people in a day than his grandfather met in a month, and he has never felt more alone.
>
> Late one Sunday night, his phone face-down on his chest, Sam finds himself asking questions he has not asked since he was a boy lying awake in the dark. What does it all mean, anyway? Who am I in the scheme of things? If there is a God, how does He fit into a world run by technology, wired together across the globe, and lonely to the bone? How am I supposed to tell good from evil when everyone seems to have a private version of both? Is there more to the world than what I can see with my own eyes? He does not have answers. He is not sure anyone does. But for the first time in a long while, he wants to know.

At stake in all this is who we are as human beings. That is what Sam realized he was asking. Who am I, really? Who are you? It may be the central question of our age. It sits underneath today's debates over sexuality and gender, the meaning of the body, and whether machines might one day count as persons. And it is a question our culture has found surprisingly hard to answer.

The modern world has offered a succession of answers, each limited and incomplete. Rational man of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, whose god was reason, gave way to Industrial man. But man empowered by the machine all too easily became man as machine—a unit of production, valued for his output. Then came Fragmented man, searching for some higher identity that could make him whole. Today we meet Curated man: a self-assembled and put on display on a screen, measured in likes and followers, and shaped by algorithms that seem to know his desires better than he does.

> Sam knows Curated man well; he sees him in the mirror every morning. His online profile is a better-lit version of his life—the trip to the mountains, the half-marathon, never the Sunday nights. The apps on his phone know what he will want to buy, watch and read before he does. Some days he wonders whether there is a real Sam underneath all the data, or whether he is simply the sum of his clicks.

Without God, none of these models gives human dignity a solid foundation. If we are only reason, our machines will soon out-think us. If we are only workers, we can be replaced. If we are only our curated image, we are as fragile as the next post. Each model captures something true about us, and each leaves out the one thing that would hold the rest together.

> If you are feeling empty or hopeless right now, please don't carry that alone. Talk to someone you trust, or call or text **988** to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night.

More Than Two Bodies?

Take the experience of sex. Is there anything more to it than two bodies coming together? Our culture gives conflicting answers. On the one hand, sex is treated as recreation—a pleasant activity between consenting adults that carries no more meaning than the two people choose to give it. On the other hand, it is treated as the very core of identity, the place where we discover and declare who we really are. Pornography, once hidden, is free and on every phone. One of the best-selling genres in fiction, sometimes called "romantasy," blends fantasy with explicit romance, and streaming dramas present sexual freedom as the path to self-discovery. Now AI "companions" are designed to be friend, lover and confidant all at once.

> Sam has lived inside these answers. With Lauren, sex came early and easily, and somehow made it harder to tell whether they actually loved each other. With Priya, they talked about everything except the future. With Kate, he wanted more than he knew how to ask for. Each time, the closeness of their bodies seemed to promise a closeness of souls that never quite arrived. Meanwhile a coworker has started spending his evenings with an AI girlfriend app. He jokes about it at lunch, but he doesn't stop.

Something in Sam—and in most of us—suspects that sex means more than our culture says it does. That is why betrayal wounds so deeply and why casual encounters so often leave people emptier than before. The generation offered more sexual freedom than any before it reports more loneliness and, by many measures, less real intimacy. In the United States, a quarter of men aged 15 to 34 told Gallup they had felt lonely a lot of the previous day, one of the highest rates among young men in the developed world.[1]

It has long been observed that human beings must worship something. When God is pushed out of the picture, that need does not disappear; it attaches itself to something else. Increasingly, people look to sex for what only worship can give: transcendence, union, the feeling of being fully known. Some New Age writers even speak of "sacred sexuality" as a way to unite body and soul. But sex cannot bear the weight of a god. Asked to carry everything, it collapses under the load, and the chaos at the human core only deepens.

Sam Is Not Alone

Sam's questions are not unusual. In a Harvard survey conducted in late 2022, 58 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 said they had lacked meaning or purpose in their lives during the previous month.[2] About three-quarters of humanity—some six billion people—is now online,[3] yet many feel more isolated than ever. That can look like apathy. It is better understood as hunger.

Every generation has searched for meaning in its own way. For Baby Boomers the quest was for significance: they assumed life had meaning and set out to make an impact. For Sam's generation, that quest can seem futile: "Why reach for significant impact when, deep down, I can't find any meaning in life?"

Each Generation's Search for Meaning

Generation	Born	The shape of the search
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	Grew up assuming life had meaning, though unsure what it was; set out to make a significant impact
Generation X	1965–1980	Grew up amid divorce, scandal and institutional failure; skeptical and self-reliant, searching for authenticity
Millennials	1981–1996	Came of age with the internet, the September 11 attacks and the 2008 financial crash; sought purpose in causes, careers and experiences
Generation Z	1997–2012	The first generation raised on smartphones; anxious and lonely, and often unsure that life has meaning at all
Generation Alpha	About 2013 onward	Raised with tablets and AI from infancy; their worldview is still forming

And yet there are signs of a turning. Many young people are reaching back to their grandparents' world in search of something solid: vinyl records and handwritten journals, ancient forms of worship, Orthodox and Catholic traditions, and the printed Bible. In 2025 the research firm Barna reported that the share of Gen Z adults who read the Bible weekly had jumped from 30 percent to 49 percent in a single year.[4] Barna also found men attending church more often than women for the first time in twenty-five years, with the widest gap among Millennials.[5] The hunger is real. The question is what will satisfy it.

The Road Ahead

This booklet follows Sam's questions. Part Two looks at the answers our age offers—technology, politics, personal truth, and the reshaping of beauty, time and reality—and asks why each one falls short. Part Three steps back to name the questions every worldview must answer and to ask how a worldview can be tested. Part Four, the heart of the booklet, explores the biblical worldview: not a list of rules, but a story that makes sense of the world and of us. We believe it is the most coherent

and the most beautiful answer to the questions Sam is asking—questions every generation has asked, and that are now being asked again. We close by returning to Sam, and to those who want to walk alongside people like him. A companion paper, *Understanding Suffering*, follows Sam into the problem of pain, and the *Head & Heart* reflection guide offers twelve discussion sessions on both papers.

PART TWO

How Our Age Answers—and Why the Answers Fall Short

Sam is not short of answers. His culture offers them everywhere: in his feeds and podcasts, in the classroom and the workplace. Few of them are announced as worldviews, but each one makes a claim about what is real, what matters and what will save us. Each contains a measure of truth. None, on its own, can bear the weight of a whole life.

> And so, Sam began to wonder whether any of the answers he had absorbed actually held up.

Answer One: Technology Will Save Us

> It was 2 a.m. when Sam typed the question into the AI chatbot on his phone: "What is the meaning of life?" The answer came back in seconds—balanced, articulate and kind. It summarized what philosophers and religions have said, suggested he look for purpose in relationships and personal growth, and gently recommended talking to a counselor. It was a good answer. It left him lonelier than before. The machine had read everything and believed nothing.

Modern science has always held out an unspoken promise: a longer, easier and safer life, along with the keys to understanding the mysteries of the universe and unleashing the creativity of the human imagination. That is no small claim, and science has delivered much of it. We live longer and more comfortably than any generation before us. Gene therapies now treat diseases once thought incurable, and brain implants have let paralyzed patients move a computer cursor by thought. Hundreds of millions of people talk every week with artificial intelligence systems that write, reason and even imitate empathy.

Yet life is not necessarily easier, and true security remains as elusive as ever. Our world is not safer:

- Nuclear danger has returned to the headlines. Russia has issued nuclear threats during its war in Ukraine, North Korea continues to expand its arsenal, and the 2025 strikes on Iran's nuclear sites showed how quickly a regional conflict can take on a nuclear dimension.
- Terrorism, from the attacks of September 11, 2001, onward, has shown how few people it takes to wound a nation.
- The world produces enough food to feed everyone on the planet, yet about 645 million people faced hunger in 2025.[6] War, power and greed—not a lack of food—keep it from reaching them, and famine has returned where conflict rages.
- Pollution of air, land and sea, along with a changing climate, is affecting the whole web of life on earth; tiny particles of plastic have now been found in human blood.[7]

- Infections that antibiotics once controlled are fighting back. Drug-resistant bacteria have killed at least a million people every year since 1990, and the yearly toll is projected to rise by nearly 70 percent by 2050.[8]

With each new advance, the potential for chaos grows. We have not been able to "engineer" human beings who can make the most of scientific breakthroughs without a matching growth in their capacity for destruction. A single trading algorithm can move world markets in minutes, and a cryptocurrency empire worth billions collapsed in days in 2022. Ransomware gangs—criminals who lock up computer systems and demand payment—have shut down hospitals and a major fuel pipeline, and AI now places in a single person's hands tools that once required a nation.

Still, the faith that science will save us persists, and new technologies have given it new life. Gene editing has moved from theory to medicine: the first therapy based on the gene-editing tool CRISPR was approved in 2023, and in 2018 a Chinese scientist produced the first gene-edited babies. Companies now offer to screen embryos for preferred traits. A "transhumanist" movement dreams of using technology to overcome aging and even death, and some technologists speak openly of "uploading" the human mind to a computer. Leaders of the AI industry promise that machines will soon cure disease and end scarcity—and some of the same leaders warn that those machines could escape human control.

Why it falls short: Science and technology are genuine gifts, but they make poor saviors. For all their progress, they have neither addressed nor changed the problems of the soul. They can extend a life but cannot tell us what a life is for. They can connect billions of people but cannot make any two of them love each other. Neither can do what Jesus Christ did: pay the ultimate penalty for human sin. Artificial intelligence sharpens the age-old question of what can truly save us, but it cannot answer it. A machine can process information, but it cannot forgive sin, and it cannot love us as God does.

Answer Two: The Right System Will Save Us

> Sam's group chat with his college friends had become a battlefield. Every news story split them into camps. One friend was sure the right policies would fix almost everything; another was sure the other side was destroying the country. Sam found himself agreeing with pieces of both and trusting neither. Scrolling through the comments one night, he noticed something: the people shouting loudest seemed to need their side to win in the way earlier generations had needed God.

For most of the twentieth century, two political and economic systems offered rival hopes for organizing resources and distributing goods and wealth. Capitalism and communism competed for the political and economic souls of whole nations. Both have shown their capacity for destruction and chaos.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 exposed the moral and intellectual rot of communism as never before. After seventy years of effort and brutal force, communism never moved beyond an

ideology of power: a select few controlled the destiny of the many, and ordinary people had no real way to seek justice. Its heirs have adapted rather than repented. China pairs markets with one-party control and digital surveillance, and Russia has slid into authoritarian rule and war.

When we first wrote this booklet in 1997, the great story of the age seemed to be the triumph of free markets over every rival. A quarter century later, the picture is more troubled. The 2008 financial crisis, the pandemic, inflation and widening inequality have shaken confidence in the system that seemed to have won. Capitalism and democracy fare little better than their rivals when they are cut off from a Judeo-Christian moral foundation—the shared moral heritage of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Human greed has an amazing ability to win the day. In the United States the wealthiest 1 percent now holds nearly a third of the nation's wealth,[9] and a handful of technology companies hold unprecedented power over information, commerce and attention. Trust has collapsed with it: only 17 percent of Americans now trust the federal government to do what is right just about always or most of the time.[10]

At the same time, the world has become both more connected and more divided. Global trade, travel and the internet bind nations together, yet nationalist movements rise alongside globalization, and one worldwide internet has splintered into countless tribes, each with its own heroes and enemies. In the Bible, humanity's first great attempt at unity was the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)—a monument to human achievement that ended in confusion and scattering. Our fractured age looks much the same.

Why it falls short: Politics matters, and justice is worth working for. But no system can change a human heart, and no party can bear the weight of our hope for meaning. The spread of the gospel has never depended on a particular form of government or economy; the church grew under Roman emperors and endures today under the watch of Chinese censors. The Christian calling is not to offer a rival political program but to live out a better way: a community shaped by Jesus' view of people and of wealth, where greed is resisted and needs are shared (Luke 12:15; Acts 4:32–35). At Pentecost, God reversed Babel: people from many nations heard the good news about Jesus, each in their own language (Acts 2:5–11). That is a unity that does not erase our differences, because it rests on something deeper than any nation or tribe (Galatians 3:28; Revelation 7:9).

This independence from every political system also challenges a popular American hope: that the nation can simply return to its "Christian" foundations. Many of the nation's founders drew on Christian moral ideas, and the church has shaped much that is good in American life. But how Christian were foundations that accepted slavery and the near-genocide of Native Americans, both driven in large part by greed? Insisting that America's roots are simply Christian can hide the true nature of the spiritual battle on our own soil, tie the gospel to a political program, and rob us of opportunities for genuine repentance and spiritual transformation.

Answer Three: Follow Your Own Truth

> Sam's sister, Maya, has her own answer. She checks her astrology app every morning, keeps a gratitude journal and talks about "manifesting" the life she wants. "You have to find your truth,

> Sam," she tells him. "Nobody else can tell you what's right for you." He envies her confidence. But that same week he watched footage of a hospital bombed in a war zone overseas, and he knew, in his gut, that it was evil. On what grounds could he say so, if every truth is private?

Relativism is the philosophy that there is no absolute truth. In this view, "right" and "wrong" are categories each person decides for themselves, morality has no objective basis, and any claim to universal truth is suspect. Today relativism often comes dressed as therapy and wellness. The answers to life are said to lie within ourselves. Feelings are the final authority, "my truth" settles arguments, and astrology apps offer the guidance people once sought from God.

Yet relativism wears a strange new face. People who deny any objective morality often hold their own moral convictions with fierce certainty. "My truth" replaces "the truth," and disagreement is felt not as an error but as an attack on one's identity. The result is not tolerance but a culture where everyone is a judge and no one can say on what basis.

Why it falls short: If truth is whatever each person decides, then no one can call anything evil—not cruelty, not injustice, not a bombed hospital. Yet almost no one can actually live that way. The moment we are wronged, we appeal to a standard we expect the other person to recognize. That inner sense of right and wrong is a clue. The Bible says that God's law is written into us: "the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (Romans 2:15). Sam's gut reaction to evil was not a private preference. It was a signal of a moral order he did not invent. Scripture warns of the confusion that follows when that order is denied: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20).

Answer Four: Reshape Beauty, Time and Reality

> On a weekend at the coast, far from the city lights, Sam lay on the sand and looked up. He had not seen so many stars since he was a child. On the drive home he listened to a popular podcast whose guest argued, quite seriously, that the universe is probably a computer simulation. Sam laughed at first. Then he wondered: if none of it is real, why had that sky made him feel so small, and at the same time so strangely addressed?

Our age does not only redefine truth. It is quietly redefining beauty, time and reality itself—the very framework within which a life makes sense.

Beauty. Beauty has long been associated with the pristine quality of nature, with purity and with all that is lovely to see. In many ways beauty is bound up with holiness. The psalmist longs "to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4) and calls us to "worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness" (Psalm 29:2). Today "authenticity" has replaced beauty as the cultural ideal. The full display of human emotion and behavior, with nothing held back, is considered beautiful simply because it is real. What might once have been called sordid, even evil, now qualifies as beauty because it is "authentic." At the same time, filters, cosmetic procedures and AI-generated images offer a perfection no real face can match. We are told to be real and shown what is not.

Time. A biblical view of time sees it as a line, not a circle: it moves forward, never repeats, and sets clear boundaries for the human soul and for the universe. “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). This life is not a dress rehearsal. Today, popular stories are built instead on the “multiverse,” where every choice spawns another reality and nothing is final; a film devoted to that idea, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2023. The infinite scroll of social media collapses past and future into an endless present. As a result, the link between choices and consequences seems to dissolve. Time becomes fluid, and nothing means anything—except whatever you want it to mean in the moment.

Reality. In the past, only philosophers argued over what is real. What was real was what existed in time and space and could be observed, measured or otherwise known. Now reality is giving way to the virtual. Headsets, video games and social media create worlds in which all the senses are engaged but consequences seem disconnected from choices. Artificial intelligence can produce lifelike images, voices and video of events that never happened. A popular idea even holds that our whole universe may be a computer simulation.

Popular culture also enlists quantum physics—the science of the very small—to support this redefinition. On social media, quantum language is used to promise that we can “manifest” a new reality or shift into parallel versions of our lives. The physics does not support these claims. Strange quantum effects, such as a particle seeming to be in more than one state at once, belong to the world of atoms and smaller particles; at the scale of people, they wash out through a process physicists call decoherence. Yet the emotional and intellectual groundwork is in place for many young people to be lost in this sea.

If people don’t know what is real, nothing seems to matter. When nothing can be said to make objective sense, nothing can be called senseless either. Any basis for truth is gone, and chaos rushes in to fill the void. Nihilism—the belief that life has no inherent meaning, purpose or value—has become increasingly popular among intellectuals and the artists who shape our culture.

Why it falls short: Life without meaning is not simply impractical, or even unsafe or unwise. It leads to chaos and despair. But human beings cannot live without meaning, so they keep searching for it. The Bible’s answer is not that nothing is real. Scripture affirms two realities: the visible, material world that God created and called good, and the invisible spiritual world (Colossians 1:16; 2 Corinthians 4:18). Both are real. What is false is the virtual counterfeit that offers experience without consequences—and the cynicism that says the stars mean nothing at all.

What the Answers Have in Common

Each of these answers takes something good and asks it to be God. Technology is a wonderful tool and a poor savior. Politics matters, but no system can redeem the human heart. Our inner sense of truth is real, but it points beyond itself. Beauty, time and reality are gifts, but they cannot hold their shape once they are cut loose from the One who made them.

Together, these turbulent undercurrents have made our era an Age of Deception. We are losing our grip on what is truly real. As a society we have lost our moorings; as individuals we have been cut adrift. The visible symptoms, at the personal level, are deep loneliness and a continuing loss of meaning—the belief that nothing really matters.

> And so, Sam began to wonder whether he had been asking his questions in the wrong places. Maybe the problem was not that there were no answers, but that he had only ever seen the pieces. He had never looked at the whole picture at once.

PART THREE

The Questions Every Worldview Answers

Think of a society as a house. Its institutions—banking, transportation, housing, commerce, government—are the rooms above ground, evident to everyone. Beneath them, like a basement, lie the cultural identities we are loyal to: ethnicity, nation, language, generation, and now the tribes we join online. But the whole house rests on a foundation that is the hardest of all to see. That foundation is worldview.

A worldview works through two kinds of reasoning. Conceptual reasoning is what we *think* about the great questions of life. Emotional reasoning is what we *feel* about them—the deep convictions we may never put into words but recognize instantly when they are challenged. Together they form the assumptions people live by and use to imagine the future, long before they ever argue for them. Everyone has a worldview. The only question is whether it is examined, and whether it is true.

Whether or not a person has ever put it into words, every worldview gives answers to a common set of questions. They fall into at least six broad categories. Sam has been asking all of them, in his own words.

Six Questions Every Worldview Must Answer

Category	The questions	How Sam asks it
1. Questions of reality	Is what we experience real or an illusion? What is consciousness? Can what I see on a screen be trusted? Could a machine be conscious?	*"Is there more to the world than what I can see?"*
2. Foundations of reality	What are matter and energy? What are time and movement? What are space, and cause and effect?	*"Is my life going anywhere, or am I just drifting?"*
3. Authorities of reality	Where does meaning come from? What are truth, beauty and power? What should guide my decisions, and who can I trust?	*"Who gets to say what is true—and what does any of this means?"*
4. Relational realities	Does God exist? What is human nature? Do spirit beings exist? How should the young be raised? Can a relationship with a machine be real?	*"Is anyone really there—God, or anyone at all?"*
5. Dilemmas of reality	Why do good and evil exist? What are sin, shame and guilt? Why is there pain and suffering? What are judgment and mercy, life and death?	*"How do I tell good from evil?" "Why do people suffer?"*
6. Dependencies in reality	What are our basic needs? What is love? Where are security, significance and strength found? How should wealth be managed? What makes human life valuable?	*"Who am I, and what do I really need?"*

These are not new questions. Every generation has asked them, and every culture has offered its answers. What is new is how many people today are asking them at once, with so few reliable guides.

How to Weigh a Worldview

If every worldview answers these questions, how can we tell which answers are true? Thoughtful people have long used a few simple tests:

- **Coherence.** Do its answers fit together, or do they contradict one another?
- **Correspondence.** Does it match the world as we actually experience it—our moral sense, our longing for meaning, the reality of both beauty and evil?
- **Livability.** Can a person actually live by it, day after day, without quietly borrowing from some other worldview?
- **Completeness.** Does it answer all of the questions, or only the convenient ones? Is mixing worldviews a better option?

The answers we looked at in Part Two struggle with these tests. Relativism cannot be lived consistently; few people remain relativists after they have been betrayed. A purely material view of the world cannot explain why a sky full of stars feels like a message. The faith that technology will save us does not fit the evidence of our own century. In the pages that follow, we make the case that the biblical worldview passes these tests—not because it explains away every mystery, but because it makes sense of more of the world, and more of us, than any alternative.

PART FOUR

The Biblical Worldview: A Story That Holds Together

When many people hear the phrase "biblical worldview," they imagine a list of rules. But the Bible does not begin with rules. It begins with a story—a story that starts before time, runs through all of human history, and reaches into eternity. Within that story, the rules make sense, because they describe how the world actually works and how human beings were made to flourish.

C. S. Lewis once put it this way: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."[11] A true worldview is like sunrise over a darkened planet. It does not answer every question at once, but it lights up the landscape, so that the pieces we already knew—our longings, our guilt, our sense of beauty, our hunger for love—suddenly fit together.

> Sam's first real look at that story came through an unlikely door. Marcus, a guy from his Thursday basketball game, invited him to a small group of men who met on Tuesday nights to read the Gospel of John. Sam went expecting a sales pitch. Instead he found an electrician, a graduate student and a retired Marine asking the same questions he was. "Nobody here has it all figured out," Marcus told him. "But the story does. Come see whether it holds up."

The Story in Four Acts

The Bible's story unfolds in four great acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. Before the first act, though, stands the Author.

CREATION → FALL → REDEMPTION → CONSUMMATION

Before the Beginning: The God Who Is Love

At the center of the biblical worldview is the Triune God—one God eternally existing in three distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is self-existent; He depends on nothing outside Himself. He is transcendent, above and beyond creation, and immanent, present everywhere and actively involved in all He has made. He is holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, just and deeply personal. Unlike the universe, God has no beginning and no end. He exists outside of time and directs it according to His sovereign will and perfect love.

This has a remarkable implication for a lonely generation. Before there was a world, there was love. Within the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Spirit have always known and delighted in one another; Jesus spoke of the Father's love for Him, saying, "you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). That is why the Bible can say simply, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Relationship is not an accident that happened to evolve. It is the deepest reality there is. Sam's ache for connection is not a malfunction. It is an echo of the God in whose image he was made.

Act One: Creation

Out of that overflowing love, God created. The physical universe is not a product of random chance but a deliberate masterpiece that God spoke into existence *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. The vast expanse of space, stars and galaxies displays the glory, scale and intelligence of its Maker: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The universe operates under orderly laws established by God, which is why science is possible at all. And because those laws are His, He remains free within His creation. At various times and within His purposes, God has worked miracles that override the ordinary order of nature.

God also created a vast spiritual realm, populated by beings we do not normally see. Angels are holy messengers and warriors, created to worship God, carry out His commands and serve His people; at times they have been visible to human beings. The Bible also describes demons: fallen angels, led by Satan, who rebelled against God before the dawn of human history. Their power is real, but it is strictly limited by God's sovereignty.

The earth, with its intricate and interconnected living systems, was designed as a harmonious, life-sustaining home. And at the crown of creation, God made human beings:

> *So God created man in his own image,*
> *in the image of God he created him;*
> *male and female he created them.*
> —Genesis 1:27

To be made in the image of God—the *Imago Dei*—is to bear a family resemblance to the Creator. It gives every person inherent dignity, value and moral responsibility, regardless of ability, productivity or popularity. Each person is a unity of body and soul, made to know God and to enjoy Him. Humanity was given a twofold calling: to live in fellowship with God and to care for the earth and its creatures as His stewards. When it was all complete, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Creation also gives sex its meaning. From the beginning, the union of man and woman was more than two bodies coming together: "a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Sex was designed as the bodily seal of a covenant—a lifelong promise of faithfulness—uniting two whole persons, body and soul. That is why it can never be merely recreational, and why it was never meant to bear the weight of worship. Its deepest purpose points beyond itself, to the love between Christ and His people (Ephesians 5:31–32).

Act Two: The Fall

The story quickly takes a tragic turn. Tempted by Satan, the first human beings rebelled against God, desiring to be like God, knowing good and evil for themselves, rather than trusting their Creator (Genesis 3:5). The consequences rippled through everything. Sin—missing the mark of God's good design—brought suffering, death, spiritual blindness and shame into the world. Relationships fractured: between people and God, between man and woman, between parents and

children, between humanity and the natural world. Even creation itself was subjected to decay and disaster. As the apostle Paul wrote, “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22).

The Fall explains something every honest person knows: the world is both beautiful and broken, and so are we. Sam had felt it all his life—in his parents’ divorce, in relationships that promised more than they delivered, in a news feed full of cruelty and suffering, and in his own capacity to hurt people he cared about. The Bible does not flatter us: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But neither does it despise us. We are fallen image-bearers—ruined masterpieces that still bear the marks of the Artist. God gave us free will and chose not to remove it or the consequences after the fall.

Act Three: Redemption

God did not abandon His world. At the center of history, He entered it in person: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus of Nazareth was fully God and fully human. He lived the life we were meant to live, healed the sick, welcomed outsiders and spoke with an authority no one had heard before. Then He did what no system, technology or self-improvement plan could ever do. He died on a cross, bearing the penalty for human sin, and rose bodily from the grave, defeating sin, death and the powers of evil.

This is the heart of the good news. Redemption is not a reward for those who have their lives together; it is a rescue for those who do not. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Jesus’ invitation is as open to Sam as it was to the fishermen and tax collectors of Galilee: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

We live now in this third act. It is marked by the spread of this good news to every nation, by the Holy Spirit living within those who trust Christ, and by an ongoing spiritual battle for human hearts. It is an age of grace—and an age of decision.

Act Four: Consummation

The story is heading somewhere. History will conclude with the physical return of Jesus Christ. The dead will be raised for final judgment, and every wrong will be put right. Satan and his demons will be defeated for good. The present universe will be purged of decay and transformed into “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1)—a physical, eternal kingdom where God dwells visibly with His people forever. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

The Bible speaks plainly about two destinies. Heaven is the dwelling place of God and His holy angels; for those who belong to Christ, it is a place of rest that culminates in the resurrection and a tangible, perfected life in God’s presence. Hell is a place of eternal separation from God, originally prepared for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). It is the final, just consequence of rebellion

against God and the ultimate confinement of evil, where God's mercy is withdrawn and His justice is carried out. The seriousness of hell measures how seriously God takes evil—and how much it cost Him to rescue us from it.

Because the story has an ending, our lives have a direction. Time is not a meaningless loop or an endless scroll. Every choice matters, because every life is moving toward a real future.

How the Story Answers Our Questions

With the story in view, we can return to the six questions every worldview must answer. What follows is not an exhaustive theology, but a sketch of how the biblical story speaks to each one, including the questions Sam has been asking.

1. Questions of Reality: Is Anything Real?

Is what we experience real, or an illusion?

What we experience is profoundly real and truly exists. The Bible rejects the idea that the material world is a "matrix," an illusion or a spiritual trap. In Genesis 1:31, God looked at everything He had made and declared it "very good." The physical universe has genuine substance because it was spoken into existence by a real God. That matters more than it might seem. If the world is real, then our choices are real, our bodies matter, and the people around us are not avatars.

Is there more to the world than what I can see?

Yes. Scripture affirms two realities, both created by God: the visible, material world and an invisible, spiritual one (Colossians 1:16). "The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). The ache Sam felt under the stars—the sense of being small and yet somehow addressed—fits this picture. The Bible says God "has put eternity into man's heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We were made for more than what we can see, and part of us knows it.

What is consciousness? How real are dreams?

Human consciousness—our capacity to know ourselves, to reason, to make moral choices and to relate to God—is rooted in our creation in the image of God. It flows from the breath of life God gave the first human being (Genesis 2:7). Animals share in conscious life, but only human beings are made in the image of God. Dreams are natural activities of the mind, though Scripture shows that God has at times used them to reveal Himself (Numbers 12:6). Even so, they remain secondary to waking reality and to God's written Word.

Can what I see on a screen be trusted? Could a machine be conscious?

Images on a screen call for discernment; fallen human beings can use technology to deceive, manipulate and distort the truth (Proverbs 14:15). As for machines, a computer can simulate intelligence, process data and mimic human language, but it is not a living being and has no God-given soul. From a biblical perspective, it cannot have genuine self-awareness, moral agency,

spiritual awareness or a relationship with God. Sam's 2 a.m. chatbot could imitate understanding, but there was no one there to understand him.

2. Foundations of Reality: Is My Life Going Anywhere?

What are matter and energy?

Matter and energy are the building blocks of the physical creation, called into being out of nothing by the word of God (Hebrews 11:3). They are not divine in themselves (contrary to pantheism, the belief that everything is God), nor are they eternal. They are finite realities, sustained moment by moment, down to the smallest particle, by Jesus Christ: "he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). The order scientists discover is not an accident. It is the signature of a faithful Creator.

What are time and movement?

Time is a created, linear framework with a definite beginning (Genesis 1:1) and a final culmination (1 Corinthians 15:24). It is not cyclical or an endless loop. History is not drifting; it is moving forward under God's sovereign control toward the restoration of all things. God is the One "declaring the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). For Sam, this means his twenties are not a holding pattern. His days are part of a real story with a real destination.

What are space, and cause and effect?

Space is the canvas the Creator stretched out to display His immense glory (Psalm 19:1). Cause and effect operate as orderly, reliable laws established by a God of order, so our actions have real and predictable physical consequences. Scripture teaches that the moral order works the same way: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Choices matter because the world is not random.

3. Authorities of Reality: Who Gets to Say What Is True?

Where does meaning come from? What is the meaning of life, work, sex, wealth and recreation?

Meaning is not invented by each individual; it is given by God. That is not a burden but a relief. Sam does not have to manufacture a purpose from scratch and hope it holds. He can receive one.

- **Life:** to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1, a classic 1647 summary of Christian teaching).
- **Work:** a dignified calling, given before the Fall, to cultivate creation and reflect the creativity of God (Genesis 2:15). Even spreadsheets can be done for His glory and for the good of others.
- **Sex:** a sacred physical and emotional union, reserved for the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman, reflecting Christ's love for the church (Ephesians 5:31–32).
- **Wealth:** a temporary trust to be managed with radical generosity, to bless others and honor God (1 Timothy 6:17–18).

- **Recreation:** joyful rest that acknowledges human limits and celebrates God's provision (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

What are truth and honesty? What are language and communication?

Truth is absolute, anchored in the unchanging character of God. Remarkably, the Bible presents truth not only as a set of propositions but as a Person: Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Honesty is bringing our words and actions into line with that reality. Language and communication are gifts from a God who speaks, designed to build up community, express truth and worship the Creator rather than to deceive (Ephesians 5:6).

What is beauty? What are intelligence and emotion?

Beauty is an objective attribute of God Himself (Psalm 27:4), reflected in the design of creation to stir wonder and worship. "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder; it is a window onto the character of the One who made the beholder. Intelligence is the capacity to think God's thoughts after Him, and emotions are the soul's vibrant capacities to feel, love, grieve and rejoice, mirroring the emotional depth of God Himself.

What are power and weakness?

True power belongs to God and is perfectly expressed in sacrificial love and justice. Human power is a temporary trust meant for service, not exploitation. Weakness is human limitation, which, when humbly acknowledged, becomes the very canvas on which God's perfect strength is displayed (2 Corinthians 12:9). In a culture that hides weakness behind filters, this is good news.

What should guide our decisions? Who can I trust, and why?

The foundations of wise decision-making are the fear of the Lord—a reverent awe of God—and the guidance of Scripture (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 119:105). Ultimate trust belongs to the Triune God alone, because He is perfectly holy and loving and cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). Human authorities can be trusted only secondarily, insofar as their character and counsel agree with God's Word. For a generation that trusts almost no institution, here is One who is utterly trustworthy.

4. Relational Realities: Is Anyone Really There?

Does God exist? Who is God?

Yes, God exists. He is the eternal, self-existent Creator who reveals Himself as one God in three distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere, loving, just and deeply personal. He is not a distant force or a cosmic principle. He knows Sam by name.

What is human nature? What are relationships meant to be?

Human beings are uniquely created in the image of God—exalted in dignity, but fractured and corrupted by a fallen, sinful nature (Romans 3:23). Relationships between individuals and within society are designed for deep community, mutual support and justice, because they reflect the

eternal relationship within God Himself. But they need God's redemption to overcome the selfishness introduced by the Fall.

Do spirit beings exist? Who or what are they?

Yes. They are supernatural beings created by God. They include holy angels, who serve God and protect His people, and demons (fallen angels) led by Satan, who work to deceive, destroy and oppose God's kingdom until their final judgment. At times, though infrequently, they are visible to humans. The spiritual battle is real, but its outcome is not in doubt.

What is the nature of other life, such as animals and plants?

Non-human life is a good creation designed to bring God glory, display His vast creativity and sustain human life. Animals and plants have biological life, but they do not bear the image of God or possess eternal souls. They are placed under human care and are to be treated with kindness, not cruelty (Proverbs 12:10).

How should the young be cared for and brought into society?

Children are to be nurtured, protected and taught within the family (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). Parents hold the primary responsibility to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), bringing them into the wider community of faith and into society as morally responsible adults. Sam's parents' divorce did not cancel God's design; it showed how much the design matters, and how deeply its breaking hurts. The good news is that God is also a Father to those whose earthly families have come apart.

Can a relationship with a machine be real?

No. A relationship with a machine is simulated. True relationship requires a two-way connection between persons made in the image of God, so an emotional attachment to a machine is an artificial substitute that ultimately isolates a person from genuine human community. Sam's coworker is not foolish; he is lonely. The answer to his loneliness is not a better program but real people, and the God who made them.

5. Dilemmas of Reality: How Do I Tell Good from Evil?

What are good and evil? Why do they exist?

Good is whatever agrees with the perfect, holy character and will of God. Evil is not a thing in itself but a corruption, distortion or absence of good, arising from the willful rebellion of free moral beings—first angels, then humans—against God. God permits evil for a time in order ultimately to display His justice, mercy and glory through Jesus Christ. This is why Sam could name the bombing of a hospital as evil and mean it. His conscience was not inventing a rule; it was recognizing one.

What are sin, shame and guilt? What are moral wholeness, peace and joy?

Sin is missing the mark of God's moral standard. Guilt is the objective, legal reality of having broken God's law; shame is the painful emotional weight of that brokenness that pervades our identity. Our

culture tries to remove guilt by denying the law, and it tries to cover shame by curating a better image. Neither works for long. The gospel does something different: it deals with guilt by forgiveness and with shame by welcoming us as children of God. Moral wholeness, peace and joy are the beautiful fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), made possible when a person is declared righteous and reconciled to God through faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

What are pain and pleasure? Why do they exist?

Pleasure is a gift from God, designed to bring joy and gratitude when enjoyed within His boundaries. Pain is a biological warning system, but it is also a stark consequence of a world broken by the Fall. God uses pain redemptively to discipline, mature and draw people back to Himself. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."[12] For a fuller treatment, see the companion paper *Understanding Suffering*, which follows Sam through grief and the hard questions suffering raises about God's justice, love, power, wisdom, goodness and joy.

What are judgment and mercy?

Judgment is God's holy, necessary and right response to sin, ensuring that ultimate justice is done. Mercy is God's compassionate withholding of the punishment a person justly deserves. The two meet perfectly at the cross of Jesus Christ, where God's judgment against sin was fully satisfied, so that His mercy can be freely offered to all. Only a worldview with both real judgment and real mercy can take evil seriously and still offer hope.

What are life and death?

Life is a gift from God, the Author of life. Physical death is the temporary separation of the soul from the body—an enemy that entered the world through sin (1 Corinthians 15:26). Spiritual death is eternal separation from God's presence, while eternal life is the full restoration of soul and body in the unending, glorious presence of the Creator.

6. Dependencies in Reality: What Do I Really Need?

What are our basic human needs? What is love?

Basic human needs are both physical (food, water, shelter) and deeply spiritual (reconciliation with God, purpose, community). Love is not merely a passing emotion; it is a sacrificial choice. It is defined by the very nature of God (1 John 4:8) and was demonstrated once and for all when Jesus Christ laid down His life for His people (John 15:13).

How are the needs for security, significance and strength to be met?

These deep needs cannot be met by wealth, status or self-improvement.

- **Security** is found in the unshakable promise of God's adopting love.
- **Significance** is found in being uniquely called as His image-bearer, servant and friend.

- **Strength** is found in relying on the power of the Holy Spirit living within us rather than on human effort.

How should material wealth be managed in a world of need, greed and beauty?

Material wealth is to be managed as a stewardship. Christians recognize that everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1), so they hold resources loosely to resist personal greed, share generously to relieve human need, and use resources to cultivate beauty that honors the Creator.

Who am I? What makes human life valuable?

This is where Sam's journey began, and where the story speaks most personally. The ideal human identity is to be a redeemed child of God, being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. A human being is a complex unity of physical body and immortal soul. What makes human life uniquely and unalterably valuable is not our usefulness, intelligence or economic output, and certainly not our follower count. It is the fact that every human life is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6) and deeply loved by the Creator. Sam is not the sum of his clicks. He is known, wanted and loved.

Why the Picture Holds Together

Step back and look at the whole. One story answers all six sets of questions, and the answers support one another. The same God who made a real world also gives it meaning, grounds its moral order, explains its brokenness and promises its restoration. The Bible says of Christ, "in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). That is true of the universe, and it is true of a worldview.

It explains both our greatness and our brokenness. Other worldviews tend to explain one and not the other. Some exalt human beings as gods-in-the-making and cannot account for the evil we do. Others reduce us to animals or machines and cannot account for the love, beauty and moral courage we are capable of. The biblical story holds both together: we are image-bearers, and we are fallen. That is exactly what we find when we look at history, at the news and in the mirror.

It makes sense of our longings. We long for meaning, for love that lasts, for justice, for beauty that does not fade. If the world were only matter in motion, those longings would be strange accidents. C. S. Lewis reasoned differently: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[13] Sixteen centuries ago Augustine prayed, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[14] Sam's restlessness is not a sign that he is broken beyond repair. It is a sign of what he was made for.

It lets us name evil and still offer hope. Relativism cannot call evil as evil. Some religions call evil an illusion. The biblical story calls evil exactly what it is and then does something astonishing about it: God Himself enters our suffering, bears the cost of our sin, and promises a day when every tear is wiped away. Justice and mercy are not traded off against each other; they meet at the cross.

It roots love in reality. In a universe without God, love is a chemical event or an evolutionary strategy. In the biblical story, love is older than the stars, because the Father, the Son and the Spirit have loved one another from all eternity. For a lonely generation, that changes everything. We were not made to be alone, because the God who made us has never been alone.

It can actually be lived. The biblical worldview does not require us to pretend that our moral convictions are mere preferences, that our bodies do not matter, or that our choices have no consequences. It lets us live in the world as we actually find it. And it does not ask us to save ourselves. It rests not on our performance but on events in history—above all, the resurrection of Jesus, on which the apostle Paul said the whole faith stands or falls (1 Corinthians 15:14–17).

It is, quite simply, a lovely picture: a world made by love, broken by sin, rescued at great cost, and headed for restoration. It does not answer every mystery. But like the sunrise, it lets us see everything else.

CONCLUSION

Back to Sam

> Sam still goes to the Tuesday group. He has not tied up every loose end, and he does not pretend to. Some weeks he argues; some weeks he mostly listens. But reading the Gospel of John with a handful of other men, he has met a Jesus he did not expect—one who asked people what they were looking for, who wept at a friend's grave, and who invited the curious to come and see for themselves.
>
> Something has shifted. He no longer feels like the sum of his clicks. He called his father last month, for the first time in a long while, and they talked for an hour. He still analyzes supply chains, but he has started to see even that work as part of a larger story. And one night, lying awake with the same questions he had asked as a boy, he prayed for the first time in years. It was not eloquent. It was barely more than, "If You are there, I want to know You."
>
> Sam's questions have not gone away. But they no longer feel like a void. They feel like a doorway.

For Those Who Walk Alongside Sam

Every society has a basic worldview: a lens through which it interprets what it takes to be reality. Understanding that worldview is crucial to presenting the good news of Christ in a way that can be heard. If we ignore our listeners' point of view, we will come across as insensitive, rude or simply irrelevant. Understanding worldview also helps us find a society's deep questions, where people are most open to the gospel.

Even as some young people show fresh interest in the Bible and the church, Christianity in its public form is widely seen as irrelevant, and about three in ten American adults now claim no religion at all.[15] Part of the reason is that much of our theology still answers the questions of an earlier age. The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s asked, "How can a guilty sinner be made right with a holy God?" That question remains true and vital. But many people today, like Sam, begin elsewhere: "Who am I?" "Is anything real?" "Does anything matter?" "How can my shame be covered?" The gospel answers each of these, but we have rarely learned to start where people are.

Our church structures, too, often still resemble those of a farming culture: built around a single weekly gathering in one building, with rhythms shaped by a settled, rural way of life and a sharp divide between clergy and everyone else. Meanwhile people live scattered, mobile and online lives. Sam did not first meet the gospel in a sanctuary. He met it at a pickup basketball game, through a friend who invited him to read and to ask questions. Christianity is also caricatured by some as a hate group that deserves no place in the society now taking shape—a caricature made easier by the real failures and abuses of some churches and leaders. The answer is not defensiveness but faithfulness, humility and love.

The questions of our day reach further back than those of the Reformation—to the nature of reality, time and personhood—and further forward, to minds made of silicon. Yet they are never beyond the reach of Scripture. The gospel will shine with fresh splendor for this generation and the next if we dare to listen to the questions being asked now and wrestle honestly with the assumptions being challenged.

For small groups, classes and mentors, *Head & Heart: A Reflection Guide for Understanding Worldview and Understanding Suffering* offers six 45-minute sessions on this booklet (Sessions 1–6) and six more on its companion paper, *Understanding Suffering* (Sessions 7–12). Each session needs no preparation beyond reading the assigned section.

The ray of hope is the risen Christ Himself. He holds "the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18). He is the Lord of history, who declares "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10), and He has promised to build His church so that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). His purposes and plans will prevail.

Notes

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Sam is a composite character, drawn from the experiences of many young adults. Birth years for Baby Boomers through Generation Z follow the Pew Research Center; the starting year for Generation Alpha is approximate.

Companion resources: Understanding Suffering *(October 2026) continues Sam's story and explores a Christian view of pain and suffering.* Head & Heart: A Reflection Guide for Understanding Worldview and Understanding Suffering *(October 2026) offers twelve 45-minute discussion sessions on both papers.*

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