

# **LIFE'S DEEPEST QUESTION**

**A 52-step Guide to Get Wisdom  
by Analyzing, Approaching, and Accessing**

**DR. DOUGLAS SHAW**

LIFE'S DEEPEST QUESTION

published by Full Cycle Publishers

© 2005 by Douglas Shaw

International Standard Book Number: 0-9779661-090000

Cover design by Image Studios

rob@imagestudios.net

Scripture quotations are taken from the KJV—*King James Version*. Authorized King James Version;

THE MESSAGE. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group;

NIV—*New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. All rights reserved.

NKJV—*New King James Version*, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission. Additional references, acknowledgements and source credits for this published work are identified at [www.lifesdeepestquestion.com/references](http://www.lifesdeepestquestion.com/references)

For information:  
Full Cycle Publishers  
Post Office Box C  
Colorado Springs, CO 80901-2901

## PREFACE

Dear Reader:

I want to coach and guide you through a series of life's deepest questions to help you arrive at some life-changing personal answers. This book only has seven topics, and yet you will find in it some of the most challenging, probing and profound questions you will ever consider. I believe it contains the incremental information you will need to make increasingly wise choices that can lead to greater productivity, even immeasurable joy and extraordinary fulfillment in your personal life.

Thousands of individuals in nations across the globe are applying the answers and truths found in this book and seeing amazing results on a daily basis.

Will you join me in this exploration as together we ask and answer some of life's deepest questions?

I hope you will!

*Douglas Shaw*

To all who are searching through the really important questions—are willing to analyze,  
approach and access even challenging issues—are longing to know who they really are  
and what their real potential is—are wanting to maximize their potential,  
have wisdom and experience life to its fullest ...  
the questions and the answers are here for you!



Without a veteran staff who specialize in asking the really important questions, the  
friendship and skillful contributions of Mark Olsen, Denny Yoder, Larry Hargrave, Rob  
Huff, and the ongoing encouragement, love and support of my family, the theme and  
message of this book would not be what it is.

I am very thankful for this team effort and the potential this book can have  
in the life of each reader.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Deep Question 1 .....	6
Deep Topic 1	Did someone create reality, or is it just an illusion?..... Deep Questions 2-8	9
Deep Topic 2	Did this Creator design my life to have any real importance?..... Deep Questions 9-13	17
Deep Topic 3	Aren't good and evil just relative concepts?..... Deep Questions 14-20	23
Deep Topic 4	How do I achieve wisdom?..... Deep Questions 21-27	30
Deep Topic 5	What does God want with me?..... Deep Questions 28-34	38
Deep Topic 6	What makes the Christian God so different?..... Deep Questions 35-41	45
Deep Topic 7	How can the Christian God make me different?..... Deep Questions 42-48	53
Conclusion:	Others, Church, Faith and Your Answer..... Deep Questions 49-52	59
	Further Reading.....	66
	Definition of Key Terms.....	67
	Topical References.....	74
	Biography of Author.....	79

## **Introduction**

### **Life's Deepest Question**

*Are you brave enough to plunge in?*

Life today dangles plenty of trivial questions. Matters that don't *matter*. Pursuits that lead nowhere. Debates over nothing.

In fact, you could very easily spend your whole life just “keeping up” with the demands of modern living without once braving a single issue of lasting consequence. Without once digging down to that layer of wisdom and purpose that alone gives human existence true meaning.

Without once confronting life's deepest question, or any of the dozens of vital questions which lead up to it.

It's almost the definition of a “wasted life.”

*What about you?* Do you long to acquire wisdom? Transformation?

In your pursuit of a truly deeper life, do you have what it takes to go places others are content to walk past? Do you have the courage to ask—and seek answers for—the questions that make others blush, stutter, and avoid even asking at any cost ...until, at last they are on their deathbeds?

Do you have the fortitude to challenge even the certainties of your home culture that may have once seemed like unshakeable truth?

Mind you, these questions are not without huge benefits for your education and your professional future, either.

The *Harvard Business Review* published a groundbreaking article on one of the personal qualities the future will soon demand of its leaders. It coined a term, which will likely take its place as one of those catchwords on everyone's lips just a few short years from now.

It's called “*deep smarts*.”

You could define this upcoming buzzword any number of ways. But essentially it means that in addition to intelligence, talent and discipline, you've demonstrated a layer of understanding that goes far beyond the mere mastery of your field. You've shown the wisdom to realize that rote learning is only the beginning. You've expanded your intellectual repertoire to include those profound matters which even science now acknowledges as an essential part of the universe. In other words, “*deep smarts*” means that you're wise and spiritual in addition to having talent and intelligence.

And in the world of tomorrow where the abstract and theoretical increasingly become pop culture in the blink of an eye, “*deep smarts*” will soon take their place as prerequisites for truly successful careers—to say nothing of a wisdom-filled life.

So I invite you to take a journey with me through life's deepest questions to see where this courage will take you. This isn't about brainwashing or coercion. It's about freely asking the deepest questions of life and bravely investigating their answers.

You'll be free to launch into further, wider investigations of any single question addressed here. There are 52 bite-sized questions with discussions, each with their own launching point to the next, deeper level. Each of seven groups of questions is part of a

deeper topic question that you can tackle as a week's reading or simply a topical heading. And each group features its own deep question which leads to the next and ultimately to the grandparent of them all: *Life's Deepest Question*. To think through each point, you can take a week, a year, or one per day for a semester's worth of illumination in less than two months. Or you can race right on through in a single sitting.

But get ready—buckle up your inner seat belt. Exercising the discipline to complete these questions is certain to unlock insights, which will lead to new understandings. It will be personal. It could prove life-changing. Almost certainly, it will affect you and your career for the rest of your life.

Are you ready?

Let's test the waters ...

The beginning of wisdom is found in doubting; by doubting we come to the question, and by seeking we may come upon the truth. — Pierre Abelard

### **Deep Question 1: What are three of life's greatest choices?**

You've heard it before: Life is a series of choices. At times everyone makes wrong choices and then suffers the consequences. However, by the same token, we can make right choices and enjoy the advantages that flow from them.

But which choices will have the most powerful impact on your life and your future?

Three of the most important choices you will ever make are: who you marry and how you respond to your mate; your vocation or career; and what you believe:

1. *Choose your mate with care. If you are already married, learn to value and choose to respect your mate in ways that help insure a meaningful and successful relationship.*

The person you marry and how you relate to that person will be a determining factor and influence in attaining the potential for achieving your dreams and desires in the future. In fact, your choices related to your mate will have great impact on the life ahead of you. Yet, incredibly, many people give less thought and consideration to their choice of a mate or their choices in relating to their mates than to their choice of an automobile!

So ask for and use wisdom in your choices regarding your husband or wife. Take the time to make sure you're building compatibility in the everyday challenges of life. Examine yourself and don't act until you're satisfied that you're choices are contributing to a commitment for life. Even in an arranged marriage or in a marriage where adjustments have not been easy, the time-honored principles regarding marriage and choices you make to show love and respect to each other can open the door to a great relationship with your mate.

A happy and well-adjusted family life demands love and respect from its members. Husbands and wives are to love each other, living in a relationship of mutual submission. Children are called to obey their parents. Parents are to teach, guide, and discipline their children with love and for their children's best interests.

Does it sound like a domestic cliché? Perhaps, but believe me: Choices are important and there's nothing cool about a miserable family life.

2. *Choose a vocation or career that fits you.*

Every human being ever born has been gifted with some special ability—and that definitely includes you! Everyone has at least one talent to develop and use in order to make a living, be fulfilled and contribute to others. In fact, even your ability to achieve your goals and dreams is a gift.

However, it has been said that plans don't work; people do. You can plan *and* work hard to see your dreams come true.

*3. You are most influenced by what you choose to believe.*

All human beings have inner battles at times regarding what they believe and how they respond to the beliefs held by others. If you do not know what you believe or if your deeply held beliefs are not connected to an ultimate measurable truth or functional reality, then at times you may feel disconnected—like a spiritual orphan. If you embrace the belief that human beings are just collections of electromagnetic impulses, you'll increasingly experience life as a seemingly soulless organism. If you believe that we're here to indulge ourselves selfishly as long as we can, you'll behave as a selfish hedonist. But if you can comprehend and embrace a structure for a new capacity to love and show others acceptance, you'll be able to accept yourself and others, and find a greater sense of personal happiness and increasing fulfillment.

Our beliefs help feed an inner spiritual hunger that's deep within each one of us. And life asks our inner beliefs to carry a heavy load: Our beliefs must provide us with hope as we sail through the challenges and uncertainties of life: poor choices, disease, suffering, death, the future, and so many more.

As you read and reflect on these deep questions, our basic need to know what we believe and even the reasons we believe what we do are far deeper than any of the “ologies” we study—like zoology, pathology, meteorology, paleontology, mythology, theology, psychology or even otolaryngology.

Weak and ineffective family and marriage relationships can be draining and even miserable. They collectively contribute to the downfall of any society, not its betterment. Without rewarding vocational opportunities and career satisfaction in your employment, your basic needs may be met, but you can be personally unfulfilled and dissatisfied. If you are not purposeful and thoughtful about discovering, and even at times challenging, what you believe, your life will have a missing spiritual dimension.

Ultimately, I want you to experience the rewards that can only come as a result of exploring and accessing your personal answers to these deep questions and then finding your answer to life's deepest question.

**My best answer 1: Choices are important. Your mate, your career, and your beliefs are three of life's greatest choices, and when they are made and managed wisely, they can help bring your life immeasurable joy and fulfillment.**

*Where do we start? With the most basic, foundational question of all...*

The best-informed man is not necessarily the wisest. Indeed there is a danger that precisely in the multiplicity of his knowledge he will lose sight of what is essential...  
...To recognize the significant in the factual is wisdom.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## **Deep Topic 1: Did someone create reality, or is it just an illusion?**

### **Deep Question 2: Is life illusion or reality?**

Is this life just a dream? Are we surrounded by nothing more than figments of our imagination? Are we, as the Eastern worldview says, mere toys in the hands of a cosmic dancer who entertains himself with us in a make-believe world, like a child at play? Is there any such thing as *anything*?

True, with all the death, disease, and disillusionment around us, with relationships sometimes causing more pain than pleasure, with stress and pressures that make us want to scream and run away, it's easy to seek an escape—if only for a moment—and pretend none of it is really happening. It's tempting to drown reality in novels, television, movies, and the Internet. And somewhere between the imaginary world and our own wish for something simpler and saner, we blur the lines between fact, fantasy, and wonder.

*What's really real? Who really knows? Who is God, and who am I ... really?*

The answer to the question of whether all matter—our world—is real or just an illusion can only begin by establishing whether we were created, and by what sort of Creator.

For those willing to ponder such mysteries, the world's religions and New Age philosophies offer a mixture of elaborate myths, otherworldly phenomena, and strange explanations.

But to streamline our discussion, let's establish early on what many scholars of religion have long maintained: there exist only two overarching religious traditions in the world. Those two are Judaism-Christianity-Islam and their derivatives, often misleadingly labeled “Western,” and Hinduism-Buddhism with their religious offspring, often simplistically referred to as “Eastern”. One philosopher refined it further by stating that they are basically two religions in the world, Christianity and Hinduism. For our purposes, I'd like to use more accurate terms: Monotheism (the belief in one God, as practiced in Judeo-Christianity and Islam), Pantheism (a doctrine that equates God with the forces of the universe or an acceptance of all gods of different religions, characteristic of Buddhism) or Polytheism (the belief in many gods, a Hindu distinctive).

For instance, Polytheism holds that only one entity in the universe is real—and it isn't you. It is the belief in many gods and spirits, each of whom pervade and control a given aspect or natural phenomenon of the universe. *This belief is the only thing that exists.* (I use the word “thing” because actually, this entity is not a person in the sense any of us would know. It does not have personal awareness, does not know, does not feel, does not forgive, or offer personal hope.)

However, this worldview fails the first and most basic of logical tests. *It literally negates itself!* If all beliefs, thoughts and logic are illusions, how can anyone use his or

her thoughts and logic to assert its truth or falsehood? How can any assertion of this worldview be true? How can anyone “know,” if all thought and knowledge is an illusion?

In fact, as we’ll explore in much more detail, this worldview offers no hope, no redemption, no salvation, no eternal life, no self-improvement. Of all its talk of offering “enlightenment,” the only insight at its core is the resignation that we do not exist and the blind acceptance of ultimate extinction.

*That’s it.*

On the other hand, the monotheistic God of the Bible is a real person, alive in a real heaven, with a real plan for the real people in His real world. In this worldview, every bit of *all this* exists, as well as the world around us. And all of us matter. Choices we make can have eternal consequences.

Which choice—a real universe or a realm of illusion—matches your impressions of the world around you? Upon which alternative do you choose to base your worldview, and your concept of the meaning of life—not to mention the ethical foundations of how you’ll live your life?

Bottom line? If your thoughts as you read this matter, if *you* matter at all, if your actions matter, then your world is real. You are not an illusion. Neither are your thoughts, your aspirations, and your emotions.

Fine, you may ask. But so what? What does it mean in my daily life?

Let’s go on.

**My best answer 2: Life is not an illusion. It’s quite real.**

The invariable mark of wisdom is the ability to see the miraculous in the common.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Deep Question 3: If life is real, then who made it—and us?**

Can you embark on a much hotter topic than this one? During the past fifty years and longer, this debate has raged at the center of spiritual and scientific thought, posing many questions and sending many people scrambling for answers.

The pursuit began in earnest in 1859 when Charles Darwin proposed the theory of evolution in his *Origins of Species*, stating that the earth and all living species—including humans—evolved from lower life forms over millions of years. According to Darwin, along the way, a complementary dynamic known as “survival of the fittest” weeded out the ill fated and ill-equipped, leaving in their place only those organisms somehow able to adapt to their changing environments.

As time goes on and science continues to dig into the difficult questions of the creation controversy, the evolution argument is plagued with inconsistencies and contradictions to fundamental laws of science and nature.

But let us start at the beginning. The basic question is not whether humanity was created the way this or that religion said it was, but whether we were created at all. Life is not an illusion, but the origin of life is debated by those who acknowledge the monotheistic Creator and those who acknowledge the Cosmos of modern science.

Before we proceed any further, however, it’s important to point out that despite modern misconceptions, embracing the so-called “religious” worldview does not require you to discard modern science. In fact, some incredibly gifted scientists and

contemporary thinkers have found it quite feasible to reconcile their personal beliefs with cutting-edge scientific research. In fact, they've found that this union explains many of science's "black holes" of unanswered questions far better than secular explanations ever could.

Second, the more you examine this conflict, the more you see its parameters narrowing. For instance, while secular scientists scoff at the notion of God or even a Creator, they maintain that all matter was created by a Universe (the cosmos), which increasingly takes on a complexity, a majesty, even a seeming intelligence which makes it similar to a god itself.

In other words, secular scientists don't actually reject God; they simply assign the role of a god to the Universe. And they certainly don't reject the notion of a Creator—only a personal one. Nor can they. You see, one of science's foundational assertions is that everything came from something else. Aristotle himself stated that "the series must start with something, for *nothing can come from nothing.*" (*Physics*, chapter 8. (191a28-29, emphasis added.)

Since that day onward, this notion of a First Cause has reigned as one of the cornerstones of modern science. In the debate regarding the origin of life, if you retreat far enough back into time, to the darkest, formational moments of matter itself, you must reach some point where something came from nothing—a primal force or substance which was not born, created, or mutated from something else.

Secular science has no answer for this problem except to say that some sort of pre-existing primordial matter must have been floating around to react with the Big Bang, or whatever initial spark gave birth to everything. But that notion begs the question: What created the primordial matter? At some point, you must reach the conclusion that there is no non-created preexisting matter!

And then what?

Secular science can only shrug and point to the majesty of a Universe, which, once again, starts to look more and more like the creative force it so defiantly professes to reject.

The monotheistic worldview says that there is and always was a Creator—an intelligence that exists outside of time, human and even physical parameters. God (the Creator) created all things and made you unique among all His creations.

Difficult to accept, you think? Remember secular science's response to the question of the origin of life: nothing, or at best, an impersonal, uncaring universe. That answer is a theory of inconsistencies.

You might say that the First Cause conflict is being waged between one alternative which seems unlikely, and another which is flat-out impossible.

Which do you choose? Increasingly, scientists are recognizing the illogical nature of their own position and embracing the Christian view—which, once again, does not require one to reject modern scientific advances.

It's no wonder that Anthony Flew, one of the world's leading scientific atheists for decades, recently stunned the scientific world by announcing that he'd changed his mind. Not that he'd embraced Christianity or any formal religion, but that the sheer weight of evidence had forced him to accept the likelihood of a creative intelligence. "A super-intelligence is the only good explanation for the origin of life and the complexity of nature," he told the world press. (Associated Press releases, and also

from James A. Beverley, “Thinking Straighter; Why the World’s Most Famous Atheist Now Believes in God,” *Christianity Today*, April, 2005, pp. 80-83.) There are so many overwhelming facts pointing to an intelligent design for the universe that they have joined into a scientific movement called, naturally, Intelligent Design. We don’t have room to outline them all here, but you can explore them for yourself through the books and other writings of people like Phillip Johnson and Dr. Hugh Ross, Lee Strobel and many others. (See the bibliography at the back of this book for specific titles.)

Both modern science and careful examination can lead you to a realization that there must be and is a creator of life.

**My best answer 3: We, and the universe, were made by a personal Creator.**

*Point to ponder ...*

**Stop. Take a deep breath. Look around you. Take a mental inventory of the world you inhabit. Does this place strike you deep down as an illusion? As a mere fantasy whose only value is to teach you that nothing is real?**

**Or deep down, do you know that it is very real, and that instead its lessons are those of relationship, and family, and the love of the Maker for the Made?**

**Deep Question 4: How do the world’s major religions describe this Creator?**

The world’s major religions (Hinduism, New Age, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) are each quite unique in their depiction of a Creator.

Most Hindus worship infinite representations of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through a multitude of gods and goddesses, over 300,000 of them. Hindus see their position in this present life as based on their actions in a previous life. If their behavior before was evil, they might experience tremendous hardships in this life. A Hindu’s goal is to become free from the law of karma—to be free from continuous reincarnations.

New Age belief promotes the development of a person’s own power or divinity. When referring to a god, followers of New Age belief are not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but are referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. People following New Age belief would see themselves as gods, as the cosmos, as the universe. The Earth is viewed as the source of all spirituality, and has its own intelligence, emotions and deity. But superseding all is self-determination. Self is the originator, controller and god of all. There is no reality outside of what the person determines.

Buddhists do not worship any gods or a personal god. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death. Most Buddhists believe a person has countless rebirths, which inevitably include suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person’s cravings, intense dislikes and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one’s heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and the attachment to oneself.

Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good and evil. Everything that happens is considered by Muslims to be Allah's will. He is a powerful and strict judge, who will be merciful toward followers depending on the sufficiency of their life's good works and religious devotion. A follower's relationship with Allah is as a servant. Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last prophet and his words and lifestyle are a Muslim's authority.

For many people, Islam seems to be a match for their expectations about religion and deity. Islam teaches that there is one supreme god, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined religious rituals. After death a person is rewarded or punished according to his or her religious devotion.

Christians believe in a loving God of personhood who has revealed Himself and can be personally known in this life. By choosing to believe in Jesus Christ, a person's focus is not on religious rituals or only on performing good works, but on enjoying a favorable relationship with God and growing in an ever-increasing knowledge of Him.

Faith in Jesus Christ Himself, not just in His teachings, is how the Christian experiences joy and a meaningful life. In His life on Earth, Jesus did not identify Himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment. Rather, Jesus claimed to be God in human form.

**My best answer 4: Hindus believe in over 300,000 representations of an impersonal force called Brahmin. Buddhists say there is no deity. New Age followers believe *they* are God. Muslims believe in a powerful but detached God. Christians believe in a God who is loving and approachable.**

#### **Deep Question 5: What makes the Christian Creator distinctive?**

If you were to put them into statements, the stances of each major worldview regarding a Creator would read something as follows:

“There is no reality, therefore no Creator.”—Buddhism

“There is a Creator, but it is neither a person or knowable.”—Hinduism.

“*We* are the Creator.”—New Age, Naturalism

“Nature (the Universe, the Cosmos) is the Creator.”—“Deep Ecology”  
Environmentalism, Neopaganism.

“There is a Creator, but it's impossible to know anything about him”—Agnosticism.

“There is a Creator, and all paths lead to Him—all understandings are equally valid”  
—Relativism.

“There is a Creator, but He is distant, all powerful and a strict judge who will be merciful only to those whose good works and spiritual devotion merit His mercy.”—  
Islam

“There is a personal Creator who knows us, loves us and desires for us to live in harmony and relationship with Him.”—Judaism, Christianity

Clearly, the Creator of Judeo-Christian belief is the most loving and human-centered. But is that all that's distinctive about the Creator of Christianity?

The different names ascribed to Him in the Christian Scripture (i.e., the Bible) reveal a lot about who he is:

- *Elohim* directly translates as *God* and is used whenever His omnipotence and creative power is suggested.
- *Jehovah* comes from the verb *to be*, incorporating all three tenses—past, present, and future—into one single entity.
- *El* means *God* and appears in combination with other words, such as *El Shaddai*, which means, “the God who is sufficient for the needs of His people.”
- *Adonai* means *lord* or *master* and conveys the idea of rulership and dominion.
- *Father* shows up in both the Old and New Testaments, referring of course to the spiritual parental relationship between God and humanity.

The Bible also describes Him as a Spirit, unbound by time and space, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, altogether holy and righteous, faithful and absolutely trustworthy, full of mercy, truth, justice and goodness. He is seen as one who reveals Himself naturally through the beauty and magnificence of His creation (though He is not existent in it, limited by it, or to be confused with it), and through the power of His written Word, the Bible.

But His most telling characteristic is the love He shows in sending Jesus into our world, sacrificing part of Himself in order to restore the broken relationship with His spiritual offspring. No other worldview envisions a Creator that loving, concerned, and self-sacrificing toward His Creation.

**My best answer 5: Christianity says the Creator is a Person of infinite power, love and grace.**

### **Deep Question 6: What does humanism, or atheism, have to offer?**

The “New Humanism,” the twentieth-century version of atheism, claims to put people first. But take a look at the bleak and heartless view of life shared by humanism’s leaders.

Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the “suicide doctor” who says he cares deeply about his patients’ dignity, was asked what happens when we die. “You rot,” came his blunt reply. Clarence Darrow, the anti-Christian attorney and social critic, summed up the purpose of human life as “. . . like the purpose of the pollywog—to wiggle along as far as he can without dying; or, to hang to life until death takes him.” How inspiring.

Humanist philosophers hardly brighten the picture. Ayn Rand said, “. . . man—every man—is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose.”

Bleak existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre put the dilemma into blunt words. “If God does not exist,” Sartre wrote, “man is in consequence forlorn. . . .”

Communism, the darling child of twentieth-century atheism, once celebrated as herald of a glorious age of freedom and as humanity’s liberator from religion, collapsed under the weight of dehumanizing repression. Now remembered as one of the most cruel and murderous systems of government ever inflicted on human society, communism is estimated to have cost 600,000,000 human lives in this century. Its most fervent leader, Josef Stalin, once boasted coldly, “a million deaths is a statistic.”

Ask yourself—Do these facts square with all humanism’s promises of a greater tomorrow and their promises of ennoblement for the human race? In fact, it would seem that atheism results in precisely the opposite of what it promises.

**My best answer 6: Humanism has nothing to offer modern seekers except bleak hopelessness and endless death.**

### **Deep Question 7: What about Mother Earth? Isn’t “she” God incarnate?**

You hear so much today about the environment. But beyond the newspaper stories and political platforms, beneath the agendas of protest and advocacy groups, lie very personal convictions about the place the environment should hold in our belief system.

- Is the environment our slave to be treated however we wish, to possess no further value than the benefits it gives to us—even if obtaining them requires the destruction of its natural beauty or the endangerment of its plants and animals?

- Is the environment our mother, a divine entity to be worshiped and revered, a godlike being with feelings and emotions to whom we owe a debt of gratitude and gentleness for giving us air and water and the elements for our survival?

- Or is the environment’s proper role in human life something entirely different?

People have worshiped the earth and the environment since ancient times, ascribing sacred status to its mountains, rivers, and forests. Nature’s beauty and mysteries have filled an inborn need in humankind—the desire to worship something bigger than ourselves.

But worshiping the environment is like giving a painting the credit for its own artistry instead of praising the one who painted it. It’s like honoring an invention for bringing advantages to our daily lives instead of honoring the inventor.

But what if the painter is invisible? What if the inventor doesn’t show His face? What if the creator’s voice is silent when we try to talk to Him? The Bible says, “He isn’t far from any of us” (Acts 17:27).

This frustration of being unable to satisfactorily see or speak with an unseen God has led men and women to settle for worshiping His creation. The world is only a picture of its creator—and a crude one at that compared to the true splendor and glory of the eternal God. If we can hardly turn our gaze from an auburn sunset or a tree-lined riverbank quietly reflecting across the water, imagine how awesome God’s actual beauty and presence really is!

Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.”

So we *should* treat the environment with kindness, gentleness, and respect—but not because we owe any worship to an unfeeling “Mother Earth.” Our love and appreciation for the environment should stem from the fact that it was given to us as a gift, from our gratitude for this blessing, and our desire to be faithful caretakers of what has been entrusted to us—just as we would want to care for a gift we’d received from anyone we love.

The world is His gift to us. The environment is for our use and preservation. But it’s all been given that we might see beyond its beauty—and see His!

**My best answer 7: Earth—the environment—is a blessed part of Creation but not the Creator.**

**Deep Question 8: How likely is a Creator compared to the alternatives?**

There are really only two ways of looking at the universe. Either it just happened or an intelligent being is responsible for it. Now, chance does not inevitably produce design or order. What sort of a Universe do we see? Is it one of order?

Consider two of the most familiar objects: the sun and the human body. The sun is a revolving sphere blowing gases a million times larger than the earth. The sun is like an atomic furnace, producing heat at the core of 35 million degrees Fahrenheit, and a temperature of 11,000 degrees at its surface. The sun is 93 million miles from the earth. If it were 120 million miles, the earth would be frozen solid. However, if the distance were 60 million miles, the earth's surface would be like a furnace.

The location of the sun and the delicate balance of the earth's atmosphere make it possible for the sun's energy to raise millions of tons of water from the oceans, vaporize and demineralize them, collect the vapors into clouds and then move the clouds thousands of miles by the energy of the wind—which in turn is also produced by the energy of the sun. Then the vapors condense and fall on dry land, thus making life itself possible. The energy of the sun activates the germ of life and the seed, causing it to grow. The green leaf's chlorophyll would not be possible without the energy of the sun. Coal is but the stored up energy of the sun and fossilized remains of plant life.

Now our second example: The human body contains 206 bones. Each bone is efficiently constructed to give maximum strength. Each bone is hollow and manufactures marrow. Each cubic meter of the body contains about five million red blood cells and between five thousand and 10 thousand white cells. The body produces two million blood cells per second to replace those damaged in circulation. There are hundreds of thousands of miles of blood vessels, allowing the blood to flow through the entire circulatory system in only 26 seconds. In a normal lifetime, the heart beats more than two billion times, pumping enough blood to fill a large skyscraper. Your brain can do what a computer the size of the Empire State Building in New York City could not accomplish. To have the power of your brain, this computer would need the power of a Niagara Falls.

These are two of many examples of design and order. To believe that the universe is the product of an intelligent being is a reasonable conclusion. Again, which is more reasonable, chance or God?

**My best answer 8: When compared with mere chance, the notion of a Creator seems not only possible, but far more likely.**

**Deep Topic 1 best answer: There is a Creator who made us and the world around us very real.**

**Point to Ponder: "If I and the world are an illusion, I want to know it beyond a doubt. Otherwise, I want to learn the truth."**

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.  
— Mahatma Gandhi

## **Deep Topic 2: Did this Creator design my life to have any real importance?**

### **Deep Question 9: Is there anything truly precious about one single person?**

Your ancestors may be saints or sinners, princes or paupers, outstanding or ordinary. But because they are part of your family tree, they are very significant people to you. Most family gatherings are incomplete without some reference, good or bad, to the colorful or unique characters in the family line. We all have *some* degree of family pride. The breakdown of the traditional family unit in recent decades has rallied family pride in some cases and damaged it in others. While for some families, pride may be an option—for others it is clearly an obsession.

These feelings run even deeper and stronger when there is an impressive reason to be proud of one's heritage, such as a person of great courage, intellect, or achievement. But what about the feelings of a person who cannot claim a strong, successful family tree?

For instance, look at Kevin, a twelve-year-old from the inner city. His father left home when Kevin was only two years old. His mother is addicted to cocaine. His brother is in a foster home. Is there hope for someone like Kevin to enjoy family pride? Yes!

As long as Kevin's self-image is attached to his biological family, it is not worth much. No one could blame Kevin for wanting to break off his branch from the family tree.

But Kevin has access to one person who does relate to and understand his dilemma. It is the One who created him. Because he is a child of the One who created the entire universe, Kevin can learn to feel valued and loved. His life can be filled with new meaning and purpose.

In fact, even the family tree of Jesus Christ is full of surprises! Jesus' ancestors included several people who were less-than-ideal citizens (see Matthew 1). Jacob deceived his father and stole the birthright from his brother Esau. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered. Rahab was a converted prostitute. Those are just a few in Jesus' family tree.

Yet if Jesus Himself is to be believed, the Creator of the Universe chose this very human family lineage as His personal entry point into the human race. And because of what Jesus did, every human being, high-born or not, has the chance to enter God's family. This includes you.

And that is a privilege and a heritage no other major worldview can offer or provide.

**My best answer 9: According to Christianity, you are a beloved member of God's own family.**

### **Deep question 10: How could I be truly loved by the Creator?**

All non-sociopathic human beings, whether they know its source or not, can harbor a deep-seated regret or guilt for their wrong actions and imperfections. Many others feel as though God could never love them. They've been too "bad." They've made too many mistakes. They've lost too much respect for themselves to believe that a God who knows everything about them could care whether they live or die.

Not so. He loves everyone just the same—even the ones who've made a mess of their lives. God doesn't have any favorites! (Romans 2:11).

Just look to the Bible for examples. If you expect to only find examples in the Bible of people who did everything right, who made nothing but good choices, who always obeyed God's law perfectly, you'll be surprised. Instead, you'll meet mostly men and women who got themselves into all kinds of trouble! But you'll be even more surprised to see God extending His hand to them—not balled up into an angry fist, but filled with the things they need, loving them and offering His help, support, and guidance.

Adam and Eve, for instance, broke the only rule that God had given them. How difficult could it have been to avoid just one little rule? Yet in spite of their disobedience, God made clothes to cover them, enabled the ground to give them food and sustenance, and protected them from the dangers in the world around them.

Abraham's servant Hagar, alone in a desert with her son Ishmael, hid her eyes to keep from watching her son die from the heat and thirst. But God heard her son's cries, saw her pitiful situation, and pointed out a well that could quench their thirst and save their lives.

The prophet Jonah, trying his best to run away from what God wanted and from his responsibilities found himself drowning in a stormy sea. But God sent help to Jonah and offered Jonah a second chance to do what God wanted.

Jesus Himself confirmed God's love for all people by bestowing honor on the least esteemed of His day—women, children, even the despised race of the Samaritans. He fed hungry crowds. He withstood ridicule from His own friends and from religious leaders. He honored the request of a Roman centurion—an officer in the occupying force that would one day hand Him over to be killed—healing the man's servant, even praising the man's faith as greater than any He'd seen in His own people.

And still today, Jesus extends an open invitation to all humanity—of all countries, all classes, all categories—saying, “If you are thirsty, come to me and drink!” (John 6:35) No matter who you are. No matter what you've done. No matter how sure you've been that He could never care about you, He does!

**My best answer 10: God loves you and me. The Creator's love is given freely and doesn't depend on our worth or on our having led blameless lives.**

**Point to Ponder:**

**Are you a parent? Do you have a close relationship with your own parents? If you do, and even if you don't, you probably have a sense of how intensely mothers and fathers can love their children.**

**That is a faint reflection of how strongly your heavenly, or spiritual, father loves you. Stop and consider, then, just how intensely He wants to show you that He loves you.**

**Deep question 11: Is there another life after this life?**

One of history's most popular answers to that question is the doctrine of reincarnation. In fact, its popularity has spread so completely into the Western world that recent surveys indicate as much as 60 percent of the Western population believes in some form of reincarnation. And those figures are, of course, far higher in the Eastern world.

Reincarnation says that you have one soul but with many bodies—human, plant, or animal. As your soul travels through time, shedding off and putting on its various disguises, it strives for perfection in order to transcend worldly suffering and achieve a state of eternal peace and rest.

There are two big problems with this, though.

*First, reincarnation is a cycle with no hope and no end.* The law of karma is one of perpetual disappointment. It is similar to the biblical teaching of sowing and reaping—which uses farming metaphors to explain how our actions are seeds which someday rise up to yield a “harvest” of consequences—only karma twists the biblical teaching so that nothing but the grim, nasty side of karma remains. In the presumption of reincarnation a person can perform some good deeds, but never enough to break the hopeless cycle of birth, misery, and death. What you reap then are continuous journeys back to earth—possibly millions of times—trapped endlessly on a spiritual treadmill of despair and pointlessness.

Many, though, remain quick to buy into the myth, believing that the pursuit of self-focused perfection—as impossible as it is—still offers some measure of meaning to this life. They hang their hopes on those who supposedly remember their past lives in fanciful detail. But they ignore the fact that 99 percent *can't* give any kind of personal testimony to a previous existence—and that those few testimonies offered are self serving.

*Second, reincarnation assumes we can somehow save ourselves.* Boil it down, and reincarnation is based on a “self-centered” system of personal efforts—which would be fine if humankind had a way of living above its unregenerated nature on the strength of personal willpower. But—sorry—we've all tried and failed. There isn't one person who does right. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:12-23). Nobody wants to believe it about themselves, but none of us has what it takes to earn our way into God's good graces and make ourselves acceptable to a holy God. And any belief system that elevates people into the position of assuming they can be their own sources of righteousness is doomed to failure.

Reincarnation offers no forgiveness, no repentance (turning away from sin), no hope and no believable promises. But Jesus Christ offers you all of it. You used to be far from God. Your thoughts made you His enemies and you did evil things. But His Son became a human and died on a cross a sacrificial death for you and was resurrected from the dead! So God made peace with you, and now He lets you stand in His presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent (Colossians 1:21-22).

Who needs the dead end of the false promise of reincarnation when you can be resurrected to eternal life?

**My best answer 11: Reincarnation is a fast track to nowhere.**

**Deep Question 12: Does the Christian Creator pictured in the Bible offer cause for hope in my life?**

Yes! In a troubled world, Christians have hope. It is a gift from God. It is a hope both unwavering and immovable. Without it, life is filled with worry, despair, boredom, cynicism, a sense of fatalism, and often little escape from an array of negative behavioral patterns.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul, the great Christian leader of the first century, classifies “hope” as one of three most honorable character qualities, along with love and faith. A Christian has every reason to be optimistic and hopeful. As helpful as it is to have a positive attitude (for numerous objective and scientific studies have shown the substantial benefits of a positive outlook on a person’s health, mental outlook and longevity), Christian hope is not based on personal gains but a deep, abiding sense of God’s presence and promises—promises that will never fail or fade.

And why are Christians filled with this abiding hope?

*First, because they have dealt with their past.*

Recognizing that the death of Jesus Christ came to be the only acceptable sacrifice for sin lets us become involved with Him and let go of past mistakes. The Christian life is energized into action by confession (agreement with God) regarding personal sin, repentance (turning away) from sin, and accepting Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

Second, *Christian hope is rooted in the solid ground of certain definite perspectives.* The Christian faith has a verified historical basis. It is not based on the gods of polytheistic religions (multiple gods for every occasion), the highly subjective teachings of well-meaning spiritual leaders overcome by ego, or adherence to some unknown or aloof god or universal force.

Despite opposition, the validity and accuracy of the Bible has stood the test of time. In fact, it has emerged as the most thoroughly documented and supported ancient writing in history. “Scholars estimate we can find approximately twenty-five hundred prophecies in the Bible. Roughly two thousand of those have been fulfilled with remarkable precision. The odds that all two thousand prophecies could have been fulfilled by chance are less than one in  $10^{2000}$  (that is one with two thousand zeros after it)! Biblical scholar Dr. Charles C. Ryrie has pointed out that, by the law of chance, it would require two hundred billion earths, populated with four billion people each, to come up with one person who could achieve one hundred accurate prophecies without any errors in sequence. But the Bible records not one hundred but nearly twenty-five hundred prophecies!” (*Is the Bible Trustworthy?* Dr. Bill Bright). Jesus came to overcome the worldly challenges we face. By his death and resurrection he broke the chokehold of Satan, the devil (a fallen angel who rebelled against God) over the human race. There is the deep abiding assurance that the Christian God is totally “good.” Unlike other religious experiences, a Christian never needs to be plagued with terrifying fears that while seeking the divine light and walking in it, he or she may be overpowered and spiritually polluted by supernatural darkness. In the God of the Bible, there is no darkness at all. This all-powerful, omnipotent God promises to “never leave or forsake” His children.

Third, *Christians have hope that provides a sense of future.* Eternal life in heaven with God is promised to every person who places his or her trust in Him. The restoration of a fallen creation has been promised and can only be fulfilled by the maker of the universe Himself— not by the environmentalists or globalists, or by self-effort.

Christians have hope in Christ as the Good Shepherd, who through the Holy Spirit leads, guides, and provides for His sheep.

Christian hope has no viable competitors. Its only alternatives are hopelessness and death, undergoing innumerable cycles of reincarnation, following the legalistic rituals of Islam (a written law without the forgiving, loving, and accepting Spirit of Christ), ending up in “nirvana” or nothingness, or imagining life to be a “Maya” or an illusion.

Christians are blessed with a hope that other religions cannot provide or take away. It is a hope definitely worth sharing with the rest of the world—because the world desperately wants it, and needs it.

**My best answer 12: The Christian experience offers a hope that no other religion or worldview even approaches.**

### **Deep question 13: Am I an eternal soul with an eternal existence?**

The Christian worldview says yes—but in a completely different sense; the sense of eternal existence as a wondrous gift, not a burden.

Eternal life isn't something you win. It's something you receive—for nothing but having faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. It isn't something you have earned so there is nothing you can brag about (*Ephesians* 2:8-9). It's a gift, pure and simple.

Still, many people choose to believe that salvation is a reward for living a good life, that salvation is something they can earn. The most well-known example of this philosophy is the doctrine of karma. It places all responsibility for a person's spiritual welfare on his or her own effort. But because a person can never live a perfect life, karma fosters a fatalistic view of life. Karma is in agreement with the first half of Romans 6:23—“Sin pays off with death”—with its idea of endless birth and rebirth, of remaining enslaved on a wheel of spiritual and physical bondage. But it fails to read on to the end of the verse: But God's gift is eternal life given by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Karma stands in stark contrast to the grace expressed in Christianity's most famous passage, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

So if eternal life is a gift from God, then what's the point in worrying about how you live? The Creator wants to free you from the power of sin. Should we keep on sinning, so that God's wonderful kindness will show up even more? No, we should not! If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning” (Romans 6:1-2)?

Faith changes who we are inside. Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new (2 Corinthians 5:17). *Imagine: the record of all your past failures—gone!* We no longer want to be what we were before, because He gave Himself to rescue us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. He wanted us to be His own people and to be eager to do right (Titus 2:14). What good is it to say you have faith when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you” (James 2:14)?

Nobody's fooling God. But to those who genuinely trust Him for their salvation, who stake their lives on His gift, there's nothing more they need to do to gain His acceptance. They're accepted already. And that salvation cannot be taken away. Once you have accepted Christ by faith, God doesn't change His mind about you.

My best answer 13: You are home to a soul bestowed by its Creator who offers you the blessing—not curse—of eternal life.

**Deep Topic 2 Best Answer: Your life is precious and of eternal consequence. Now matters. What you do matters now.**

**A prayer: begin asking God to let you experience the sense of His love and grace for you.**

Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.

— Albert Einstein

### **Topic 3: Aren't good and evil just relative concepts?**

#### **Deep question 14: Isn't morality relative? Aren't "good" and "evil" dependent upon the context in which they arise?**

Relativism says there are no absolutes or moral laws. In its extreme form, this belief will result in total self-centered lawlessness and chaos. Since relativists believe there are no absolutes and that everything should be interpreted according to the circumstances at hand, a vicious cycle erupts. In fact, relative law is no law at all. As current "horror stories" of judicial laxness demonstrate, subjecting every episode of accountability to means-testing of its context results in law having no consistent standard whatsoever.

But it gets worse. Those who scoff at the holding of absolutes are actually intellectual hypocrites. To prove this accusation, simply ask the nearest relativist how firmly he or she believes in the lack of absolutes in the world. He or she will likely nod his or her head and admit, "Completely. Without a doubt."

In other words, they "absolutely" believe there's no such thing as absolutes! Like so many competing worldviews we've examined, this one is self-negating. You cannot "absolutely," or even "ferverently" believe there's no such thing as absolutes. An absolute belief of any kind makes you a fellow absolutist. The truth is anybody who holds a worldview, no matter what it is, with any degree of fervency, is an absolutist of some sort.

Most relativists seek in their beliefs freedom from the responsibilities of knowing and acknowledging right from wrong. We live in an age that recoils at the least restriction upon unlimited freedom of choice. At the seat of relativism is a rebellion against the authority of the Creator and the laws He put in place to provide and sustain order in the universe.

And yet, most of us also enjoy the benefits of value systems that sprang out of the order and blessing of God's laws. Conversely, history has demonstrated time and time again that when humanity violates God's laws as revealed in the "Ten Commandments" (the ten laws of behavior from God given to his servant Moses for His people)—oppressing the weak, spurning mercy, denigrating the value of life, embracing greed and materialism, abusing Creation—we reap the negative results of that violation.

In fact, the Creator's wishes define the very essence of what's "good" and demonstrate His desire that we avoid every form of "evil." And His laws, according to Scripture, are forever settled in heaven. His wisdom and his ways are far above (superior to) our own.

**My best answer 14: Good and evil are not relative, but fixed and determined by the standards and eternal nature of the Creator Himself.**

#### **Deep question 15: Isn't the answer just to live a good life?**

Many people believe that human beings are basically good and that if they live a "relatively" good life and "try" not to hurt anybody, whichever deity may be watching

will overlook their minor flaws. According to relativism, there is no objective standard by which God could judge us anyway, so why worry?

If people are corrupt, according to this point of view, it's due to their environment, lack of education, or society's injustices. Certainly not because of any fundamental spiritual condition or problem needing to be addressed at the core of our beings. (How prone we are to blame others or our environment for our shortcomings!)

However, this view is a far cry from Christian teaching. The Scriptures tell us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That means that we all have done bad things in our lives, regardless of how pure we might have appeared to be at birth.

The Bible teaches that we were born into a fallen (corrupt), sinful world. It informs us that by turning away from God, we have all been corrupted. And most important, it asserts unequivocally that nothing we can ever do by ourselves will make us good enough.

Does that sound like a grim or depressing answer?

It might be when first considered. But on second thought, it's the best possible reply. That's because it means it's not up to you—your strength, your efforts, your innate goodness, and your determination to make yourself good enough. This is very good news because no matter how hard you try you are never good enough, perfect enough or selfless enough to earn salvation.

That's why, unlike any other world-religion, Christian salvation is a gift, not a penance or even a destination. We each need the wisdom, courage and humility to accept the gift. Though our human pride may rebel at the idea of salvation being offered as a free gift, we can't earn salvation, but we can receive it, accept it and say "thank you."

**My best Answer 15: Just "trying your best" doesn't meet the standard. God's righteousness can't tolerate our sinful, self-serving condition—but His grace (i.e., unmerited favor and acceptance) gives us a solution.**

### **Deep question 16: Is death the absolute end?**

No matter what your religious outlook is, the observation that life ends with the nothingness of death is quite disturbing. Death mocks our dreams, our aspirations, our talents and hope for meaning. It is a tragic end to a human life that has been filled with the potential for God's divine power and supernatural touch.

People who believe death is the absolute end take an awful risk of being unprepared to meet their Creator. However, while they are still alive there remains time to consider God's claim on their lives.

Reincarnation, as we've discussed earlier, gives scant comfort in the face of death. It is a cycle with no hope and no end. It is based on a strict doctrine of "works"—or good deeds to gain approval. It is also based on the bizarre claims of people who ask us to believe in their "remembered" past lives.

But we have a choice. We can believe that death is an absolute dead end—or not a dead-end at all, but rather an ushering into the presence of our Creator and the beginning of life in eternity. As part of His astonishing claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah came to save humanity. Jesus Christ made the equally astonishing claim that the dead will be raised to eternal life at the sound of His voice, that those who have followed Him

will rise to eternal life, and that those who have rejected Him will be condemned (John 5:21, 25, 28, 29).

**My best answer: 16: Death is not the end—it’s just the beginning.**

**Deep Question 17: What is sin and why does it matter?**

Sin, one of the most misunderstood words in all of language, literally means missing the mark (target). When people think of sin, they may think of the Ten Commandments. When most people think of sinners they think of murderers, idolaters, and adulterers. There is a natural human tendency to think of the Hitlers and child molesters of the world as sinners and ourselves as “perhaps not perfect,” but certainly not in the same category. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus corrected this false self-righteous view we hold of ourselves with these eye-opening words:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ [“fool”] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:21-28).

The bottom line is that there is absolutely no room for presuming you are good enough or for self-righteousness. No one is good enough; “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

**My best answer 17: Sin is serious; it’s the barrier—the one thing that can separate us from God.**

**Deep Question 18: Why can’t I fashion my own worldview from what works for me?**

Tailor-made clothes fit perfectly. When someone wears a custom-made shirt, the sleeves are exactly the proper length, the shoulder seams are at precisely the right place,

and the shirt looks like it was made specifically for the person wearing it—because it was!

Unfortunately, your limited human intellect can't stitch a stable, effective belief system with scissors, needles, and thread. You can't just alter all the religions of the world and stitch together the pieces you want. But people try, and we call this eclectic blend of religion and philosophy *syncretism*. So what's wrong with it?

First, it's important to realize that you're pulling from all kinds of traditions and religions, and some of them are in conflict. With syncretism, you can draw from good and evil, light and dark, true and false.

You can look to historic paganism with its animism, idolatry, ancestor worship, and occult practices. You can draw from the classical world religions (outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition) with their quests for enlightenment, complex meditation processes, ritual sacrifices and “earning” a relationship with god by your self-effort. You can also avail yourself of the many New Age beliefs popular today, such as channeling spirits and worshipping the self-realized god within.

Syncretism denies sound doctrine and commitment to an established, proven belief system. You have no guarantee that what you have chosen to combine and believe in is, in fact, accurate and reliable. Syncretism will pull you away from the truth of Jesus Christ and into a collection of convictions you select that are independently based on your limited experience and intellect. Such a system of self-serving beliefs can really mess you up. It will cause you to think “everything is relative.” This, as collective thought, progresses to form a lawless and unsafe society. Syncretism offers no viable answers to human imperfection (sin, death, disease, and suffering). Only Jesus Christ offers true forgiveness and redemption in the present and the promise of eternal glory in the future.

The Christian belief system will bring power and joy and peace unlike any other. All you need to do is ask God for it.

**My best answer 18: People can't fashion their own beliefs from what works for them because the deepest truths are not relative concepts; they are fundamental reality.**

**Point to Ponder:**

**Have you ever taken a science course? If you have, how many of the great laws were classified as “relative” (i.e., make up as you go)? Did you ever have a test that allowed you to make up your own personal definition for the law of gravity or thermodynamics? Or your own explanation for wind?**

**You certainly could invent your own brand of science, but it would probably be worthless, unless it lined up with established facts.**

**And it's the same for spiritual truth. Just because it's unseen and cannot be proven doesn't mean it has no actual source. Just as the wind, which is invisible, has a single, definite cause, so do the fundamental realities of spiritual truth.**

**Our job is not to make up our own answers, but to discover fundamental reality.**

**Deep Question 19: Does a person just wake up involved and entrapped in sin or is it a gradual process?**

Very few people simply wake up one morning and decide to be an atheist or to begin actively looking for more opportunities to commit sin. It's not that immediate a choice. In fact, it's rarely a conscious choice at all. Becoming cold toward God, unable to do the right things you know to do, is usually much more of a slippery fall than a leap.

It happens over time. But it happens over and over—to lots of people. In Romans chapter one, Paul paints a picture of the person who is going downhill spiritually. Here's the pattern:

First, they develop an unthankful spirit. Even with plenty of reasons to put their trust in God and to live in such a way that pleases Him, they don't honor Him or even thank Him (v. 21). God becomes like the forgotten parent who's been cooking their meals and washing their clothes for so long, they hardly notice it anymore. His blessings don't turn their heads like they used to.

Second, their minds become playgrounds. Without God's Word and His Holy Spirit's direction to make truth the main staple in their mental diets their thoughts are useless, and their stupid (deceived) minds are in the dark (v. 21). Compromise and confusion positions them to rationalize away their behaviors. They claim to be wise, but they are fools (v 22).

Then they turn their allegiance to other things. They don't worship the glorious and eternal God. Instead, they worship idols that are made to look like humans, birds, animals, or reptiles (v. 23). Material possessions and enjoyable human experiences, even an inordinate focus on human wisdom, can also replace God as the central focus and attention-getter of their lives.

Next, they lose their ability to see right and wrong. This is where the fall becomes nearly irreversible. They've lost all their bearings. They've completely given in to their own desires. Pain and regret sometimes visit them in the night, but they're unable to use what's left of their conscience to escape and change. They give up the truth about God for a lie" (v. 25).

Finally, God gives them their way, unimpeded. What they didn't know during their slide into habitual sin was that God was still there protecting them in ways they weren't even aware of. But tragically at some point—as a last resort—"God let them follow their own evil desires" (v. 26). He removes all protection. The parachute doesn't open anymore—not out of spite, but in the fervent hope that facing the raw, undiluted consequences of their sins will cause them to look to Him once more, to call out to God for help, and turn back to His love.

Consequently, they take others with them. Misery loves company. And barring a reversal in their actions and attitudes, they will always lead others down the same destructive path. They know God has said that anyone who acts this way deserves to die. But they keep on doing evil things, and they even encourage others to do them (v. 32).

God has been to rock bottom with a lot of us. And He's the only way out.

**My best answer 19: For most people, ensnaring their life into sin is a gradual process of successive choices.**

**Deep Question 20: Are people basically good, and if not, then how can salvation reach them?**

Outside of Judeo-Christian teaching, the question of how to achieve salvation—or enlightenment—is very clouded. Why? Because arrival at spiritual salvation is set within the context of human effort, occult involvement, and/or the notion that we are all gods.

One reason the Bible can be so specific about the issues is that it provides solutions for the negative challenges we face.

*1. Are people basically good?* It is popular to subscribe to the view that humankind is basically good and that moral problems are simply the result of bad parenting, poor education, and the failings of society. The Bible presents a different view. Though Scripture affirms the inherent dignity and value of every human being, it insists that each of us is born in “sin.” In Romans 7, Paul addresses the reality that we have a natural tendency to do wrong rather than right.

The concept of “original sin,” which asserts that rebellion is literally written in our genes and is a natural inclination, is a sobering one. It strikes a blow to our pride, which is at the root of all sin. The first step to the solution is to humble ourselves and not blame someone else. It is a recognition that only God is “good” and that any goodness He may cultivate in our lives comes from Him. The second step is to define sin. To sin is to “fall short of God’s glory” (Romans 3:23). People entrapped in sin’s snare cannot live up to the lifestyle God intended for them when He created them. Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). It involves “living for me” first rather than God.

Everything that is wrong is sin (1 John 5:17). When we sin, we offend the God who loves justice and righteousness (Romans 1:18). And if we know what is good and yet do not do it, we sin (James 4:1-7). Thus, sin means to consciously deviate from what is right. It is no laughing matter because it spreads from our own, compromised person to our world in subtle yet powerful ways.

*2. How has God provided salvation for our past, present, and future?* Salvation is a finished work in the past. Christianity says that Jesus’ sacrificing of Himself on the cross to pay the price for our sins allows us to be saved. To use Paul’s words, you are “made acceptable.” (Romans 5:1, 8-9) A complete one-time work of God’s love has transformed you from a sinner condemned to eternal separation from God to an accepted righteous child of God who will live forever in His presence.

Salvation is also an ongoing work in the present. You can be saved yet still struggle with sin. Paul had this problem (Romans 6: 1-21.) As you call out to God, the Holy Spirit empowers you to overcome temptation. This lifelong process of being set apart from sin to serve the purposes of God is called “sanctification.”

Salvation is, finally, a hope to hold onto in the future. Paul says you will share in the glory of Christ (Romans 8:17). That is, you will be saved and perfected when you stand before God. You will be delivered from judgment, removed from sin’s presence, restored to the image and likeness of God in which you were created, and enter into eternal life with God.

*3. What can we do to earn salvation?* We can do nothing to pay for or deserve the salvation Christ offers through His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. This incredible gift is offered to us through grace alone. No ritual or good behavior will ever earn it. You simply choose to believe in Him.

Salvation is a central theme in the Bible. God desires that everyone be saved from sin, not by our efforts at goodness but by His amazing willingness to accept us!

My best answer 20: We are tainted with a predisposition to sin. But we're also graced with a standing, one-way ticket to a better life.

**Deep Topic Answer 3: Evil is not a state of mind. It's real, and so are its consequences.**

**A prayer: Based on your reflection, ask to be shown true evils in the world around you—and then the presence of evil in your own heart. Then ask to be spared and separated from its continuing presence and to be renewed by the purifying presence of God in your life.**

There are three methods to gaining wisdom. The first is reflection, which is the highest. The second is limitation, which is the easiest. The third is experience, which is the bitterest.

— Confucius

## **Deep Topic Question 4: How do I achieve wisdom?**

### **Deep Question 21: Is there a fast track to wisdom?**

These days, we want it all, and we want it now. But in truth, no matter how many tasks we can accomplish with our technologies and menus of drive-through conveniences, some things are always going to take time.

Your life, for example. Your character. Your calling.

These are stories that won't be wrapped up in time for the 10 O'clock news. To develop quality in them requires slow, tedious work, over many years, through excruciating lows and exhilarating peaks. Your life is a process. Think of just the biblical examples whose special purposes took years to develop. Look at Noah (whom God saved from the great flood), constructing the ark for over a century. See Abraham (who was a man set apart for God) waiting on a specific promise from God for 25 years. Travel with Moses (who was called to release God's children from slavery in Egypt) from a reed basket in the Nile, through 40 years of Egyptian royalty, then through 40 more years tending sheep on the backside of nowhere—still being prepared for his life's mighty work of delivering the Hebrew people from bondage to the king of Egypt (Exodus 2, 3).

And still today, God is not one to always be in a hurry when He's fashioning one of His people. The discovery of your calling, the development of your natural and spiritual gifts, and the nurturing of your relationships move on a schedule that forces you to foster the coveted trait of patience—or to be miserable fighting it—while God changes your heart and develops His wisdom in you.

Paul revealed this truth to the members of the Philippian church when he told them “You have taken part with me in spreading the good news from the first day you heard about it. God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that He won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:5-6, paraphrased). God's eyesight is eternal. His field of vision is forever. With our human eyes, we only have about an 80-year frame of reference, often expecting God to accomplish in our lifetimes what may take many generations to do. As people created by God, we must humble ourselves before Him and become willing participants in His wise and perfect plan for the ages, working with Him as long as we have breath to play the role He desires for us.

God can transform all your experiences—the good and the bad—into a full life that will bless others and glorify Him, so that the slow process of life is no longer a foe to be feared, but a friend to further God's highest purposes in you.

**My best answer 21: There is no fast track to true wisdom. It's a long, sure process, made possible by God.**

**Deep Question 22: Is wisdom a destination or just a journey?**

The concept that wisdom is in the search and not necessarily in the arrival does not apply in Christianity. Any religion can extol the benefits it offers a seeker, but following Christ offers even more. Christianity also holds out a viable spiritual destination, centered in Jesus Christ, relevant to human need, and set within the context of recorded history.

How is this destination received and experienced? It happens when a person exercises the gift of *faith*, implanted in every human heart by the creator Himself. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that this faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. It is no wonder that Jesus boldly declared that those who in faith seek the God of the Bible will find Him.

Hebrews 11:6 pinpoints some key concepts concerning faith:

*1. Faith is essential in order to please God.*

- To satisfy such a requirement, a measure of faith has been placed in every human heart. It is deepened and strengthened through time spent studying the Bible and growing spiritually through prayer and fellowship.

- The biggest challenge we face in activating this faith is not the unconquerable circumstances of life, but rather our own unsundered human wisdom and decision-making.

- The motivation to please God by exercising faith is acting in your own best interest, because God is already available as the source of your need.

*2. Faith begins with accepting the existence of the great "I Am" of the universe.*

- When dealing with atheistic thinking, Paul states that the conscience is like a law written in every human heart (Romans 2:15). So it is futile to waste time and energy trying to disprove the existence of God.

- We seek to discover the God who is absolute and sovereign (supremely and ultimately in control).

- Once we discover who God really is, we realize that we can only approach Him through Jesus Christ, in humility and recognition of our own sinfulness. We need the salvation He alone offers.

*3. When we exercise faith in God, it releases His divine energy to bless us.*

- Our faith is to be rooted in the truth of His Word, the Bible. That is the source of our faith.

- We are called to resolve and diligence—to ask, search, and knock until the answers God has promised come to us. Again, they can be found in the pages of the Bible, as well as the witness of Creation and the wisdom of believers who have come before us. Even then, there will come times when we may need to ask God to help us have more faith.

- The focus of our faith is to be God alone. He is the ultimate source in the universe.

***All true wisdom, including the gift of faith, emanates (comes) from Him.***

This gift is for every human being without distinction and regardless of race, religion, or rank in society. It is acknowledging who God is, accepting His salvation in Jesus Christ, and activating His best for our lives as we believe in His promises and choose to walk in obedience to His ways.

**My best answer 22: Wisdom is a journey with a definite destination, fueled by faith.**

**Point to Ponder:**

**Consciously relying on faith isn't comfortable, but in modern life it's something we do without even thinking.**

**Think of it: Two centuries ago, people understood the inner workings of nearly everything around them—and were usually able to repair what they used personally if needed. Today, even the most rudimentary devices of our lives are too sophisticated for us to master without extended study. And two centuries ago, those same devices would have seemed like magic, too unlikely to be believed...**

**That is, without faith.**

**Deep Question 23: Will I find peace at the end of this journey?**

To be at peace is among any individual's prime desires. To enjoy the confidence of a clear conscience, to feel spiritually content, to be able to deal honestly with others, and to be at rest with and confident in your eternal destiny are qualities that can't be bought, earned, or made up.

They are qualities that can only be given by God, our Creator. No matter how much turmoil you feel inside, no matter what a mess you feel like you've made of your life, no matter how stormy your relationships are, there is peace for you in the arms of God. It's your privilege as a believer.

But how do you find it? You must start at the beginning.

The Christian faith proclaims that by faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God (Romans 5:1). By abandoning your own attempts at living a righteous life, you ask God to clear the slate of your sins, and submit to Him as Lord of your life. The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death. If our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will have life and peace (Romans 8:2-6). There is no other way to find and have lasting peace.

This new way of thinking must be renewed every day. Eternal life is permanently assured through Christ's victory over death, hell, and the grave—yet the victory comes in a "battle to believe" that is sometimes a hard fight in the push and shove of daily life.

Warring against you and the peace which has begun growing in your heart is the devil himself—not to mention the world system you're forced to make a living in, or your own selfish desires which continue to complicate and choke your life. Overcoming them requires understanding that each day must begin with repentance (choosing to turn from your sins to serve the purposes of God) and a commitment to let Christ have control of your life, and a decision to exchange your own momentary pleasures and desires for the blessings of intimacy with God and a decision to offer sacrificial service to others.

You must focus on God and His service, practice being content with what you have, replacing worry with prayer, and seeking a steady diet of the Scriptures over the tasteless trivialities of modern life. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel (Philippians 4:7).

But to continue burning away the agitation and conflict you may feel in your life, you need to let Christ's peace begin flowing out of you and creating peace in your relationships. If you are at odds with your spouse, a friend or family member, a boss, professor or coworker, then ***make the first move of reconciliation*** (resolution). Ask forgiveness for anything you may have done wrong (***even if you don't think you did anything wrong or don't know what it may be***), and ***pledge your commitment to restoring your relationship*** on a foundation of peace and trust.

The hope you need is available to you right now. God's peace is a prayer away.

**My best answer 23: Finding peace in life's journey has many enemies, but after their defeat incredible peace will fill your life.**

### **Deep Question 24: Is the New Age movement another valid wisdom path?**

Imagine yourself looking into a bowl of red gelatin. You know that there's something real about it, but try taking it out of the bowl a handful at a time and attempting to examine it.

Welcome to the elusive world of the New Age—a beguiling blend of native myths, occult practices, mysticism and a sprinkling of highlights from many world religions—all with your “self” as the ultimate deity. Marketing itself as the “latest and greatest” of religious innovations with a soothing, feel-good appeal to ego and unbridled freedom of behavior, it is also one of today's most dangerous worldviews.

In the Bible, Satan appears under many different names and disguises. He's known as the angel of light, the snake, the dragon, and a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack (1 Peter 5:8). But you may not recognize him in this disguise: as the mastermind of the New Age. Not all who find themselves involved in New Age practices realize what they're doing. Not all totally believe or understand everything it stands for. Few even acknowledge that it's a religion at all. But the New Age is a definite mindset and philosophy that the Scripture confirms as part of the one-world religion of the end times. It is part of the mysterious “Babylon” referred to in the Bible and is filled with witchcraft and devil worship and many other expressions of anti-Christian belief.

It all started in the Garden of Eden where God placed his first children Adam and Eve and where Satan unlocked the deceptive door to reincarnation by promising Eve (and through her, Adam) that she could become like God. These enchanting, alluring and deceitful promises form the foundation of New Age thought—promises of gaining treasures of wisdom from a source outside the God of the Bible.

In Matthew 4, Satan's at it again, this time tempting Jesus Himself with three distinctly New Age seductions: using supernatural powers to achieve personal gratification (turning stones to bread), exalting one's self above others (receiving acclaim by miraculously surviving a jump from the pinnacle of the temple), and grasping power and control over others (receiving the world in exchange for worshiping him).

Observe Satan also in Isaiah 14:13-14 saying, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most high.” This clearly asserts that the God of the universe has been dethroned in Satan's heart and the lives of Satan's followers.

The devilish promises of the New Age remain today.

From these spiritual beginnings have come the spread of New Age thinking through such people as Madame Blavatsky who imported a repackaged brand of Hinduism to the United States, paving the way for other forms of Eastern religions such as Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, yoga, and reincarnation. And today its tentacles have fingered their way into the mainstream of American life, masquerading old and ultimately frustrating pursuits of self-focused spiritism as something new and innovative.

Still, long before the foundations of the New Age were laid, God had laid a foundational plan of His own. And His saving plan for the lost sheep of humanity will be ever new and alive when the New Age is fully exposed as a deceptive tool of Satan himself.

The mask is off. The power source of the New Age is Satan.

**My best answer 24: The New Age movement is a cunning counterfeit of the most dangerous kind.**

### **Deep Question 25: Does embracing Christianity mean giving up on meditation?**

Our fast-paced world has lost the art of Christian meditation. Some believe there is no such experience. Others confuse it with non-Christian forms of meditation, while yet others hold to the view that meditation is a spiritual experience only for certain scenarios, cultures, and other religions. However, a number of passages in the Bible confirm the value and promote the practice of Christian meditation. Psalm 1, for instance, praises the virtues of a man who meditates on His word day and night.

Whatever happened to Christian meditation? By a subtle shift, church or group Bible study has taken the place of meditating on Scripture during private devotions. Emphasis on the outward has swung to an extreme. While group Bible study certainly has its place, it was never meant to replace personal mediation on God's Word (i.e., the Bible). A growing preoccupation with our bodies, the houses we live in, the clothes we wear, and the cars we drive can keep us from giving priority to how we are progressing in our inner spiritual lives. Sadly, for many the practice of meditating on God's Word and building our inner spiritual strength is just not a high priority.

Three common obstacles often keep people from meditating and hearing God speak through His Word. The first is self-enthralment (being absorbed or interested only in yourself). Direct and personal praise and worship to the Lord can set this aside. The second is a guilty conscience. Confession and repentance will deal with this. The third is immediate needs. We must get the preoccupation with these things out of our minds and into the hands of the Lord, believing that God knows our needs and will lovingly supply.

How do you begin meditating on the Scriptures? You simply ask God to help you. He has probably been waiting for you to stop and listen to His voice. Take advantage of the times you might feel lonely. Jesus has promised to be a friend who is closer than a brother, and He may have something to say to you. If you are an intense individual, you may need to relax first so that you become more easily open to His Word and Spirit. Above all, be patient. God deserves our attention as well. We need to be still and quiet to recognize that He is God.

Once you begin to read, verbally repeat the Scriptures, reflect and meditate on them. Even if it is on an introductory level, this results in a taste of the illumination

available from the Word and the Holy Spirit, and your spiritual appetite will grow. For those who meditate on the Scriptures of the Holy Bible, the promise is more than good: They succeed in everything they do (Psalm 1:3).

**My best answer 25: Christianity offers a rich tradition of deep, nourishing meditation leading to godly wisdom and success.**

### **Deep Question 26: What is the wise path through the storms of life?**

Perhaps the most important step you can take in learning how to live through life's tough times and challenges is to not be so surprised by them. If you expect that there will be storms, then they won't be so hard to live through.

Christian or not, your life will sometimes be like a ship in a storm that has run aground on jagged rocks of fear, uncertainty, and confusion. Life is not always a pleasure cruise, and all who climb aboard seeking total ease and rest eventually discover their pleasures rudely interrupted by panic and pain. Although that was not God's design, we children of Adam and Eve have abused His gift of free will and inherited a fallen world beset by hazards and pitfalls. If you're not staring into a storm now, you probably will some day.

But even if you are facing storms, God has ways to get you through.

*First, communicate with God.* Yes: it is possible for any one of us to converse directly with his or her Creator. It's called prayer. When the storm hits, go right to God, because communicating with Him through prayer and Bible reading opens your life for inspection in the light of His truth. Sometimes—not always, but sometimes—the storm is your fault. You may be paying the consequences for a particular decision or sin. Or you're reaping the bitter reward of a fractured relationship. Or you're suffering the wicked results of your own procrastination. Confess your sin in thought, word or deed. Acknowledge your spiritual condition to yourself. Start with Psalm 19:14—"Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer." With your conscience clean, with your heart humble enough to receive whatever He reveals to you, and with the lines of communication reestablished, you may be able to move out of the storm—or at least to march bravely through what's left of it.

*Second, commit to God.* Now that God has your attention, it's very important to begin obeying His will in your present situation—not waiting until things get better, but right now. The clouds may not be clearing yet, the way ahead may still be covered in darkness, but the Bible spells out plainly what your response should be. Be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble (James 1:2). Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do (1 Thessalonians 5:18). ***Be glad that you're suffering? No. Be glad that God is there with you, and that He cares enough about you to turn even the hard times into seasons of growth and strengthening—and that the God of heaven and earth has trusted you to be a living picture to others of the difference He makes in a life.***

*Third, claim the victory.* God's anger lasts a little while, but His kindness lasts for a lifetime. At night we may cry, but when morning comes we will celebrate." (Psalm 30:51). God always makes it possible for Christ to lead us to victory (2 Corinthians 2:14). The battle is the Lord's, and we can trust Him to fight for us until we are victorious. Victory may not look the way you expected, and it may not match what others think, but

God's Spirit is in you and is more powerful than the one that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Ours is the ultimate prize.

God has seen storms like yours before—not even his own Son was exempt from them! And He will get you through.

**My best answer 26: Your Creator is a sure, safe refuge in the storm—if you just embrace Him.**

### **Deep Question 27: How do I hear His voice?**

When you need direction, there is no shortage of voices competing for your ear. Some come with absolutely nothing valuable to say, like a weekly horoscope or the psychic hotline. Some can at least hint at the answer you need, like your own experience or the words of a trusted friend. But only God's voice can lead you safely all the way—or even point you back to the right path if you've taken a wrong turn somewhere.

But how do you find His voice in the crowd? How do you know for sure that it's Him?

1. *Acknowledge that God is in charge.* Pray when you are in trouble, knowing God will listen. No other gods are like God; He alone is God (Psalm 86:7-10). Before you do anything else, remind yourself that He, the one true God, is your only hope and that by His own mighty word, He holds the universe together (Hebrews 1:3). You can't call on a greater power. You don't have a better friend.

2. *Realize that He wants what's best for you.* He is indeed a Good Shepherd. That's not to say that He wants what's easiest for you. But He has a good, meaningful plan for your life. The sheep know their Shepherd's voice. He walks in front of them, and they follow (John 10:3-4). The Bible shows that He's been faithful to this task over and over again, taking His people further than they ever thought possible, satisfying them with the joys that come as a result of obedience.

3. *Give yourself completely to Him.* With all your heart you must trust the LORD and not your own judgment. Always let Him lead you, and He will clear the road for you to follow (Proverbs 3:5-6). The Bible says that giving yourself wholeheartedly to Him is the most sensible way to serve God, not being like the people of this world, who selfishly work for their own advantage and chase the latest craze of the month that promises health, wealth, and prosperity. Instead, let God change the way you think. Hand over the keys to someone who's been driving a lot longer than you have. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to Him, because He'll be doing it through you (Romans 12:1-2).

4. *Learn how to listen with your spirit.* God is spirit, and He communicates with us through the inner counsel of His Holy Spirit who resides in everyone who follows Him. It's a kind of godly intuition, an inner voice and a certain knowing deep down inside. Even when it seems illogical, it is consistent with His Word and seems right somehow. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, you will hear a voice saying, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

Clean the sin from your life that clogs the connection between you and God, and hook yourself up to daily infusions of truth from God's Word. You may not see the end of the road before you, but you'll sense a peace inside that you're on the right path, that someone has gone ahead of you to make the way safe—and that this same

strong and kind God has one hand in yours, leading you to places you'd never dream you could go.

**My best answer 27: If you listen humbly, quietly and intensely for Him, He'll speak to you in an unmistakable voice.**

**Deep Topic Answer 4: Wisdom is about being filled, not emptied. It's about learning a new sufficiency and contentment in surrender to God's will and desires for you.**

**A prayer: "Let me develop wisdom, starting with the fear (deep respect and awe) of God which is the beginning of great wisdom. Then let me become a wise and humble servant leader of others for Your name's sake."**

Lord grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference.

— Saint Francis of Assisi

## **Deep Topic Question 5: What does God want with you?**

### **Deep Question 28: What kind of relationship does the Creator want with me?**

God earnestly wants to be your Father so that you can have an intimate relationship with Him. God loves you more deeply than you can imagine. His Word tells us, “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Tragically for many people, speaking of God as father immediately presents difficulties. Those who have suffered bad experiences with their earthly fathers may be hindered from experiencing God’s love for them, or from emotionally connecting with God. That’s especially true if their fathers didn’t communicate love to them in ways they could understand.

But your Creator wants to be a perfect, heavenly parent to you. Down through the years, many have believed that the god of the universe was an impersonal, aloof, demanding stranger. But Bible passages like Psalm 139 confirm that He created you and each human being, and that He has total knowledge of every person. Jesus categorically stated to His followers that if the Father in heaven knows about every sparrow that falls to the ground, surely He cares for every human being as well (Matthew 10:29).

When we, God’s children, acknowledge Him as our heavenly Father as expressed in Jesus Christ, we begin a love relationship with Him that lasts for all time and eternity.

At the end of his life, Jean-Paul Sartre, perhaps this last century’s greatest atheistic philosopher, penned this poignant statement: “I often wonder what kind of love affair I could have had with God.” How sad! How would it feel to reach the end of your life regretting that you had not reached out to kindle a relationship with a loving heavenly Father who desperately wanted you to know Him and share your life with Him!

**My best answer 28: God wants to be your very own special loving, present, heavenly father.**

### **Deep question 29: Is there really a way to communicate directly with the Creator of the Universe?**

Prayer is perhaps the most precious gift in life. Imagine how quickly we’d seize the opportunity to spend only a minute in conversation with some hero, or celebrity, or world leader. Yet every day we have the opportunity to talk with the eternal and living God, maker of all that is, whose kingly rule extends from everlasting to everlasting, yet whose love and compassion for the tiniest details of our lives extends to His knowing even the number of hairs on our heads. Philippians 4:6 tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to

God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Why would we want to pass that up? It is our lifeline to freedom and healing and rest and peace. It is our release valve for the pressures and problems we face every day. It is our contact point for communing with the Spirit of God and having our own spirits prompted with His fresh insight and godly direction.

Do you like the sound of that? Then how do you get started?

The Bible tells us to “never stop praying.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That doesn’t mean that we should quit our jobs, stop our educations, ignore our friends, and do nothing but pray every waking hour of the day. It means that in the flow of our daily activities we should stay in an attitude of prayer, reminding ourselves regularly that we are in God’s presence, thanking Him for opportunities right in front of us, asking for His help in saying the right things and maintaining a peaceful spirit.

But the Bible also shows us that we need to set aside times with God. Jesus would often go to some place where He could be alone and pray (Luke 5:16), rising long before daylight to get away from the roar of life and the demands on His time, beginning His day in quiet reflection and sweet fellowship with His Father. Jesus said, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). This world is a noisy place. But prayer can start our day in a quiet place.

Whether you’re with others or alone, prayer can include praise and worship, confession and repentance, and supplication (asking God to meet needs). Prayer is asking God for help with a personal problem or trusting Him to comfort the pain of a friend. Prayer can be loud and full of emotion with lots of words and reasoned expression. It can also be filled with the groans and cries of a broken heart that only God can understand. Prayer is not a method with steps to follow and words to memorize, but an ongoing conversation of love and freedom.

In prayer we find answers. Sometimes God answers with a resounding yes, sometimes with a no ... when He knows that what we think we want isn’t what we really need. Sometimes He tells us just to wait a while, but to keep asking so that our faith can increase and we’ll be ready for the next big challenge that comes our way.

Do you want to know God in a new and deep way?

**My best answer 29: Prayer is real, direct and powerful. It works!**

### **Deep question 30: If God loves us, then why does He allow so much suffering in the world?**

This is one of the great questions of the ages which has perplexed the greatest thinkers and scholars of all time—yet one thing we know for sure: suffering is as much a part of life on earth as breathing.

If God is good (which He is), *then what’s going on?*

Well, when God first created the world, He declared that it was good. It didn’t take long, however, for Satan’s temptations to light the spark of potential rebellion in humans’ God-given free will. So it wasn’t God who changed, but man. It wasn’t God’s nature that was affected by sin’s entry into the world, but the world itself.

All the suffering in the world can be pinned on the consequences of Adam's and Eve's pride and rebellion, Satan's deception and resulting perversion—sin and human failure—a nature that we have inherited as the fateful descendants of that critical mistake.

But, certainly, that simple answer doesn't satisfy all your questions because the suffering that has touched your life or that you witness through the newspapers and headlines still seems to make no sense at times. *That's because, like Christ's followers who asked Him about the source of the blind man's problem, we want to trace an exact correlation between a particular act that a person committed and the resulting tragedy that came as a result—the cause and effect. "Rabi [teacher], who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" they asked Jesus (John 9:2). Neither one, Jesus answered. Not all suffering can be so conveniently analyzed.*

Perhaps, as in this case, the man's blindness served as a living example of Christ's ability to restore his sight. In other cases suffering may be allowed by God as a last resort in order to draw one of His children into a deeper dependence upon Him. But in countless others there may be no humanly understood reason at all. It's simply another example of the befuddling turmoil and decay that was set in motion by original sin.

But God hasn't left you without a way to overcome it. Knowing that sin was the problem, God went right to the tap root by sending His Son to break sin's stranglehold on us, promising us a destiny with Him where "there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever (Revelation 21:4).

Still, in the meantime you will face the chilling effects of sin's lingering blows through suffering and pain, loss and heartache. But God will take you through it, sometimes delivering you through miraculous healing, sometimes allowing you to grow through the hardships, sometimes putting you into situations and relationships you would never have discovered any other way, sometimes preparing you to be able to come alongside another who needs your encouragement and understanding. "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus said in John 16:33. "But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Suffering doesn't have easy answers and may not begin with any identifiable purpose. But for those who've put their lives into the hands of God, He can make something worthwhile out of every life experience—even the rotten ones—until the day when all our questions will be answered and seen as swallowed up in victory.

**My best answer 30: Suffering is a consequence of living in a fallen world, not of God's intentional design.**

It is important to live each day with a positive perspective. It is not wise to pretend problems do not exist, but it is wise to look beyond the problem to the possibilities that are in it.

— Dr. Dale E. Turner

#### **Point to Ponder:**

**It's natural to wonder why an all-powerful God would allow all the miseries of human existence to continue. But consider this: if God forced the world to conform to His wishes just because He could, we would all be robots. We would have no free will, no ability to choose Him and no ability to choose doing good over choosing evil.**

**What value, then, would any behavior have? It would merely be pre-determined, coerced machinery, rather than the meaningful choices of creatures endowed with free will. What victories would our lives enjoy? What breakthroughs, or joys would flow from behaviors performed without choice—and consequences?**

**Deep question 31: How can God be an infinite Creator and love me intimately at the same time?**

God loves you. And He longs to have a relationship with you, to share His life with you. The entire epic of the Bible, from the very beginning of time, shows that God chose to create man as the crown jewel of His handiwork. The uniquely Christian story of a loving Heavenly Father shared throughout the Bible tells of God reaching down to man, making every effort to communicate with him and address his deepest needs. In the ultimate display of His love for us, He even sent His only Son into the world to be the ideal sacrifice for our sin-sick souls and to restore the broken bridge between us (as sin-seduced men and women) and a holy God.

None of the other world religions offer a God like this. None can duplicate the one true God in His preeminent glory and unrivaled splendor. This is a God who was not created, because He existed before all things and will exist after all things are completed at the end of this age and the world as we know it. He is omnipotent (all-powerful), He is omnipresent (in all places at all times), and He is omniscient (all-knowing).

Despite His infinite nature, the Bible presents us with as clear a picture of God as we with our human minds can possibly understand. “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.” (Psalm 139:15-18) With a knowledge and eyesight that can see all times—past, present, and future—in one sweeping, panoramic view, God looks upon you and instantly sees where you’ve been, where you are, where you are going, and where He can take you if you’ll let Him.

He knows everything you need. Don’t worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear.... Look at the birds in the sky! They don’t plant or harvest, they don’t even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren’t you worth more than birds? (Matthew 6:25-26).

And because of His strong hand that keeps you safe in every situation, protecting you even in death from the ultimate sting of the grave, He’s big enough to fulfill the promise that nothing can separate us from God’s love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! (Romans 8:38-39).

Try to see in His all-knowing eyes the love that is your motivation to persevere. Find in His all-loving arms of comfort the confidence that He will not allow more burdens to be put on you than you can bear. Discover in Him a love that will never let you go and will always be there for you no matter how alienated you feel.

**My best answer 31: He may have created the universe, but we are His most cherished, yet often rebellious creations. Our coming back to Him means everything to God.**

**Deep question 32: Is there a guiding metaphor or imagery to illustrate how God feels about me?**

If one Bible passage has been the greatest comfort at gravesides and shined the light of hope and companionship through more of life's darkest valleys, it's the twenty-third Psalm. This passage is rich in vivid imagery and alive with memorable phrases. It reveals a Savior whose face is not stern and unapproachable, but kind and ready to help, concerned enough to involve Himself in the daily, the ordinary and the difficult.

But before we can see Him as our Good Shepherd, we must first make a brave, yet humble decision—that we are weak, wandering sheep who have no idea where we're going and no hope of ever getting there unless we submit our plan for our own lives into the hand of One who loves us and has promised to lead us home.

If you're ready to say that, then lift up your eyes and look. See your Good Shepherd.

*He is your source.* “You, Lord, are my shepherd. I will never be in need” (v. 1).

Never, Not now. Not tomorrow. Not ever—because He knows what you need and is able to supply it. Whether it's resting in fields of green grass (v. 2), drinking at streams of peaceful water (v. 2), or being led along the right paths of life (v. 3), you can enter each day with confidence that where your ideas fail, His are all sufficient. Where your strength ends, His strong arms can carry you. Where your way seems blocked, He has already plotted a better one for you. He is your source. He is your supply.

*He is your answer.* Many times you can just go through the day, experiencing nothing more challenging or unpredictable than getting incorrect change at the grocery store. But no one walks through life without problems such as taking a wrong turn and finding themselves in a part of town they feel unsafe in, or discovering quite unexpectedly that the nagging pain in their side isn't something they can ignore any longer. When money won't buy an answer, when all the thinking and planning in the world won't help, God is your answer. When the valleys are as dark as death (v. 4), and you have no idea where to turn, you can feel His peaceful, comforting presence coming alongside you, so that even without knowing where He's taking you, you don't feel so afraid. With His shepherd's rod, He can stop you from making a big mistake, offering you the compassionate discipline of a father who knows the dangers you'll face in going the wrong direction. Sometimes life doesn't play fair or by your schedule. With the Good Shepherd's help, you're ready for anything.

*He is your security.* You will be able to look back over a life spent in service to the Good Shepherd and find that your cup of blessings has been so full “it overflows” (v. 5). You will find that His kindness and love have been your constant companions each day of your life (v. 6). Sometimes it didn't feel so loving. Sometimes you felt like He was stretching you to the breaking point; sometimes you felt like He was being too hard on you. Now, though, like a grateful grown up reflecting on a father's love, you realize that He was taking you places you never would have gone yourself— like being able to “live

forever in your house, LORD” (v. 6). He must love you a lot to want you with Him for all time.

Will you trust the Good Shepherd to lead you?

**My best answer 32: God is our Shepherd—it’s one of His favorite and consistent metaphors to describe His relationship with us.**

**Deep question 33: Will God be there when I really need Him?**

God’s as close as your next breath. The distinctive of Judeo-Christian teaching is that God *is* available to His people—not just available, but longing to be involved in your life, especially during those moments when you’re in the greatest need, when you’re most likely to call on Him for help. You may not recognize the form He takes. His answer may come through the powerful assistance of an unseen angel, or the phone call of a compassionate friend, or the unusual arrangement of seemingly ordinary circumstances. But God has promised to step in and intervene on your behalf when you come to Him in faith and trust.

Psalm 107 shines a light on some of those needy moments, those lifelike scenarios when all your ways have been tried and all your hopes for a way out seem impossible. It’s in moments like these that God in His loving kindness shows Himself as your merciful, caring God. He truly is a friend of sinners, a counselor to the lonely and abused, a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow. Every follower of Christ has an advocate in heaven, Jesus Christ, who has the ear of the Father, and He will come to your aid even in situations like these:

- When you feel lost and devoid of direction, hungry and thirsty and about to give up (v. 5), He’ll be there with what you need and point you down the right path.
- When you feel bound as though in a prison of affliction, chained by the shackles of injustice, entombed in the dungeon of depression, worn out from working like slaves with no one to come to your aid (v. 12). God can burst through the thickest walls of sin and despair, and restore what has been taken from you.
- When you’ve foolishly committed a lot of sins and are in terrible pain (v. 17), and when the weight of your own guilt and shame make the darkness your closest friend. He can come to you during your lowest point, pick you up by your hand, and put your feet back in places of peace and strength you never thought you’d walk in again. He will do it if you invite Him to help you.
- When the natural storms of life have wreaked havoc on your home and family, when your ordinary every day has been jolted out of the blue by tragedy, when “things looked so bad that you lost your courage to go on, (v. 26) that’s when God can bring an end to the storm and quiet the raging sea with a word.
- When there seems to be no human answer to your problem, call on God. He’ll be there. He has the power to deliver and the promise to protect us in every situation. He can turn your experience in the wilderness into a new season of blessing and hope.

God will be there. Don’t wait another minute.

**My best answer 33: We don’t always feel God’s presence, but He’s always as close as our next breath.**

### **Deep Question 34: Does God have a human face?**

This world is a dark place filled with evil, killing, violence, crime, disease, drugs, death, divorce, war and talk of war. The heart's cry of history has sought for some kind of meaning amid the madness, comfort in the chaos, or light in the darkness.

Down through the centuries, many spiritual-sounding names and faces have stepped in to offer their path through the fog of human confusion. They have explained away life's events and circumstances as a cosmic battle between good and evil. They have presented their own secrets to wholeness and enlightenment, teaching people how to attempt to travel above the conflicts of human existence by practicing everything from self-denial to self-indulgence. Some have even had the audacity to declare themselves a god, to be the ultimate source of their follower's ideals, sufficiency and contentment.

But all have proven inadequate. All have failed to answer life's deepest questions. All have offered far less than the freedom that people need and desire. All but one—the one who said, “I am the Light that has come into the world so that all who believe in me won't have to stay any longer in the dark” (John 12:46).

That one is Jesus Christ, the living son of the living God.

The Bible teaches that Jesus was present before the world began, speaking light into the darkness of uncreated disorder. Many years later, his death on the cross cut a gleaming shaft of light into the hopeless hell of death, releasing prisoners of sin from the eternal grip of the grave. And we know from the Scriptures that He has now returned to heaven where He is preparing a home for those He came to redeem, a place the apostle John saw in his heavenly vision and said it did not need the sun or the moon. The glory of God was shining on it, and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) was its light (Revelation 21:23).

So what does all this mean? It means that though the world is still in darkness, though the evil still continues, though the human heart still cries out for help, there is hope. There is an answer.

There's a light at the end of this dark tunnel. His name is Jesus Christ. He can dispel the darkness in your life. He can clear away the clouds of confusion. He can brighten your outlook and give you hope and new direction for your future.

And what's more, He offers you the chance to be like light for the whole world (Matthew 5:14), showing forth His glory in the same way the moon reflects the light of the sun, revealing to others the freedom, joy, and peace that grows in those who have entered into a relationship with Him. “Let your light shine,” He said, “so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Shine as lights among the people of this world, as you hold firmly to the message that gives life (Philippians 2:15-16).

**My best answer 34: God has a human face and name. It's Jesus Christ.**

**Deep Topic Answer 5: God wants you to know Him. He wants to be your Father, your Shepherd, your closest Friend, and your Savior.**

**A prayer: “God, show me how we can be restored to the relationship of father and child. Let me understand how you can also be my Savior.”**

We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success. We often discover what we will do by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery.

— Samuel Smiles

## **Deep Topic Question 6: What makes the Christian God so different?**

### **Deep Question 35: What's the difference between Christianity and other religions?**

Every religion in the world claims the way of truth. So who are we to say which is right and which is wrong? What makes Christianity any different from the other world religions? Lots of things:

#### *1. Christianity offers a personal relationship with God.*

The most incredible aspect of the Christian faith is that God wants to share His life with us. He is God, is holy, is not like us, but He loves us. He has not distanced Himself from us, but has provided a way for us to cross the gulf that exists between our hopelessness and His promises. We have not had to chase down God, feverishly searching for Him, earning His love and acceptance, struggling to discover the way to reach His high and lofty place. Through His Son Jesus Christ, He has come to us. He has paid the ultimate price for our sins—all because He loves us, because He really wants to enjoy our company.

#### *2. Christianity offers freedom, not limits.*

Many people mistakenly believe that Christianity binds people to a life of boring, meaningless rituals, to a long list of restrictive rules. If they only knew the truth—Jesus said that when you enter into a relationship with Him, “the truth will set you free” (John 8.32). It is not bondage to possess God’s peace in difficult times. It is freeing to no longer be compelled by the sins that have previously made you hate yourself. It is not impossible to enjoy hope for life beyond the grave. The truth is, life in Christ is the ultimate freedom to be who God made you to be!

#### *3. Christianity offers an answer to sin and suffering.*

Christianity doesn’t just acknowledge the problem of sin and suffering. It provides the way to be delivered and cleansed from sin, and promises you the ongoing power to endure and overcome the struggles of life. But far from promising a path to peace by telling you to look inside yourself, Christianity finds its peace in a person, Jesus Christ. Jesus didn’t tell people who had problems to search out a corner and only meditate. He met them at their point of need and gave them healing, wholeness, and a new perspective. Only God’s power can overthrow the rule of sin in your life and offer you a healing path through your suffering.

#### *4. Christianity offers a living God.*

Many have come claiming to be God, to embody all the answers to life’s greatest mysteries. But they’re all dead—all except one. His tomb remains empty. Christ alone has been raised from the dead. More than five hundred people actually saw Him in His resurrected state on the earth. And though many have debated, disputed, or denied its truth, no one has been able to successfully disprove it. And that’s not all. He has also returned to heaven, as recorded in the Bible and witnessed by many, with the promise that He would reside within those who choose to believe in Him, that by His indwelling Holy Spirit He would empower us to serve Him with boldness and increasing clarity.

These truths set Christianity apart. They are the testimony and privilege of every believer. No other religion offers so much.

**My best answer 35: Christianity offers personal relationship, true freedom, real solutions, and a living, loving God.**

**Deep Question 36: If Christianity is clearly the right way, why doesn't everyone embrace it?**

Atheists deny the existence of God and stand firmly against any form of religion. Agnostics believe there is a God, but they don't seek to know Him. They are anti-religion and therefore anti-Christian. Historically, however, the majority of the world's population has always believed in some form of religion.

There are at least four reasons why people do not choose the Christian way.

The first is ignorance or lack of accurate biblical information. They do not really know who Jesus is, why He came, what He said or what He offers in terms of spiritual salvation and eternal life. Our modern society is more accustomed to interpretive information (through television) rather than factual information (through books or primary sources). In any situation, it is important to know all the facts. Otherwise a person could make a poor decision. When people are ignorant about true Christianity, they do not have reason or motivation to choose it.

Second, even people who know the truth of the faith and understand it often reject it out of pure rebellion. We are all born with an inner nature that seeks its own way and rejects humbling itself and placing obedience in something outside itself. That's why religions and worldviews that place no demands or value judgments on their followers' behavior are so popular today.

Third, people reject Christianity because they are born with an innate drive to question, specifically to question authority. Children are never taught to question parental directives, they just *do*. Sometimes people ask questions as a way of being rebellious or difficult. Sometimes they truly do want answers.

Yet questioning with an honest heart must not be equated with rebellion against authority. It is normal for a person seeking God and life's meaning to ask sincere questions. Some valid questions must be answered before a person takes the plunge to believe by faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Lord of life.

Fourth, some who claim they have tried Christianity have been disillusioned. Symptoms of disillusionment include spiritual boredom, laziness, depression, and the tendency to grab at quick fixes for immediate challenges.

The scenario of life is filled with people who will disappoint us, Christian or non-Christian. We are prone to failure and our failure can become a stumbling block for others. Just as all Germans are not like Hitler, all so-called Christians are not necessarily representative of Jesus Christ. Spiritual disillusionment is hard to take, and it is easy to transfer one's disappointments from religious people to the God they profess. To know God and His wisdom, ultimately the spiritual seeker must decide to overcome the obstacles of ignorance, rebellion, questioning, and disillusionment. If a person chooses Christianity, there must be follow-through with a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. When we take this action step, our ignorance is

increasingly replaced by wisdom, our rebellion by His love in our lives, and our disillusionment by His hope and inspiration.

**My best answer 36: The deepest truths often have the most obstinate enemies.**

**Deep question 37: Isn't it intolerant to claim a single answer to life's deepest question?**

Do you think it's possible to disagree with the statement that "all religions are the same" and at the same time respect an individual's right to choose the religion that he or she prefers? Are "disagreement" and "intolerance" the same thing?

No religion teaches that all religions are the same. Even Hinduism, which claims to be the most tolerant religion of all, is intolerant towards religions such as Christianity and Islam because each of those religions claims to be *the* way to God.

If all religions are the same, that would make them equally valid. But since they are different, they yield different results and thus cannot be equal or compatible.

The Bible presents one single path—asserting boldly that Jesus Christ alone offers a way out of the dilemma afflicting the human race. He is the sole bridge to God. He directly solves the problem of sin through His sacrifice on the cross. No other religion addresses humanity's problems head-on, like this.

Also, Christianity alone offers a personal relationship with God. Vital to Christian belief is the fact that God wants to share His life and love with every human being. Although He is a holy God, He is not out of reach for any human being. He has expressed Himself through Jesus Christ, His son. He has paid the ultimate price for our sins because of His great love for His creation.

Although Christianity is not the only religion that acknowledges the problem of human sin and suffering, it is the only religion that provides a way for human beings to be delivered, cleansed and preserved from sin. Jesus offers salvation for every human being who will by faith agree with what He has done, accept it and receive its benefits.

This question is based on a kind of popular American worldview which insists that "whatever works is true." This worldview doesn't have much use for philosophy or religion, unless that philosophy or religion can improve one's happiness in this life. This worldview is in one sense very old—eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die—and represents American consumerist culture very well.

But the question of the true God and of life's ultimate meaning cannot mean a variety of conflicting things at once. Just as the truth of our planet's shape cannot co-exist with the belief in a flat earth, the belief in a soulless, uncaring, impersonal Hindu God cannot be as equally true as the claims of Jesus Christ and a loving, personal God.

**My best answer 37: The choice you must make will be neither inherently intolerant nor destructive to the rights of others—but it will have eternal consequences.**

**Deep question 38: Is Jesus Christ Enough?**

Life is too short and the afterlife too real and lasting for you not to consider all the spiritual options available and to confirm that you have made the right decision. Christians talk about “the sufficiency of Christ,” (or, in other words, His “enoughness”) but should you look for something more?

*1. The sufficiency of Jesus Christ is incredible, but true.*

God is the source of life. As creator He breathes into man and woman, and they become living souls, Jesus Christ was present at creation, and nothing was made without Him (John 1:1-4).

God is our strength. Paul is encouraged by the fact that God could use him in his weakness, make him complete and fully equip him for his work (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God gives success. Paul affirms that his personal sufficiency comes from God when he states, “God gives us what it takes to do all that we do” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

The salvation Jesus Christ offers is not just a heavenly destination, either. It’s a doorway to God’s wonderful blessings. Blessings like the power to develop good values and character traits, to relate positively with others, to have guidance in life, to have family bonds and friendships, to have wisdom beyond yourself, to have physical strength, good health, and the strength to survive, even to have total prosperity from a biblical perspective and ongoing forgiveness of sin, and above all, eternal life after death.

*2. What would keep us from accepting His sufficiency?*

We could be faced with competing forces which sidetrack us from the sufficiency Christ offers. For example, a lack of acceptance of our physical characteristics could challenge the fact that Christ made us who we are, the way we are. His sufficiency brings us completeness when we feel inferior.

On the other hand, pride in who we are, humanly speaking, can give us a superiority complex. Race, culture, class or nationality are not to be used as benchmarks of superiority, especially when no one can take credit or blame for their tradition or parentage.

Then there is human achievement. Paul was a highly educated religious leader and Pharisee with a rich spiritual heritage. In spite of that, his adequacy for his God-ordained mission came from Jesus Christ.

*3. We must surrender in order to receive Christ’s sufficiency.*

Paul had to:

- Discard anything that meant personal profit to him if it would result in loss to the cause of Christ. The sufficiency of Christ becomes very apparent when we follow God’s agenda rather than our own. His blessing is both to help us live the abundant life (above ordinary measure) and to fulfill His plan.

- Discern the value in Christ. There was nothing more valuable in the universe. He had to examine other options and compare.

- Decide to follow Jesus Christ alone. Not Jesus minus what he wanted to deduct. Not Jesus plus what he wanted to add. Paul recognized Jesus Christ as totally, completely, and irrevocably sufficient.

Jesus Christ alone is enough. All other prophets, founders of religions, and spiritual masters fall far short of true sufficiency. Apart from Jesus Christ, the human soul does not experience deliverance from the load of guilt, power for living in the here and now, and the definite hope for a joyful, eternal life after death.

Jesus has set a blazing trail before us. His final words included “everything is done!” (John 19:30). He had done the will of God. Now He calls every human being to both recognize and experience Him by faith as the all-sufficient Jesus Christ.

**My best answer 38: Jesus Christ is God Himself: He’s way more than enough.**

**Deep Question 39: Are all those hateful things they say about Christianity really true?**

*Myth 1: Science is in conflict with Christian faith.*

The tendency to insist on a tangible proof for everything before being willing to acknowledge it is nothing new. Even with the multiplied miracles Jesus performed, many who witnessed His ministry firsthand with their own eyes demanded more signs. But Christ knew that all the evidence in the world wouldn’t turn some people’s heads to the truth of what He was saying. Yes, Christianity requires a leap of faith. But God in His grace has left clue after clue of evidence behind. Hardly a year goes by without biblical claims or stories being verified scientifically. These people will listen and listen, but never understand. They will look and look, but never see. If they could, they would turn to Jesus. (Matthew 13:14-15). Check out the bibliography at the back of this book for a starting point in studying the scientific validity of Christianity for yourself.

*Myth 2: People become Christians through the influences of Western culture.*

Christianity is not a Western religion. Jesus Christ came from the Middle East, and nations do not become Christians—people do. The spiritual influences that are present—or not present—in a child’s formative years will definitely color their religious choices and perceptions for the rest of their lives. But Jesus Christ presented His gospel of redemption to all the world. Based on this biblical reality, Christian beliefs and doctrine work in any world context or culture. There are countless Christians who were born and raised in cultures in diametric opposition to Christian faith. The book of *Revelation* even prophesies that heaven will be populated with people from every tribe and nation. That’s because the gospel offers answers to guilt, suffering, fear of death, and uncertainty about the afterlife. The Christian faith stands as a testament to a gospel that remains true—and appealing—in all times, among all people, in all places.

Try it and see.

**My best answer 39: Christianity is neither unscientific, a Western invention, or a threat to personal freedom. Precisely the opposite.**

**Deep question 40: Are all those hateful things they say about Jesus Christ really true?**

*Myth 1: Jesus Christ is not the one and only Son of God.*

In the beginning was the one who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God. The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw His true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father (John 1:1-4).

Some religions acknowledge Him as a mere human being while others concede that He is God, they qualify their claim by insisting that He is one of many gods—and they claim that in fact we too can become gods.

Yes, Jesus was a man, but He was God in the flesh—100 percent God, 100 percent man. He had to be human in order to understand our hopeless plight and every weakness of ours, because He was tempted in every way that we are. But He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15)! We must believe that He is God and that He has the power to rescue us from our sinful state and make us acceptable in the sight of a holy God. He is God’s Son—the one and only.

*Myth #2: Jesus was only a great moral teacher.*

Jesus Christ stands tall among the leaders of the world’s religions. But a closer look at His life and teachings brings you face-to-face with a shocking dilemma. All would agree that His teachings on peacemaking, sacrificial love and quiet resistance to injustice are noble and powerful. But would a great teacher have the audacity to mislead His listeners with talk of being “the way and the truth and the life” and to say, “Without me, no one can go to the Father” (John 14:6)? Why would a wise, caring instructor claim to have the authority to forgive sins? If His only role was to express truth from one man to another, then why would He tell others He was Almighty God? His skeptics can’t have it both ways. Either He was God in the flesh, or a madman deceiving those gullible enough to believe him.

His teachings were great because they were coming from the mouth of God Himself.

*Myth #3: Jesus didn’t actually rise from the dead.*

A Roman centurion at the base of a real cross around A.D. 33 looked up at the lifeless body of a dead man and said, “This man really was God’s Son!” (Matthew 27:54). The man, Jesus Christ, was crucified that day. But no sooner had the unexpected news of His escape from the tomb reached the ears of the chief priests, then they hustled their first-century spin-doctors into action, reporting that Jesus’ disciples came during the night and stole His body (Matthew 28:13). But the report didn’t stand up to those who saw the risen Christ with their own eyes—over five hundred people, the Bible declares (1 Corinthians 15:6). And neither does it wash with untold numbers of followers who 2,000 years this side of the empty tomb, still at the cost even of their own lives, proclaim He is alive and put their life into the safekeeping of that incredible belief. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

**My best answer 40: Jesus Christ is not a mortal man, a mere teacher, or an abstract expression of the divine. He is risen from the grave and God Himself.**

**Deep Topic Answer 6: The God of Christianity took the initiative and paid a terrible price to redeem, reconcile and restore us to Himself.**

And now, friend, we've finally reached the most important question of all:

### **Life's Deepest Question:**

**“If Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He died for me, then how can I respond?”**

*It is not my intent to convert you to anything. Only God Himself can do that. I wish to point you toward the questions that matter, offer you some relevant, time-tested answers, and let you seek God and decide the rest for yourself.*

#### **Deep Question 41: Is it possible to be Christlike without being a Christian?**

To answer this question accurately we must clearly understand what the term “Christlike” means. Some believe Jesus Christ is synonymous with “goodness,” that He was a model human being. However, for the Bible-believing Christian, being Christlike means to accept His salvation, embrace His truth and lifestyle, and live by the strength of His power in your life.

To the New Age enthusiasts and devotees of some forms of Eastern mysticism, adopting an aura of goodness (expressed by the honoring of all faiths, gods, humans, and all creation) expresses a religious lifestyle. For those who believe in Jesus Christ as the outstanding example of an essentially “good” person, the “good” life involves love for God, respect for others, and the practice of doing good. Bible-believing Christians, however, take this issue of Christlike living literally. To them it begins with and is continually empowered by a relationship with Christ.

Many schools of thought share the belief that “we are what we think.” The person we are inside is the “real” person. Our outward expressions are the reflection of that inner person.

Based on this concept, the Christian is Christlike in outward behavior because of an inner change (sometimes referred to as the new birth or being “born again”). Therefore, a person who is not a Christian inwardly but attempts to live like a Christian outwardly is living a double life. The outward behavior is artificial, an act. It takes a concerted effort because it is not an overflow of the real inner person.

Being Christlike in terms of being a “good” person in the eyes of the world is one thing. Being Christlike in a truly biblical sense starts when a person becomes part of God's family and submitted to His lordship.

Unlike anyone else in history, Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, fed five thousand people with two loaves and five fish, walked on water, died a vicarious death, and rose from the dead. No other religious leader or spiritual master even starts to compare. Jesus has no competitors among the leadership ranks of world religions. Believers in Christ are called to follow Him.

Doing so is both a challenge *and* a blessed experience for Christians. Mahatma Gandhi is universally recognized as a noble and good person. At one point in his life he stated, “Show me a Christian who lives like Jesus Christ, and I will admonish the nation of India to turn to Christ.” Either Gandhi had forgotten that Christians, while seeking to

emulate their Savior's example, are not perfect, or he had been misled by Christians who projected a superior attitude incompatible with the humility of Jesus Christ. He also stated that his primary spiritual illumination came from a mantra" (the name of a Hindu god which he chanted daily. At the end of his life, Mahatma Gandhi died with these words on his lips: "All around me is darkness." He had a form of goodness, Christlikeness or godliness, but he did not have the inner conversion created by the one and only true Spirit of Christ. The result was an outward artificial Christlikeness rather than an inner presence of the Christ of the Bible and Christianity.

**My best answer 41: Any human being who wants to be truly Christlike begins first by acknowledging and accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is only then that any reflections of Christlikeness in our lives are truly authentic.**

**Point to Ponder:**

**Jesus Christ made a host of inescapable, emphatic pronouncements about who He was—the Son of God. He did not leave any "wobble room" for embracing compromised versions like His being merely a wise teacher.**

**In fact, Christian author C.S. Lewis once said that "Jesus was either who He said He was or He deserves to be taken about as seriously as a man who claimed to be a poached egg."**

**Who do you say He is?**

There is no wisdom save in truth. Truth is everlasting, but our ideas about truth are changeable.

— Martin Luther

## **Deep Topic Question 7: How can the Christian God make me different?**

### **Deep question 42: What are my options?**

You must make a decision. What are your options? There are only three possible answers to this question:

1. To say *yes*, to accept God's free gift of salvation by putting your trust in Jesus Christ.
2. To say *no*, to reject God's offer of salvation. The Bible says that those who make this choice will spend eternity separated from God in a place called hell.
3. To say *maybe*, to try to put off the decision to a more convenient time. The Bible does say that God is patient, wanting everyone to come to the point of accepting His gift of salvation (2 Peter 3:9). However, none of us is promised that we will be here tomorrow, and because of this x-factor of death, trying to put off our decision by saying *maybe* automatically puts us at risk of ending up in the "no" category.

So, in reality, there are only two answers to the question, "What will you do with Jesus Christ?" Accept His free gift of salvation or reject that gift.

**My best answer 42: Your options are yes, no or maybe. I pray you choose yes.**

### **Deep question 43: How do I encounter this divine love?**

God's love is different from human love. When people say they love, they may really mean love of family, friendship, or that they desire or crave something from you, or that they are committed to a relationship as long as it's fun. God loves with a passion and commitment you will never find from anyone on earth. His love, revealed to us through His son, Jesus Christ, is expressed by the Greek word *agape*.

If you have never known God's kind of love, or if human love has disappointed you, how do you make a fresh start and begin to experience this *agape* from a loving heavenly Father?

1. *Admit your need for love.*

God created us with needs both to love and to be loved. Love is one of the most powerful forces on earth. It can heal broken hearts, endure endless struggles and break the strongest barriers. Giving and receiving love will satisfy the human heart as nothing else will. The English poet, John Donne, wrote "No man is an island." The Bible tells us, "It isn't good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Let's face it. Life can be tough, and no one is tough enough to make it without a little help. You need love.

2. *Recognize that God can meet your need for love—perfectly.*

The Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that is God's nature. His whole personality and His every motivation is love. Take a look in His Word and see for yourself:

Romans 5:6-8

Romans 8:1-39

Ephesians 2:4-3

Ephesians 3:19

1 John 3:1-3

Jude 2:1

3. *Receive God's love in your life.*

Nothing you have ever done is so bad that God can't love you. He specializes in pouring out love on even the most unlovable individuals. You'll have to make a choice—a decision to receive the love of Christ. You can start by saying to Him, “Lord, I receive your love.” When you take that first step, you will find that His love has been waiting for you. He will run to meet you, and His love will transform your life.

### 3. *Share God's love with others.*

As mentioned earlier, everyone needs love. When God's love fills you, you will be eager for those around you to experience the same peace, joy, and fulfillment you have found. The more love you give away, the more love comes back to you.

You can look at this as an “ABC” process. First you admit your need for love. Then you believe God to give you His love through Jesus Christ. Finally, you communicate love to God and to others each day.

**My best answer 43: Divine love is yours for the asking. Just reach out and ask Jesus for it!**

### **Deep question 44: Is it possible to actually sense the Creator's presence?**

Feeling or sensing God's supernatural presence or nearness is a desire in some religions and a promise in others. But who is this divine presence?

Openness to supernatural presence in most world religions is created by a variety of rituals. These rituals can open people to either good or evil spirits. The Judeo-Christian tradition believes the God of the Bible to be a “good” God. He has expressed Himself as the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ, who came to earth as a fully human and fully divine being), and an inner, abiding presence known as the Holy Spirit. Other than the time Jesus spent here on earth, or when God has in some way revealed Himself as recorded in the Bible, the presence of God has been manifested throughout history in the Holy Spirit.

He was present in the beginning at the creation of the world, and will be present at the end when the Spirit and the bride (i.e., the Church) say, “Come!” (Revelation 22:17). He is the one who expresses the desire and issues the invitation for the Lord Jesus Christ to return to the earth for His people.

He is present in the lives of Christian believers through His Holy Spirit which resides in them and works in various specific ways which challenge them to move from seeing everything through human wisdom to start seeing through God's wisdom. For example:

#### *1. New Birth*

- He forgives the sins of all those who choose to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and gives them new birth in Him.

- Jesus impressed Nicodemus, an astute Pharisee (religious and legal leader of the Jewish people), with the necessity of being born from above by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3). When Nicodemus with all his human wisdom still struggled with understanding the concept of a “new birth,” Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit is like “the wind.” Though invisible, His presence is definitely felt.

- We see an illustration of the new birth in nature when a caterpillar turns into a chrysalis and then into a butterfly. A new birth results in a “new person” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit enables you to leave your old life behind and begin a new life in Christ Jesus.

#### *2. New Character*

- The Holy Spirit brings counsel, illumination and guides us into the full truth, revealing more about the person of Jesus Christ (John 16:13).
- Continual surrender to the truth of the Bible and the inner work of the Holy Spirit results in the building of Christian character. God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled (Galatians 5:22,23).
- These qualities are more excellent and admirable than the natural expressions of someone who has not received the new birth in Christ. The Holy Spirit can stop the natural progression of soulish or selfish, even demonic qualities that include immorality, filthy thoughts, shameful deeds, idol worship, witchcraft, hatred, jealousy, anger, selfishness, envy, and drunkenness—all resulting in evil actions (Galatians 5:19-21).

### 3. *New Compassion*

As you grow spiritually, you will naturally find that you have a new compassion and desire for opportunities to share what you've experienced with others.

**My best answer 44: Yes, you can actually sense the Creator's presence— that's what Christians call the "Holy Spirit" —the spiritual personhood and presence of God.**

### **Deep question 45: How do I actually take the first step to embracing Him?**

If you've come this far, you probably realize you're about to make the most important decision of your life.

Let me ask you, What have you done with Jesus Christ? If you have never accepted God's offer of eternal life, I can think of no better time than right now (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you would like to say yes to Christ, you can do it right now, wherever you are, whatever you are doing. Pray to Him and invite Him into your life.

The invitation is open—you can accept the gift of salvation and get rid of the sin in your life. It doesn't matter what you're doing or what you've done. The offer is open to everyone.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:25-30). He also said, "Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

So if you ask Him into your life as your Lord and Savior, you will be accepted.

The first step to becoming a Christian, a "Christ-Follower," is as simple as it is life changing and eternal.

Bottom line? The way believers talk to the Lord is through prayer. Your prayer should be your own, from your own heart to His. If you're not in the habit of praying, though, you may need an example.

There's no set script, but you basically tell God that you acknowledge you're needy and sinful, out of harmony with Him, and that you want to start sharing your days with Him through the forgiveness found in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Ask God to forgive you, to enter your heart with His Spirit, and to start leading you every day of your life.

An example of such a prayer may go something like this:

*Father in Heaven,  
I know that I am a sinner  
and need forgiveness.*

*I believe that Your Son Jesus  
died in my place  
to pay the penalty for my sin,  
and rose again for my salvation.  
I want to accept You and turn from my sinful ways,  
so I now ask You,  
Lord Jesus, to come  
into my life as my Savior  
and my Lord.  
In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

The Bible says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). So if you have asked Him into your life and believe He died to save you, you are a Christian, bound for heaven.

If you have taken this all-important step, let me be the first to welcome you into the family of God. You have made an exciting decision to say yes to God’s offer of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the beginning of a new life for you, a lifelong adventure of getting to know God and an eternity of living and growing in Him.

**My best answer 45: It’s easy—you ask God to forgive you and come to live within you through His Holy Spirit.**

**Deep question 46: What do I do now?**

If you have become a new Christian, there are several initial steps you should take:

1. Tell a sympathetic friend that you have become a Christian.
2. Get a modern translation of the Bible (e.g., the New International Version of the Bible or the Good News Bible) and start to read the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament (the back third section of the Bible). Then move on to the next three, the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John. These three Gospels explain all about Jesus and the way of life in His Kingdom. Before you read, pray to God and ask Him to help you understand what you read in the Bible.
3. Find a Bible-believing church in your area that you are comfortable with. When you go to a church, tell someone on their welcoming team that you have just become a Christian. Ask if they have a new believers’ group or discipleship group you could attend.
4. Be sensitive to what God will show you about how He wants you to live. Open your heart and mind to what God has for you. He has a plan for your life. Don’t be satisfied with anything less (Jeremiah 29:11-13).
5. Read the Bible and pray daily. Meditate on His word and quietly listen for Him. When you became a Christian, you were reconciled (made acceptable) to God. Maintaining that personal relationship requires two-way communication. Through the Bible, God will speak to you; through prayer, you speak to Him (Psalm 119:11, 1 Peter 3:12).
6. Watch for opportunities to share your experience with others and serve (minister) with the unique abilities and gifts God has given you (Romans 12:4-8).

**My best answer 46: You’ve started a whole new life. Take baby steps ... but take them.**

### **Deep question 47: How do I stay on the path with God?**

You don't have to get too far into the Christian journey to discover that it's not a sprint to the finish line, but rather a marathon that requires endurance. The adrenaline and excitement of the first mile or two make you think you can keep up this pace forever. But pretty soon you find yourself out on the open road, where the temptation to quit is always a footstep away. The streets aren't lined with cheering friends, and the goal of this whole thing seems a million miles away—if it's really even there at all.

So what keeps you going when you've run out of reasons?

*First, you surrender your will into God's hands.*

It's a great mystery of the Christian faith—and an incredible insight into the nature of God—that even after you yield your heart to Him for salvation He allows you to retain your free will. Along the path of Christian living you'll come to many forks in the road that will test you. You'll face choices such as whether to cave in to an old familiar sin, or to let God show you how to escape from your temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13); whether to demand your own rights, or to be humble and consider others more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3); whether to secretly burn with a desire for recognition, or when you eat or drink or do anything else, always do it to honor God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Self-will is a tough nut to crack, and you'll have to stare into its proud, squinty eyes every day you live. It only has a taste for the temporary. So when you're thirsty, it will scream for water. When your legs get wobbly, it will cry for rest. But when you allow God to be in charge, you will find lasting peace and bring honor to Him.

*Second, never let your failures bury you.*

Simon Peter, one of Christ's original twelve disciples, is the classic example. He smugly tried his hand at walking on water, parading his faith in front of his wimpy, unspiritual friends, only to end up afraid of drowning—spewing and sputtering for dear life. One minute he told Jesus that he'd gladly die for Him, only to act like he'd never heard of Him the next. Now who'd give a guy like that another chance to mess up something else? God would. That's why you see that man who was a miserable excuse for a faithful follower later standing out in front, boldly preaching a sermon that brought 3,000—yes, you heard it right—3,000 people to accept Jesus Christ (Acts 2). Sure, he could have quit a long time before and gone back home where it was a whole lot safer and more comfortable. But God kept giving Peter chances, and Peter kept trying again. God saw something in him no one else would have ever believed.

*Third, you keep your eyes on the prize.*

If you thought you'd signed on for a flashy 100-yard dash, check the Bible they gave you when you entered this race—especially where it tells you to sit down and figure out how much it will cost (Luke 14:28)—or where it reminds you that you have not yet reached your goal and are not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of you. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize (Philippians 3:12).

**My best answer 47: There's a finish line out there—and a God who will help you make it.**

### **Deep question 48: How do I Become a “world Christian?”**

Jesus Christ reminded the New Testament disciples that even though they did not “belong” to the world, they were still “in” the world—a vital principle of discipleship. It was a reminder that despite the caution to avoid the philosophies, patterns, and practices of “worldliness” (versus the Christian way), they still had to live in a “real world.” Their world, like ours, was filled with evil, death, disease, disappointment, and many other visible evidences of a human race dominated by the power of sin.

They were not called to bury their heads in the sand, but to be “world Christians.” Jesus was born, lived, died, and was resurrected to offer salvation to the entire world, without exception. His was not an exclusive message of hope but one which included rich and poor, and people of all religions and races. It is to this same world that Jesus commissions modern-day disciples. They are called to reach the world without fear or favor, and with a Spirit-empowered fervency to see people who are spiritually lost find faith in Christ.

World Christians believe that their primary task is to reach the world God created beginning in their own villages, cities and nation. This perspective promotes acceptance rather than alienation toward all people groups.

A world Christian, though totally committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, is sensitive to seekers following other paths to God, no matter how unbiblical they may seem. There is a sense of both awe and humility at beholding the non-Christian and responding with the thought, “I can graciously introduce them to the love of Christ and a relationship with Him that I now know and experience.”

A world Christian is not fixated on Christian labels and lingo, but on the significant issues of the Christian life. A world Christian recognizes the authenticity of the gospel and appreciates that its timeless truth works within the context of all cultures.

It is no coincidence that the word *nations* in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) refers to the language, customs, and culture of people. The challenge to every Christian is to view the world not like a bird peering through the bars of its cage, but rather like an eagle flying above the earth—comprehensively.

The challenges to serious world Christians are many: to love and respect the views of other people without compromising the Word of God and despite disturbing disagreements, to resist the tendency to turn differences into dividing lines, and to love sacrificially like Jesus loved, just to name a few.

The challenge is to see the world through the eyes of Jesus, as He hung on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He saw a lost world, desperately needing to be found by the Good Shepherd and by His people.

**My best answer 48: As you grow in Christ, He will give you a heart desire and a burden for reaching a world crying out for His hope and salvation.**

**Deep Topic Answer 7: The Christian God makes you different by coming to live within you and giving you a new compassion and concern for others to also know this Christian God.**

## **Conclusion: Others, Church, Faith and Your Answer**

You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.

—Mahfouz Naguib

### **Deep question 49: Can I give my faith to others?**

Most of the world's religions issue the call to serve humanity. Its concrete expression however is clearly most evident where the Christian message has taken root and blossomed to fruitfulness.

The motivations in world religions to serve others are different from those in Christianity. Hindus revere their ancestors. Muslims give alms to the poor. New Agers protect our natural resources. In one way or another, people in every religion seek to work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved (Philippians 2:12). But the Christian call is expressed as an integral part of living out the salvation received through Jesus Christ.

Our service to the people around us is motivated either by a sense of obligation, an artificial religiosity, or a genuine love for others. Because we are created by God to both love and be loved, Christians' service to others is a healthy outflow of the love within us. Most of us long to touch the lives of others and bless them in some way. We consider it an admirable and noteworthy quality. The hallmark of true compassion is the strong sense of affinity and oneness we feel with the rest of God's creation, especially other human beings.

The teachings of the Bible and Jesus Christ make it crystal clear that the two greatest commandments in order of importance are: 1) to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and 2) to love others as you would love yourself (Matthew 22:35-59). It establishes our love for others as being rooted in the extent of our love for God. Our service to others is, in fact, a reflection of our love for God. Proven by experience is the fact that serving others gives a person a higher sense of purpose and fulfillment—more so than temporary pleasures, material possessions, and power trips can.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) Jesus includes a graphic description of the scene on judgment day. Those who dedicated their lives to serve others—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison—were clearly rewarded for their efforts. They had moved from lip service to a lifestyle of active service to others.

Joy in serving cultivates a new level of confidence in us as we meet the needs of others. By serving others, instead of “lording” it over them, we display the mark of true servanthood, a life pattern opposed to the popular view of service. Christ teaches that the one who wants to be great must first be the servant to others.

The true joy in serving others can be neither bought nor sold; it is the Spirit that is caught from Jesus Christ. It continually looks for ways to serve others—friendship, encouragement, giving generously of finances, caring enough to meet basic needs, and discipling new Christians in the ways of the Bible.

**My best answer 49: You can serve others in so many ways. But the greatest is to give them the hope of the gospel—eternal life.**

### **Deep Question 50: What kind of church should I look for?**

There are many labels circulating these days to describe the various creative, free-form ways of enjoying fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. We've come up with a term of our own that captures the right meanings in a vocabulary that's right for our times.

*"Live church."*

We believe you should look for a church that's "live" in the same ways that up-to-the-minute, on-the-spot, unrehearsed media is "live"—in the ways that natural, organic food is "live"—in the ways that something maturing and reproducing is "live."

In other words, a real, vibrant, growing, plugged-in, responsive, body of believers. One with which you have an affinity, which does not depart from the truths of the Bible but nurtures its members into a deeper walk with God, and which has a heart for sharing this Good News with the whole world.

You may find one at your local campus, in a dorm room, an empty classroom, packed auditorium, or in a thriving urban population core. Or tucked away in an old building, known only through the Web or local newspaper postings. Or even on the front row of your area's oldest, most imposing church sanctuary. The location means nothing. What matters is that you weave your life together with those of other, Bible-believing fellow Christ-followers. (Be sure to seek out one-on-one and small-group mentoring relationships with other committed believers in Christ's church to encourage, support and graciously challenge you in your walk with the Lord.)

And do stay discerning: because the cross is a global icon, all sorts of hybrid belief systems have adopted it as their own. Their sophistication can often make them difficult to identify as having a form of godliness, but lacking undistracted and truly biblical devotion to Christ—even for lifelong Christians, let alone brand-new believers. So go into any group with your eyes open, praying for discernment, asking God for wisdom and graciously testing everything against the standard of God's Word.

Start by being aware of what "church" is and is not:

In its root meaning the word *church* is a group of people "called out," belonging to the Lord.

1. The church of Jesus Christ is not:

- an exclusive social club for preferred people. The call of Jesus Christ is to anyone who will come.
- a conquering army or military force. Jesus confirmed that His kingdom is not an earthly one; it is spiritual.
- a corporate entity. Nowhere does the Bible discourage good organizational management and sound fiscal responsibility, but the Church itself is a living organism, empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

2. Biblically, the church is:

- the body of Jesus Christ, with Him as the head—the source of all wisdom.
- the bride of Christ, with Him as the bridegroom—the source of love and acceptance.
- the temple of His Holy Spirit—the presence of God.

3. Despite denominations and divisions within the Church, we are called to live in unity. Despite its placement in an evil world, the church is called to holiness. Individually and

corporately, the church has been entrusted with a sacred mission that has eternal implications.

- On a spiritual landscape decorated with a multitude of deities, the Church is called to worship and celebrate the one true God of the Bible, revealed in His Son Jesus Christ,
- As salt and light, the Church is called to bring meaning (flavor) and dispel the spiritual darkness created by human depravity. A Christian cannot in his or her own ability convert a human soul. Yet every Christian is on assignment to intercept errant or misguided souls headed down the path to eternal destruction. The good news of the Gospel is the power of God which brings people to salvation in Jesus Christ.
- The church is to be a training center where people are educated in the Holy Scriptures, encouraged, and given visible models of Christlike living.
- The Church is a haven for fellowship. It is where caring and sharing begin as Christians learn to love Jesus Christ—and others, regardless of gender, age, race, religion, or socioeconomic background.

There is only one true Church—those bought by the Lord, regardless of the name on the front door of a building. Jesus Christ bought His Church by His perfect sacrifice on the cross. He promised He would return to the earth again to take His Church (the Bride!) home to heaven. He assured us that the powers of hell would not be able to prevail or score any permanent victories against His Church.

**My best answer 50: Look for a church that’s “live”—growing, real, seeking, and rooted in the truths of the Bible. Remember that Church is any gathering of your brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s not important that you belong to any one building or denomination, but that you meet regularly with your spiritual siblings.**

### **Deep Question 51: How does my faith affect my career?**

Myths concerning the issue of work abound and need to be confronted with the facts. Here are some of them:

1) Myth: Church work is the only work that has any spiritual value. Fact: Christianity makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular. All of life is to be lived under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, we are all answerable to God (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

2) Myth: The heroes of the faith are ministers and missionaries. “Lay” workers remain second-class. Fact: God has delegated His work to everybody, not just clergy. The workplace needs representatives of Christ in every position. Several dozens of professions are listed in the Bible, almost all of them with parallels in our time.

3) Myth: Work is part of the curse placed upon humanity. Fact: The Bible never calls work a curse but rather a gift from God (Ecclesiastes 3:13, 5:18-19).

God values our work even when the product has no eternal value.

- Even though God created a world which is time-bound and temporary, He values His work, declaring it to be “very good” by its nature (Genesis 1:31; Psalm 119:68; Acts 14:17).

- God promises to reward people in everyday jobs, based on their attitude and conduct (see Ephesians 6:7-9; Colossians 3:23-24).

- It is reasonable to conclude that since God values people, jobs which serve people are also of value to Him.

God wants people to take responsibility for their material needs and those of their families:

- Paul urged that those who would not work, due to laziness and idleness, should not be given food (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
  - God has created a world of resources. He gives us authority, along with strength and skills, to use these resources to earn a living and even gain wealth.
  - There are times when people will need help. Grown children must care for their parents and grandparents. The church community sometimes must assume responsibility as well, though such responsibility starts with the individual.
- Jesus Christ is the ultimate boss:
- God uses human supervisors. According to Colossians 3:23-24, people in authority over you are actually human representatives of Christ.
  - If you serve Christ in your job, you have more reason than anyone else to work with integrity and enthusiasm.
  - Jesus Christ will reward you for good, faithful work.

God has created you in His image to be a worker, giving you skills and abilities to accomplish His purposes. He has also sovereignly placed you in your occupation to do His work there. Do your work in a way that has dignity and brings glory and value to Christ.

**My best answer 51: Your career, like every part of your life, will be dramatically affected and enhanced as you serve Christ daily.**

### **Deep Question 52: What is your answer to life's deepest question?**

We started with the premise that wise choices can lead to immeasurable joy and fulfillment. From North and South America, Europe, Asia, and the Far East, I am privileged to hear reports from individuals who have discovered a new joy in following Jesus and who are finding a sense of fulfillment in sharing Jesus with others.

My prayer is that you have benefited from this book and that you are already experiencing a new joy and the anticipation of a great increase in your sense of personal fulfillment.

From the most basic fundamental question until now I have given you my best answer. I have also encouraged you to meditate and reflect on the deep questions of life. It is my hope that you have analyzed and approached the questions with an openness to access the answers.

And now we arrive at the last of life's deep questions. For this last question I cannot give you my answer. Only your answer matters now. Only your answer can guide you into greater wisdom and better choices. Only your answer can help you avoid foolish choices.

You have now considered some deep questions and you have been exposed to the reality that the God of the Bible is the God of the universe, the He loves you intimately, has forgiven you, that He accepts you just as you are and believes in you. He has trusted you with the right to choose to believe in Him, to respond to His love and accept the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on the Cross for you to be acceptable to Him. If you made that decision earlier, I congratulate you on having gained access to great wisdom for life on earth and a future filled with hope for eternity.

So here we have it. Life's deepest question was asked by Jesus Himself and recorded in the Scriptures in Matthew 16:15. Jesus asked the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Your specific answer to that question will have the most profound impact on your life and the life of those around you of any question you will ever answer.

**Write your answer to Jesus question in Matthew 16:15 below:**

---

---

---

---

If your answer right now is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, you have said "yes" to Jesus, and even if you are not aware of it, the Holy Spirit of God is living in you and can continually guide you into all truth and wisdom.

Even if you have prayed before, you can pray again now. I invite you to pray the following prayer and ask God to forgive you, to enter your heart with His Spirit, and to start leading you every day of your life.

*Father in Heaven,  
I know that I am a sinner  
and need forgiveness.  
I believe that Your Son Jesus  
died in my place,  
to pay the penalty for my sin,  
and rose again for my salvation.  
I want to accept You and turn from my sinful ways,  
so I now ask You,  
Lord Jesus, to come  
into my life as my Savior  
and my Lord.  
In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

The Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So if you have asked Him into your life, and believe He died to save you, you are a Christian, bound for Heaven.

If you have made that decision I encourage you to stop reading for a moment and write a thank-you note to Jesus for being your personal Savior and Lord.

Thank you, Jesus.

---

---

---

---

Now there is more. Thank Jesus often and remind yourself that the Holy Spirit now lives within you. He will always be with you and will never leave you or abandon you.

If you are still considering and not certain of your answer to deep question 52, I urge you to reread portions of this book and resolve your personal answer to life's greatest question.

### **Closing Thoughts:**

As we close our time together in this book, I ask you to reconsider two topics we have already addressed. Once you have answered life's deepest question and responded by saying "yes" to Jesus, it is important that you meditate and reflect on two additional scriptures and their meaning for you personally. The first is life's great commandment and the second is one of life's greatest concerns.

Ultimately, life is not so much about what we have and what we accomplish as it is about what influence we have on others and what we give or impart to them.

Jesus was asked to say which is the great commandment. He answered, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37).

Life's great commandment as found in these words of Jesus could be summarized in the questions, "Will I love Jesus as the Lord of my life?" and "Will I love others by making wise choices and decisions?"

I hope you will make it your daily practice to say yes to both questions.

One of life's greatest concerns is found in a warning recorded in Romans 1:21-22: "Although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools. ..."

It is possible for someone to know God, even say "yes" to Jesus and still behave foolishly. How do we guard ourselves from this?

I leave you with five things from this scriptural warning in Romans that you can do to avoid foolishness and sustain a vibrant, inviting relationship with God in which you continue to make wise choices.

- 1) Study the scriptures to know God better. Do not settle for the level of knowledge you have now.

- 2) Continually be in an attitude of praise and worship. Elevate Jesus through your thoughts and prayers.
- 3) Be thankful and grateful. Remind yourself daily of what Jesus has done for you.
- 4) Take your thought life captive for Jesus and think about things that keep you aware of Him and His love for you.
- 5) In your innermost mental and moral being where all your decisions concerning Jesus are made, be careful to honor Him in all you say and do. (And when you fall short in this commitment, be quick to pray for forgiveness and commit to growing daily in your walk with the Lord.)

Again, I remind you that to experience greater wisdom and maturity as a believer in Jesus, it is critically important that you join together often with other believers. Together you can build one another's faith as you are encouraged and strengthened in the Lord.

To further help you, at [www.lifesgreatestquestion.com](http://www.lifesgreatestquestion.com) you will find printable access to the scriptures noted in this book as well as links to other resources and study materials.

You may send a question or comment to me at [dshaw@lifesgreatestquestion.com](mailto:dshaw@lifesgreatestquestion.com); I am interested to know your view of this book.

In the appendices of this book are additional topical scripture references for further study, a list for further reading on the topic of Christianity and science and definitions of the key terms I have used.

If you have questions regarding these topics, references, books, definitions, or any of the 52 deep questions, I encourage you to contact me by email.

I pray that life's greatest question now has your greatest answer!

### **Further Reading on Christianity and Science:**

Behe, Michael J., *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Free Press, 1998.

Dembski, William A., *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology*, InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Ross, Hugh, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Latest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*, NavPress, 2001.

Ross, Hugh, *Beyond the Cosmos: The Extra-Dimensionality of God: What Recent Discoveries in Astrophysics Reveal About the Glory and Love of God*, NavPress, 1999.

Ross, Hugh, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, NavPress, 2001.

Strobel, Lee, *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points Toward God*, Zondervan, 2004.

Strobel, Lee, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*, Zondervan, 2000.

## Definition of Key Terms Used

**Agnostic**—One who believes it is not possible to know with certainty that God or an afterlife exists. Agnostics are skeptical about the existence of truth, about the ability of language to convey truth and about anyone who claims to know the truth.

**Animism**—The belief that all natural objects and phenomena (i.e., trees, stones, the wind, etc.) are spiritual beings or inhabited by spirits.

**Atheist**—One who has decided to disbelieve in God.

**Babylon**— A literal city, referred to as the beginner and supporter of tyranny and idolatry, adopting the worship of the false deities.

**Born again**— from the term used by Jesus in the third chapter of the New Testament book of John (John 3:3), meaning to receive salvation by trusting in Jesus, hence becoming a “new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**Buddhism**—A major world religion founded by Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century B.C. Buddhism teaches the doctrine that suffering is inseparable from existence, but that inward extinction of the self and of the senses culminates in a state of illumination called “nirvana.” **Mahayana Buddhism** teaches a modified Buddhism with many gods and saviors (bodhisattvas). **Theravada Buddhism** adheres to original Buddhist practice, emphasizing that outside agencies (gods or spirits) are irrelevant to the religious objective of cleansing the mind (or consciousness) through meditation.

**Calling**— a profession, or a vocation (1 Corinthians 7:20). The “hope of your calling” in Ephesians 4:4 is the hope resulting from your being called into the kingdom of God.

**Christ**— from *Christos*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term “Messiah.” Both words literally mean “Anointed One.” This was the word used in the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures as prepared by Jewish translators three centuries before the time of Jesus. When early Christians believed they had found their Messiah, they naturally referred to him as “the Christ.” When Christians say “Jesus Christ,” they are actually saying “Jesus the Messiah.”

**Christian**— according to the New Testament, this term was first used at Antioch to describe the Jewish faction that believed they had found the “Christ” (i.e., Messiah) in Jesus. Today it means anyone who trusts in “the Christ” (i.e., Jesus) as his or her Savior.

**Church**— 1.) An assembly of Christian believers 2.) All Christian believers everywhere.

**Confess**— To agree or to acknowledge sin or acknowledge someone as something.

**Conscience**— That faculty of the mind, or inborn sense of right and wrong, by which we judge the moral character of human conduct.

**Conversion**—To turn. Usually to turn to God. The encounter with God which begins with an initial confession of sin and prayer of repentance to God, then continues as the convert invites the Spirit of God to enter his or her heart and begin a process of renewal and cleansing from habitual or previously unrecognized sin.

**Cosmos**— An orderly, harmonious systematic universe, worshiped in Eastern worldview as an impersonal, infinite, non-material god-like entity.

**Darkness**—A metaphor for the absence of God’s spiritual light, resulting in human depravity and evil (Ephesians 5:11,12).

**Deep smarts**—Not simply IQ or talent, but a potent form of experience-based wisdom that drives both organizational competitiveness and personal success, a combination of knowledge, competitive advantage and continuous innovation. What makes *deep smarts* so competitively valuable is that they are built on firsthand life experiences, resulting in tacit knowledge that is hard for other organizations or individuals to copy.

**Denomination**—Groups within Christianity that emphasize different key principles of scripture, yet at least in their origins agree on the important doctrines of the Christian truth: i.e., Assemblies of God, Baptist, Episcopal, Foursquare, Lutheran, Methodist, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, etc. are examples of only a few Christian denominations. There are over 2,500 denominations in the United States.

**Discipleship**—The act of uniting with fellow followers of Christ and growing spiritually. Often this refers to the specific process of initiating relationships of spiritual mentorship and teaching with more mature brothers and sisters. By its very name, this process is meant to emulate the experience of Christ’s 12 disciples, who became giants in the faith merely by their consistent travels with and emulation of Christ.

**Eastern worldview**—An ancient collection of beliefs arising from India and pervasive throughout the Far East, characterized by six major concepts. 1.) In the so-called Eastern Worldview, the ultimate Reality (the “One”) is impersonal, infinite, non-material, and non-conceptual. 2.) The Universe flows out of Brahman (God), and Brahman is the Universe. 3.) “Atman” (the soul and essence of each human) is Brahman (the Soul of the Cosmos). 4.) The death of man is the end of individual personal existence but Atman is eternal. 5.) Ethics are not absolute; to reach enlightenment in the “One” is to go beyond good and evil. 6.) All distinct things, events, and time are illusions; so history is meaningless and cyclical.

**Eternal**—When referring to God, eternity timeless, immortal with no beginning or end in terms of time. When referring to the gift of eternal life that God offers humans in Christ, it is a quality of life that extends through eternity.

**Existentialist**— One whose acts of free will are without concern for knowledge of what is right or wrong.

**Faith**—The one act we can offer to God that is essential to salvation: To place our trust in Him, despite occasional doubts and the world’s attacks. It is the very lifeblood of the Christian experience.

**First Cause argument**— Fundamentally, the argument is based on the claim that God must exist due to the fact that the universe needs a cause. Framed as a formal proof, the First Cause argument can be stated as follows:

1. Some things are caused.
2. Nothing can cause itself.
3. Therefore, everything that is caused is caused by something other than itself.
4. A causal chain cannot stretch infinitely backward in time.
5. If the causal chain cannot stretch infinitely backward in time, there must be a first cause.
6. The word *God* means uncaused First Cause.
7. Therefore, God exists.

(The cosmological argument infers the existence of God from claims about *the entire universe*.)

**Gospel**—Literally “good news,” a literal translation of the Greek word *euangelion*.) The story of Jesus who “died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . was buried and . . . rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

**Grace**—Unmerited favor, undeserved blessing.

**Hindu, Hinduism**—One who believes in the religious tradition of Hinduism developed over several thousand years and intertwined with the history and social system of India. There are significant variations in the beliefs that different Hindus hold, although most believe in reincarnation. There are also differences in the gods and goddesses worshiped, the scriptures used and the festivals observed. **Mainstream Hinduism** is also polytheistic; worshipers may choose among 330 million gods to worship. Some Hindus and some Indian religions teach pantheism, which claims that all perceptions of distinctions are illusion and that all is one.

**Holy Spirit**—A part of the Christian trinity, or three-person God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) associated with the spiritual indwelling, teaching, conviction and renewal of the human soul.

**Horoscope**— A diagram of the relative positions of planets and signs of the zodiac at a specific time (as at one’s birth) for use in inferring individual character and personality traits and in attempts at foretelling events of a person’s life.

**Humanism**— The doctrine emphasizing a person’s capacity for self-realization through reason; rejects religion and the supernatural.

**Illumination**—Refers to being spiritually enlightened and being filled with inner light. In Christian understanding, illumination comes from the Holy Spirit.

**Islam**—The word means “submission to the will of God” in Arabic and is the religion founded by Mohammed (A.D. 570-632). It is an offshoot of Judaism and Christianity. Islam is based upon the absolute unity of God; Muslims have been taught that Christians teach three gods: God the Father, the mother Mary and their son, Jesus. Their key profession is that “there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet.”

**Judaism**—The religion that developed among the ancient Hebrews and is characterized by belief in the one true God who revealed Himself to Abraham, Moses and the other Hebrew prophets. Judaism is characterized by a religious life in accordance with Old Testament Scripture and the Talmud. Christianity is built on the foundation of Judaism.

**Karma (reincarnation)**—A basic concept common to Hinduism, Buddhism, and New Age groups, which holds that one’s state in this life is the result of physical and mental actions in past incarnations and that present action can determine one’s destiny in future incarnations.

**Light**—A biblical metaphor referring to God as the spiritual light source similar to the sun, not dependent on any other, and one who dispels all spiritual darkness (Psalm 27:1; John 1:4, 5; 8:12; 1 John 1:5). When Christians are referred to as “light,” the term refers to borrowed light similar to how the moon reflects the light of the sun

**Live church**—a group of Christian believers who come together in a manner that is unforced, unrehearsed and spontaneous, spurred on more by the leading of God than obligation or external pressures.

**Maya**— In Hinduism, a powerful force that creates the cosmic illusion that the phenomenal world is real. The word *maya* originally referred to wizardry.

**Meditation**—To ponder or think deeply about religious matters.

**Monotheistic**— Having the doctrine or belief that there is only one God.

**Myths, mythology**—A myth is a non-historical story—or set of stories—that explains the origin and history of a people. The Hindu scriptures and other Eastern religious writings are based on myths and legends. The pagan Greek and Roman religions were also based on myths.

**Neo-paganism**— The practice of worshipping a contemporary form of paganism—a follower of a polytheistic religion (such as Wicca) or the practice of delighting in sensual pleasures and material goods.

**New Age**—Western reinterpretations of Hindu, Buddhist and occult mysticism rounded out with elements from Native American spirituality. The words “New Age” refer to the Aquarian age which occultists believe is dawning, bringing with it an era of enlightenment and peace. Encompassed within the New Age movement are various cults

which emphasize mystic experiences.

**Nirvana**—Literally a “blowing out” or “cooling” of the fires of existence. In Buddhism it is the term used for the final release from the cycle of birth and death into bliss.

**Occult, occultism**—Literally meaning “hidden,” it is a vague term used to cover a variety of groups or practices that involve contacting and using the knowledge and the power of the spirits of the dead and other spirits, including Satan and his demons.

**Pantheism**—The belief that God and the world are ultimately identical; all is God. Everything that exists constitutes a unity, and this all-inclusive unity is divine. God is equated with the forces and laws of the universe but is not a personal being.

**Psychic**— An individual who is sensitive to nonphysical or supernatural forces and influences who may claim extraordinary or mysterious sensitivity, perception, or understanding to predict the future.

**Quiet Time**—A term used to denote a time that is set aside for personal meditation and communion with God.

**Reaping**—A metaphor for gathering the fruit or results of what one has planted. Also applies to character traits and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 6:7-9).

**Reconciliation**— A change from enmity (irreconcilable hostility) to friendship. It is a change formed in both parties who have been at enmity.

**Redemption**—The act of being set free by paying a ransom. Christians are redeemed from eternal death to eternal life through God’s gracious provision of Jesus’ death on the cross (Romans 3:23-25).

**Reflection**— A thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation.

**Reincarnation**—The belief that the soul moves from one life and body to another. This movement is supposedly influenced by the actions a person has in his or her previous life. After many existences the soul is released from historical existence into the Absolute. This is a commonly held belief of religions affiliated with Hinduism.

**Repentance**—Being sorry, changing one’s mind about doing wrong, and wanting to leave the wrong-doing behind and become righteous. True repentance includes agreeing with God that you have done something wrong and asking for forgiveness.

**Sanctification**— The process by which the Holy Spirit helps a Christian grow spiritually to be more Christ-like after first having been justified. This involves more than a mere moral reformation of character, brought about by the power of the truth: It is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the whole nature more and more under the influences of the new

gracious principles implanted in the soul in regeneration. In other words, sanctification is the carrying on to perfection of the work begun in regeneration, and it extends to the whole man (Romans 6:13; 2 Corinthians 4:6; *Colossians* 3:10; 1 John 4:7; 1 Corinthians 6:19). It is the special office or role of the Holy Spirit in the plan of redemption.

**Salvation**—The bundle of benefits received by the person who believes the Gospel and entrusts his or her life to Christ. The benefits include forgiveness of sin, a right standing (accepted relationship) with God, heaven instead of hell upon physical death, new life (the indwelling Spirit of the life of Christ Jesus), awesome joy and contentment, and power to live an unselfish life worthy of our calling in Christ.

**Satan**—A biblical name referring to both a supernatural being, and an obstacle. The profoundly evil adversary of God and humanity, often identified as the leader of the fallen angels; also the devil. Christian Scriptures describe him as the one-time leader of all the angels and so beautiful that he was difficult to gaze upon; he became enraptured with his own beauty and launched a fateful rebellion against God in which he and many of the angels who followed him were defeated and exiled to the realm of earth.

**Savior**—Jesus, our Savior, was sent by God to save the world from sin.

**Sin**—Rebellion against God and His will for His Creation. Literally, it means to fall short, or fail to reach the target of perfection. The Bible says that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

**Soul**—the innermost part of the human being; the part of us which interacts with the spiritual during our earthly existence.

**Sowing**—A metaphor used in the Bible that means the planting of thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that will grow and bring about good or bad consequences, depending on what is sown (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7-9).

**Spiritual master**—A guru or teacher in an Eastern religion who claims supernatural ability and power.

**Syncretism**—The process by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. It is the union of two or more opposite beliefs, so that the synthesized form is a new thing. It is not always a total fusion, but may be a combination of separate segments that remain identifiable compartments.

**Transcendental meditation**—A Hindu cult imported to the west by Maharishi Mahesh, a yogi that focused on a meditation technique in which a mantra (a short phrase or name of a god in the Sanskrit language) is chanted in order to foster calm, creativity and spiritual well-being.

**Truth**—In the New Testament truth refers to Christ, the salvation He brings and what He

reveals about God. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). A person is in the truth or knows the truth if his/her existence corresponds to what truth really is or should be. Many in our culture believe that truth is relative, that each of us creates our own truth and that “my truth” is not the same as “your truth.”

**Wisdom**— A moral rather than a purely intellectual quality. To be “foolish” is to be godless. True wisdom is a gift from God to those who seek Him. Jesus is the personified principle of wisdom, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

**Witness**—The testimony of one who furnishes evidence or proof or has knowledge of an incident. Also a person giving testimony of Jesus rising from the dead (Acts 1:8).

**Witchcraft**—The practice of magic or sorcery traditionally used by witches for evil ends. In the Western world, witchcraft has evolved into neopaganism and ritual magic practices (Galatians 5:19-21).

**World Christians**—Followers of Christ characterized by an overriding concern and passion for reaching the rest of the world with the saving message of the Gospel, often over other pursuits such as personal enrichment or comfort.

**Worldview**—The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world. A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

**Yogi**—A master of one or more methods of yoga (a Hindu system of meditation and self-control designed to produce spiritual insight) who teaches it to others.

## Topical References

### BUSINESS & CAREER

#### Counsel

Psalm 1:1-3  
Psalm 32:7-10  
Proverbs 1:5  
Proverbs 11:14  
Proverbs 15:22  
Proverbs 24:6

#### Honesty

Leviticus 19:11, 13  
Leviticus 19:35-36  
Job 31:5-8  
Proverbs 13:11  
Ezekiel 45:9-10  
Luke 16:10-12

#### Integrity

1 Kings 9:3-5  
Job 2:3  
Job 27:3-6  
Psalm 26:1-5  
Proverbs 10:9  
Proverbs 11:3-4

#### Labor

Deuteronomy 8:17-18  
Proverbs 14:23  
Proverbs 22:29  
Proverbs 28:19-22  
Colossians 3:17, 22-25  
1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

#### Laziness

Proverbs 6:6-8  
Proverbs 12:24  
Proverbs 13:4  
Proverbs 21:25-26  
Proverbs 24:30-34  
2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

#### Leadership

1 Samuel 13:14  
Acts 6:3  
1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
Ephesians 6:8-9  
Colossians 4:1  
1 Timothy 3:1-13

#### Management

Exodus 18:17-23  
Deuteronomy 1:9-18

Deuteronomy 24:14-15  
Matthew 6:24-34

#### Ownership

Genesis 1:1  
Job 1:21  
Matthew 25:14-29  
Luke 12:48  
Luke 16:10-13

#### Partnership

Proverbs 13:20  
Proverbs 22:24-29  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12  
Amos 3:3  
1 Corinthians 15:33  
2 Corinthians 6:14-16

#### Vision

Psalm 32:8  
Proverbs 29:18  
Jeremiah 29:11-13  
Habakkuk 2:2-3  
1 Corinthians 2:9-14  
Ephesians 1:17-19

#### Wisdom

Job 28:12-28  
Psalm 111:10  
Proverbs 2:1-15  
Proverbs 4:5-8  
Daniel 2:19-23  
James 1:5

### CHARACTER-BUILDING TRAITS

#### Courage

Joshua 1:5-9  
1 Chronicles 22:13  
2 Chronicles 32:6-8  
Psalm 27:12-14  
Daniel 3:15-18  
Acts 4:18-21

#### Faithfulness

Psalm 119:89-90  
Matthew 25:23  
Romans 3:3-4  
1 Corinthians 4:1-2  
Galatians 5:22-23  
1 Thessalonians 5:24  
Hebrews 3:5

#### Humility

Deuteronomy 8:2  
2 Chronicles 7:14  
Psalm 18:27  
Proverbs 22:4  
Philippians 2:3-8  
James 4:6-10  
1 Peter 5:5-6

#### Meekness

Psalm 37:11  
Matthew 5:5  
Galatians 5:22-23  
Colossians 3:12-13  
James 1:21  
James 3:13-18

#### Obedience

Leviticus 26:1-35  
Deuteronomy 28  
Job 36:11-12  
John 14:21-24  
Acts 5:27-32  
Romans 5:19  
Romans 6:15-18  
2 Corinthians 10:3-6

#### Patience

Ecclesiastes 7:8  
1 Thessalonians 5:14  
2 Thessalonians 1:4  
1 Timothy 6:11-12  
Hebrews 6:11-15  
James 1:2-4  
James 5:7-8

#### Righteousness

Genesis 15:6  
Leviticus 19:15  
2 Samuel 22:21-25  
Psalm 11:7  
Psalm 103:6  
Proverbs 11:3-11  
Proverbs 14:34  
Romans 3:10

#### Self-Control

Genesis 39:1-12  
1 Corinthians 7:1-9  
Galatians 5:22-23  
2 Timothy 3:1-5  
Titus 1:7-9  
2 Peter 1:5-7

## **EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS**

### **Anger**

Psalm 37:8-9  
Psalm 103:8-12  
Proverbs 15:1  
Proverbs 16:32  
Matthew 5:22  
Romans 12:19-21  
Ephesians 4:25-32  
James 1:19-21

### **Contentment**

Psalm 37:16-19  
Proverbs 17:22  
Matthew 6:25-34  
Philippians 3:7-8  
Philippians 4:11-13  
1 Timothy 6:6-10  
Hebrews 13:5

### **Fear**

Psalm 23  
Psalm 91  
Proverbs 1:33  
Isaiah 41:10-14  
Luke 12:5  
John 14:27  
2 Timothy 1:7  
Hebrews 13:6

### **Guilt**

Psalm 103:11-12  
Proverbs 21:8  
Jeremiah 33:8  
Ezekiel 18:19-24  
Romans 3:19-24  
James 2:10  
1 John 1:9

### **Hate**

Psalm 139:21-24  
Proverbs 6:16-19  
Matthew 5:21-24  
Matthew 5:43-44  
Luke 6:27-31  
1 John 2:9-11  
1 John 3:13-15  
1 John 4:20-21

### **Joy**

Psalm 5:11-12  
Psalm 16:11  
Habakkuk 3:18

Luke 10:17-21  
Luke 15:10  
John 15:10-11  
John 16:19-24  
1 Peter 1:6-9

### **Love**

Proverbs 10:12  
Matthew 22:37-40  
John 3:16  
John 13:34-35  
John 14:21-23  
John 15:12-13  
1 Corinthians 13  
1 John 3:18  
1 John 4:7-8

### **Peace**

Numbers 6:23-26  
Psalm 37:37  
Psalm 119:165  
Proverbs 3:1-2  
Isaiah 26:3  
Isaiah 32:17  
John 14:27  
John 16:33  
Romans 5:1

### **Sorrow**

Psalm 51  
Matthew 5:4  
John 14:1-3  
John 16:20-22  
2 Corinthians 1:3-7  
2 Corinthians 7:9-11  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

## **FINANCIAL MATTERS**

### **Budgeting**

Proverbs 6:6-8  
Proverbs 24:3-4  
Proverbs 27:23-24  
Luke 14:28-30

### **Cosigning**

Proverbs 6:1-5  
Proverbs 11:15  
Proverbs 17:18  
Proverbs 22:26-27

### **Debt**

2 Kings 4:1  
Proverbs 22:7  
Matthew 18:24-25

Romans 13:8

### **Giving**

Leviticus 27:30  
Proverbs 3:9-10  
Malachi 3:8-11  
Mark 12:41-44  
Luke 6:30-31, 38  
2 Corinthians 9:6-12

### **Greed**

Exodus 20:17  
Proverbs 15:27  
Proverbs 28:20-22  
Luke 12:15-21  
1 Timothy 6:9-10

### **Investing**

Proverbs 21:5  
Ecclesiastes 5:13-16  
Ecclesiastes 11:1-2  
Matthew 25:14-30

### **Lawsuits**

Exodus 20:16  
Exodus 23:1-3  
Leviticus 19:18  
Proverbs 24:28-29  
1 Corinthians 6:1-8

### **Lending**

Exodus 22:25-27  
Deuteronomy 15:7-8  
Psalm 15:5  
Matthew 5:42  
Luke 6:34-36

### **Poverty**

Psalm 72:4, 12-13  
Psalm 82: 3-4  
Isaiah 41:17  
2 Corinthians 8:9  
Revelation 3:17-20

### **Prudence**

Proverbs 8:11-12  
Proverbs 12:23  
Proverbs 13:16  
Proverbs 18:15  
Proverbs 22:3

### **Retirement**

Psalm 92:12-14  
Proverbs 9:10-11  
Proverbs 21:20

Isaiah 46:4  
Luke 12:16-21

### **Savings**

Proverbs 6:6-11  
Proverbs 10:4-5  
Proverbs 11:28  
Proverbs 21:20  
I Timothy 6:17-19

### **Taxes**

Proverbs 28:4-9  
Matthew 22:17-21  
Romans 13:1-7  
I Peter 2:13-15

### **Wealth**

Deuteronomy 8:17-18  
2 Chronicles 1:11-12  
Proverbs 13:11, 22  
Ecclesiastes 5:19  
James 5:1-5

## **LIFE'S ISSUES**

### **Anxiety**

Psalm 27:1-3  
Psalm 46:1-3  
Proverbs 3:24-26  
Isaiah 41:10  
Luke 12:22-31  
Philippians 4:6-7  
1 Peter 5:6-7

### **Crisis**

Joshua 1:5-9  
Psalm 23  
Psalm 32:6-10  
Proverbs 3:5-10  
Isaiah 43:2  
Romans 8:37-39  
Hebrews 13:5-6

### **Death**

Psalm 116:15  
Isaiah 25:8-9  
John 5:24-29  
1 Corinthians 15:51-57  
Hebrews 2:14-15  
Hebrews 9:27  
1 John 5:11-13

### **Depression**

Psalm 34  
Psalm 103:1-8  
Isaiah 40:31

John 16:24  
Romans 15:13

### **Drunkenness**

Isaiah 28:1-3  
Habakkuk 2:15-16  
Luke 21:34-36  
1 Corinthians 5:11  
1 Corinthians 6:9-11  
Galatians 5:19-21  
Ephesians 5:17-18

### **Gossip**

Leviticus 19:16  
Proverbs 11:13  
Proverbs 18:7-8  
Proverbs 20:19  
Titus 2:3

### **Guidance**

Psalm 25:8-9  
Psalm 32:8  
Proverbs 3:5-6  
Isaiah 30:21  
Isaiah 58:11  
John 16:13  
1 Corinthians 2:10-14

### **Health**

Proverbs 3:5-8  
Proverbs 4:20-22  
Proverbs 15:30  
Proverbs 16:24  
Proverbs 17:22

### **Loneliness**

Genesis 2:18-24  
Deuteronomy 31:6  
Joshua 1:5-9  
Psalm 23  
Isaiah 41:10  
Hebrews 13:5

### **Lying**

Exodus 20:16  
Leviticus 19:11  
Psalm 101:5, 7  
John 8:44  
Ephesians 4:25  
Colossians 3:9  
Revelation 22:14-15

### **Murder**

Exodus 20:13  
Deuteronomy 5:17  
Matthew 5:21-22

Mark 10:19  
Romans 13:9-10  
James 2:10-11

### **Pride**

1 Samuel 2:3  
Proverbs 6:16-17  
Isaiah 13:11  
Matthew 23:12  
James 4:6  
1 Peter 5:5-6

### **Protection**

Psalm 27:1-3  
Psalm 34:7  
Psalm 91  
Proverbs 1:33  
Proverbs 18:10  
Isaiah 41:10-13  
Romans 8:35-39

### **Sickness**

Exodus 15:26  
Psalm 38:2-8  
Psalm 41:3-4  
Psalm 103:2-3  
Isaiah 53:5  
2 Corinthians 12:9-10  
James 5:14-16

### **Slander**

Exodus 20:16  
Exodus 23:1-3, 6-7  
Psalm 101:5  
Proverbs 10:18-21  
Matthew 26:59-60  
2 Timothy 3:2-5

### **Temptation**

Genesis 3:1-7  
Isaiah 33:15-16  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Matthew 26:41  
Luke 11:4  
1 Corinthians 10:13  
Hebrews 2:18  
James 1:12-15

### **Theft**

Exodus 20:15  
Leviticus 6:1-4  
Leviticus 19:11-13  
Proverbs 11:1  
Zechariah 5:3-4  
Matthew 19:18  
1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Ephesians 4:28

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Adultery**

Exodus 20:14  
Proverbs 5:3-8  
Proverbs 6:32-33  
Matthew 5:27-28  
Luke 16:18  
John 8:3-11  
Galatians 5:19-21

### **Children**

Deuteronomy 6:4-7  
Psalm 127:3-5  
Proverbs 13:22  
Matthew 18:3-6  
Matthew 19:14  
John 1:12  
Ephesians 6:1-4  
Colossians 3:20-21

### **Divorce**

Malachi 2:16  
Matthew 5:31-32  
Matthew 19:3-9  
Mark 10:2-12  
1 Corinthians 7:10-16

### **Friends**

Job 6:14  
Proverbs 17:17  
Proverbs 18:24  
Proverbs 22:11  
Proverbs 27:9-10, 17  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12  
John 15:13-15

### **Marriage**

Genesis 2:22-25  
Proverbs 5:18-20  
Matthew 19:4-6  
1 Corinthians 7  
2 Corinthians 6:14  
Ephesians 5:22-23  
Hebrews 13:4  
1 Peter 3:7

### **Neighbors**

Exodus 20:16-17  
Zechariah 8:16-17  
Matthew 22:37-39

Luke 10:29-37  
Romans 13:9-10  
Ephesians 4:25  
James 2:8-10

### **Orphans & Fatherless**

Exodus 22:22  
Deuteronomy 24:17-21  
Psalm 68:5  
Psalm 82:3  
Psalm 146:9  
Isaiah 1:17  
James 1:27

### **Parents**

Exodus 20:12  
Leviticus 19:3  
Proverbs 1:8  
Proverbs 15:5  
Proverbs 23:22-25  
Ephesians 6:1-4  
Colossians 3:20-21

### **Spouses**

Genesis 3:16  
Proverbs 5:18-19  
Proverbs 31:10-12  
1 Corinthians 7:1-6  
Ephesians 5:22-33  
Colossians 3:18-19  
1 Peter 3:1-7

### **Widows**

Psalm 68:5  
Proverbs 15:25  
Zechariah 7:8-10  
Acts 6:1-3  
1 Timothy 5:1-16  
James 1:27

## **SPIRITUAL CONCEPTS**

### **Atonement**

Exodus 30:10  
Leviticus 23:26-28  
Galatians 4:4-7  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
Ephesians 2:4-10  
Colossians 1:13-14  
Hebrews 7:26-27  
Hebrews 9:24-28  
Hebrews 10:10-14  
1 Peter 3:18

### **Faith**

Mark 11:22-24  
Romans 1:16-17  
Romans 3:21-26  
Romans 10:17  
2 Corinthians 5:7  
Galatians 2:16, 20  
Ephesians 2:8-9  
Ephesians 6:16  
Hebrews 6:12  
Hebrews 11  
James 5:15  
1 John 5:4 -5

### **Forgiveness**

2 Chronicles 7:14  
Psalm 86:5  
Psalm 103:1-3  
Matthew 6:12-15  
Luke 17:3-4  
Colossians 2:13-14  
1 John 1:9

### **Grace**

Psalm 84:11  
Proverbs 3:33-34  
Romans 3:22-26  
Romans 5  
Ephesians 2:8-9  
Titus 3:5-7  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
1 Peter 5:5-6

### **Hope**

Psalm 31:24  
Psalm 33:18-22  
Psalm 119:114  
Jeremiah 17:7-8  
Jeremiah 29:11  
Ephesians 1:17-19  
Colossians 1:27  
Titus 2:13-14

### **Mercy**

Exodus 20:5-6  
1 Chronicles 16:34  
Lamentations 3:22-23  
Matthew 5:7  
Luke 1:49-50  
Ephesians 2:4-5  
Titus 3:5  
Hebrew 4:16  
1 Peter 1:3

### **Repentance**

1 Kings 8:46-50  
Ezekiel 18:30-32  
Matthew 4:17

Mark 1:4-5, 14-15  
Luke 13:1-5  
Luke 24:46-47  
Acts 3:18-19  
Romans 2:4  
2 Corinthians 7:9-10  
2 Peter 3:9

### **Salvation**

Psalm 51:9-14  
John 1:12  
John 3:3-8, 14-18  
John 5:24  
Acts 16:30-31  
Acts 26:17-18  
Romans 6:23  
Romans 10:9-13  
2 Corinthians 5:17  
Ephesians 2:8-9  
Titus 3:5-7  
1 John 5:11-13

### **Sin**

Psalm 51:2-5  
Matthew 18:8-9  
John 1:29  
John 16:7-11  
Romans 3:9-23  
Romans 5:12-21  
Romans 6  
Romans 7:7-25  
1 Corinthians 6:18  
2 Corinthians 5:21  
Hebrews 10:26  
James 4:17  
1 John 1:7-10

## **Biography of the Author:**

### **Dr. Douglas Shaw**

Indian-born Dr. Douglas Shaw, once an international student himself, is the President/CEO of International Students, Inc. in Colorado Springs, Colorado. After receiving his initial education in Calcutta, Dr. Shaw came to the U.S. over 33 years ago and earned both an MA and a Ph.D. at California Graduate School of Theology in Glendale, CA. Dr. Shaw's professional experience includes ongoing work as a consultant, producer and guest in various media endeavors, including television, radio and multi-media. He is the author of many articles and more than a dozen books and training manuals. In addition, Dr. Shaw travels extensively in the U.S., Europe, Asia and the Far East and serves as a guest lecturer on topics related to emerging world religions, the new world order, and systematic adaptations for the expanding dimensions of globalization. Doug Shaw is married to Susan, and they have three children, Cilicia, Kassania, and Rajeev.