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#1

EXAMINE YOUR FOUNDATION CAREFULLY

It's your worldview. Look deeply at what you value and what you believe about God and man and truth and reality. Then make it your own. Because it will affect every decision you make. Because life has a way of picking you up and tossing you around, and you always want to nail the landing.

*What comes into our minds when we think about God
is the most important thing about us.*

—A.W. TOZER

We all have a worldview.

It's what we believe, not necessarily what we profess.

It's the ideas that actually control our lives—often without our realizing it. It's what drives our every thought, every decision, every move we make. It affects how we relate to other

people, what we feel, and what we do under pressure. It informs how we spend our money and how we spend our time.

We come by our worldview effortlessly. We were helped in its construction—from the day we were born—by our families, our friends, our teachers, our experiences, our culture, our problems, and our faith.

To see how this happens, let's look at Mike.

Mike was raised in a suburban Christian home. For much of his life, his parents took him to sports every Saturday and to church every Sunday. He paid decent attention in Sunday school and youth group, and by the age of fourteen he thought he had most of the Christian thing figured out. Be nice to people. Read your Bible. And pray. Actually—if he was honest—Mike didn't really see the point to all of that Bible reading and prayer. It bored him. But he was as nice as the next guy.

In school Mike learned how to make sense of the world—through math and science, literature and history. He learned that the human race continues to evolve and progress. He learned that there is no ultimate authority, no single truth that applies to everyone for all time. Rather, he and his peers got to figure out what was true for them.

Mike learned about relationships from movies and music. He learned that men should be strong and assertive, that girls want a man who will make them feel good, and that having a girl by his side would make him feel good too.

Mike learned about happiness from advertising. In order to be happy, he needed the latest game system, the best car, the trendiest clothes, and the most money. And, of course, he needed to have the most fun.

When he arrived at college, Mike stopped attending that

suburban church. In fact, Mike stopped attending church much at all. He learned that sleeping in on Sunday mornings helped him recover from Saturday nights.

Mike's college friends came from all over the United States, even from all over the world. These new friends subtly influenced Mike's worldview. Although he had learned at his old suburban church that Muslims and atheists did not believe the truth about Jesus and would spend eternity separated from Him, the real Muslims and atheists he met were much nicer than he had imagined.

So, by his midtwenties, Mike was at a crossroads.

Before the cement of his worldview had even had a chance to cure, it had been placed under considerable pressure—at many points. And Mike was hardly even aware that it was happening.

EIGHT WORLDVIEW QUESTIONS

A few years ago I (Peter) sat down with a group of twenty-somethings, and we developed this set of questions to help people identify their worldview:

1. Is there a supreme force, power, or being? If so, what is it like?
2. Is there a physical world, a spirit world, or neither?
3. Are human beings good, evil, or neither?
4. Is there such a thing as truth?
5. What do you value?
6. Can logic be trusted?
7. What books, people, or media inform your life?
8. What happens when people die?

Our answers to these eight questions will reveal—to a large degree—our worldview: Why we believe and feel and talk and act the way we do.

In answer to these eight questions, many people who grew up in a church (just like Mike) might say something like this . . .

“Sure, there’s a God.” They might acknowledge that He exists. However, they don’t act as if He’s terribly involved with the world—or with their life. They might pray in a time of undue stress, or even sing a Christian chorus (with arms raised?) if the opportunity presents itself. But God has little to do with their job or schoolwork or habits or hobbies or the way they interact with their family and friends. When people believe in such a distant God, they have to create their own purpose for living. They might decide that they want to live to serve others and make the world a better place. They might decide to focus on what feels good and to live for themselves and maybe their family. Or they may even decide that life is meaningless. They may even succumb to despair.

In answer to question #2, they might hem and haw and say, “I think there’s a spirit world.” But it doesn’t matter much because they live in the here and now and trust their own senses. They

are only aware of what they can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and they aren’t worried about what might be going on behind the scenes.

MOST PEOPLE FIND
THE QUESTION ABOUT
TRUTH TO BE TRICKY.

In answer to question #3, many people who grew up in the church will say, “Of course, I’m good. Most people are.” Then, if asked to define “good,” they might say, “Nice.” “Kind.” “Not a jerk.” And they would reserve “evil” for terrorists, murderers, human traf-

fickers and such. And even then, they might hesitate to judge. After all, if those people were doing what they believed to be “right” and “true,” who are we to pass blame?

Most people find the question about truth to be tricky. Some would say, “There is no such thing”—not realizing that this, in itself, is an assertion of truth. Others would say that truth is complex and unknowable. And if anyone claims to have it figured out, he must be arrogant or ignorant or intolerant or all of the above.

When asked what they value, many people might say, “Family. Friends. Work. Life. Health.” Or they might say, “Authenticity. Selflessness. Justice. And peace.” They might list all sorts of people and activities and objects and ideas. But the better question might be: Where do we spend our time and money and attention? Because that will reveal our actual values—whether we would name them as such or not. And while the things listed above are good, we also have to ask: When it comes to my life values, is “good” really “good enough”?

Many people also struggle with logic and its role. Historically, logic was central to learning. An hypothesis had to be researched and proven—with valid reasons and compelling evidence. However, our culture’s standards today have shifted. Rather than requiring a solid argument, we now trust whoever tells the most heart-rending tale. Narrative trumps thought. Also, we feel obligated to give assent to absolutely everyone—no matter what they believe. To do otherwise—to engage with logic and to think critically—can be considered uncompassionate and cold.

When asked to name the sources that inform their lives, most people today find them too numerous to count. Certainly, family and friends still rank high on the list. However, their

voices now compete to be heard over the hundreds of television stations and websites and billboard ads and celebrity promos and musical performances and Internet videos we encounter in a given week. And the indicator of whether or not something is worthwhile and credible is whether or not it went viral.

Finally, in answer to question #8, most people assume that their dead loved ones have gone to heaven and, of course, they themselves are headed there too. They might not use that exact term. But they comfort themselves with phrases like this: “I’ll see him again” or “she’s in a better place” or “he’s looking down on me.” And they believe that even people who had no time for Jesus on earth have gone to spend eternity with Him.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton gave a fancy name to the worldview we just described. It’s “Post-Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” and it’s all the rage—in our culture and in many of our churches.¹

However, it is something less than Christian.

A CHRIST-CENTERED WORLDVIEW

If we were to try to align our worldview with that of Christ, then it might look more like this . . .

We might say, Yes, there is a God. He is holy and sovereign and loving and unchanging. And He is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives. We live for His glory. And knowing Him changes absolutely everything.

Yes, there is a spirit world. It is the foundation of the world we can sense, and it permeates it at every point. It transcends the physical world as a giant transcends a ladybug.

Yes, I am evil. At least I was born that way. Now the evil per-

son who came into the world can be crucified with Christ and a new person may live in her stead.

Yes, there is truth. And it is found in God and His Word and His world. And though none of us will ever come to understand it entirely, we will spend our lives seeking it out.

Yes, I value family and friends and other good things. But even more than those, I value God. All other things are a pile of dung compared to the value of knowing Him (Philippians 3:8).

Yes, I value logic. But my own logic pales in comparison to God's. He is all-knowing and perfectly reasonable, though He may not always seem so to us.

Yes, there is a heaven. And there is a hell. Heaven is a relationship with God—a loving God who does not force people to be with Him for eternity. So He has provided a second option. Eternal estrangement. We call that hell.

A FRACTURED FOUNDATION

When I (Kelli) was in my twenties, my worldview had some huge holes.

I believed a lot about God. I had already studied Him for years. And I thought I had Him all figured out. The theology that my church had handed me had hardly been questioned or challenged or truly made my own. God still fit in a nice God-sized box that I had set on the shelf. He was holy (check) and sovereign (check) and on down the list. He was also good, and He wanted good things for me. So if I delighted in Him, if I worked hard enough on His behalf, He would give me the desires of my heart. On demand. As far as I was concerned, that was the deal.

When I was in my twenties, I believed certain things about

human nature and about myself. Though I would have told you that people are sinful (evil) and are the grateful recipients of God's good grace, I had a hard time accepting that grace for myself. Secretly, I wanted to believe that I was pretty good, and I lived the tiresome life of a perfectionist—trying to perform; trying to live up to some unspoken, but powerfully perceived, expectations; trying to control my world. Grace was not sufficient and failure was not acceptable, so when I did fail—when I didn't get the job, when a mentee pushed me away, when a boy and I broke up—I couldn't forgive myself. Let alone accept forgiveness from God.

I spent most of my time at work and in ministry, with my friends, in seminary studies, and at the gym. I spent my small salary on coffee and clothes and quirky antiques—but also on mission trips and serving the teens from church. Certainly, I did value good things: people, service, education, health, and home. But truthfully, in hindsight, I think I mostly valued what these good things said about *me*. Their contribution to the identity and image *I* was seeking to create. And a more thorough inspection of my values may have revealed a preference for activity over intimacy, pleasure over purity, and spiritual ritual—small groups, quiet times, Bible memory—over real life change.

When I (Peter) was in my twenties, I believed that the Bible contained truth. But for me there were other truths as well. I held to a sacred/secular divide though I wasn't even aware of it. I could switch easily between these two worlds: one in which God existed, and one in which He did not. Biblical truth and scientific truth had no overlap in my mind. And though the borderline between the two realms was indistinct, it was there nonetheless. As a result, I led two lives. In my "secular" life, I taught in the public schools, partied with friends, and traveled the world. In my "sacred" life, I

believed the truths that remained locked in the pages of Scripture.

When I was in my twenties, I thought I was rational. I enjoyed a rousing debate in the corner coffee shop. However, I was rational like a French movie—dark and intellectual until love was involved. Then when a *femme fatale* entered the scene, I'd die a dramatic death on the stage of my own passion. I couldn't deny my heart, no matter how corny or melodramatic it seemed.

When I was in my twenties, the Internet had not yet been born, so I was influenced by books and music and movies. I read *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and watched *The English Patient*. These two works reinforced the darkness and fatalism surrounding my unrequited love. One was a classic piece of literature, and the other won Best Picture for 1996. So they *had* to be communicating truth, right? Not necessarily. I found out later that Napoleon banned his troops from reading *Werther* when too many love-sick soldiers were jumping off bridges rather than charging the enemy. *C'est la vie*.

Finally, when I was in my twenties, I believed that my destiny was a distant heaven. It may be a matter of some concern for the old and for the sick. But as a young and healthy soul, I was content to live in a vacuum until sometime in the far-off future when I might see Christ face-to-face.

**IT makes sense, THEN,
TO DO A THOROUGH
INSPECTION—SOONER
RATHER THAN LATER.**

INSPECTION TIME

So, the bottom line is this. We all arrive at our twenties with some sort of worldview in place. The forms were long ago built.

The concrete has been poured. But the material is still malleable.

Why does this matter?

Because, for the rest of our lives, it is upon this foundation that we build.

It makes sense, then, to do a thorough inspection—sooner rather than later.

It makes sense to allow God to examine your footings. To look for signs of structural failure. To identify the cracks. To drill down to bedrock and make thorough repairs—rather than settling for temporary remedies. In so doing, you will undoubtedly avoid some of the very costly repairs that can otherwise happen down the line.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

Ask your family and friends the eight questions from the beginning of this chapter.

Keep a careful log of where you spend your time and money for an entire week. What does this tell you about your values?

Re-watch your favorite movie or listen to your favorite music with the eight questions in mind. Ask: What worldview is being communicated?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How would you answer the eight worldview questions from this chapter?
- Are you conscious of choosing a worldview? Or have you drifted into it?
- How do you see your worldview reflected in the way you live your life each day?

- Have you identified any areas where your worldview is not in harmony with God's design? If so, what are they?
- What might be the consequences of continuing down this worldview path?
- What might it look like to change how you think and act in this area? What steps might you take to change in this area?
- Ask God to reveal any places where He wants to address your worldview.

OTHER THINGS TO READ

Romans 12

Acts 17

Colossians 3

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-your-twenties-are-darker-than-you-expected>

Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Baker Academic).

J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity).

Glenn S. Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Zondervan).