

INTRODUCTION –

- a. In Part 1 of this article, **LD – 5.8 – Opinion Paper – Search for Ultimate Truth Part 1** – we observed how religious faith has played a part in ordering culture through the millennia. Rather than being the “opiate of the masses” as Karl Marx argued, faith has played a pivotal role in how humanity has both energized and integrated their Culture. The prevalence of faith through all cultures the millennia argues less for a superstition that placates social order, and more for an experience and view of reality that includes the supernatural along with the natural order.
 - b. In Part 2 of this article, **LD – 5.9 – Opinion Paper – Search for Ultimate Truth Part 2** – there are four approaches to Truth we will look at. 1) “Discussion of Truth” – will explore “What is TRUTH?” 2) “Discussion of an Ultimate Truth” will look at reality through the lens of a Supernatural Reality than engages the physical world. Is this Truth a “one size fits all absolute reality,” or is it more flexible, malleable and personal. 3) “Discussion of the Changing Nature of Culture and Scientific Truth” – this is necessarily ever-changing and not static, 4) “Discussion of Cross Cultural Comparisons of the Four Major World Religions” – each have very different world and eternal views.
1. **DISCUSSION OF TRUTH** – Recently, my friend Justin Barron taught on the nature of truth. His discussion explored the nuances of what we call truth in a fascinating and compelling manner. So much so, that I asked his permission to explore his thoughts as part of this article. The “unbold text” is mostly Justin’s material, with some clarification and editing by AD. What is “truth”? This is a question that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus shortly before he ordered Jesus crucified (John 18:37-38). The broadness of the question belies the complexity of the question. Foundationally, how you define truth matters. Is it a thing? Is it a concept? Is it a matter of opinion?
- a. Philosophers, thinkers, and random people [like us] have been debating this topic for a long, long time. Some people believe in “absolute truth” - the idea that truth exists outside of themselves, independent of their own perception of it and/or opinion about it. Others believe in “relative truth” – the idea that truth is wholly dependent on an individual’s personal perception and/or opinion, and that this personal perspective means there is no “absolute” or “objective truth.” But is this really and either/or question? Can it be a both/and paradox? First, let’s look at what constitutes the idea of “absolute truth.”
 - b. Absolute Truth – The idea of “absolute truth” - or “objective truth” - is a truth that is autonomous - that is, its existence and validity is not dependent on anyone’s or anything’s perception of or opinion about it. In this view, absolute truth exists and is true, whether or not humans exist and whether or not anyone believes in it or agrees with it.
 - i. A simple example would be this statement: “Gravity exists.” Is that true for only those who believe it to exist? Certainly not. If you meet someone who denies gravity’s existence, a simple test is to hold an egg above their head and let go. Another example would be to ask, “What color is an orange?” If I say, “The fruit we know as an orange is blue.” This begs the conclusion that what I’m saying is either true or it’s not. In understanding color, the object’s color is fixed and is based on what portions of the visible light spectrum are reflected by the object versus what is absorbed.
 - ii. It is possible that you might get different answers based on someone’s own perception of the color. For example, two people might disagree about the shade they see, or maybe they disagree significantly due to some sort of visual impairment, or the quality of direct

light on the subject, or maybe one of them has tinted glasses on. Regardless, the fact remains that the object has a color, this color can be measured precisely, and nobody's opinion or assertion will necessarily change the fact that the object absorbs certain portions of visible light and reflects other portions which objectively defines its color.

- c. Relative Truth – There is also the idea of “relative truth” or AKA “subjective truth.” Relative truth is the idea that truth is not necessarily fixed and does not exist outside of someone's perception or opinion. So, if you think something is true, then it's true for you, and if I think something is true, then it's true for me. The idea here is that truth – and the reality it represents is malleable and is dependent upon how *you* perceive it, regardless of how *someone else* perceives it.
 - i. For example, if you believe God exists, then that is true for you and he exists for you. Alternatively, if someone believes God doesn't exist, then that is true for them, and God doesn't exist for them. Thus, this approach to truth is relative to the individual. Another example of this would be to declare, “Burgers are delicious!” Someone else might say, “Burgers are nasty.” Both of these statements are valid in their own right, and its truth depends on the opinion and preference of the person making the declaration. Thus, it's a relative truth.
 - ii. Taking relativism to the extreme, one could make the claim “There are no absolutes,” or alternatively “There is no truth.” Philosophically, this claim is self-refuting. Meaning, this belief contradicts itself. If there is no truth, how can you claim that statement to be true? Declaring “There is no truth” is in itself, a claim of absolute truth. If you claim truth is relative, does that mean you think it's relative for everyone? If so, then you've just stated an absolute, which contradicts your relativistic premise. If you believe truth is relative for some people, but not everyone, then you imply that truth is absolute for some people which, yet again, contradicts the original premise.
- d. Defining “Truth” - Let's see if we can come to an agreement on a reasonable definition for “truth.” How about this: “Truth is that which is - it is what agrees with reality.” Thus, truth necessarily conforms with reality, meaning it is consistent with *what is*. In this approach, there are both objective and subjective truths reflecting absolute and relative aspects of reality. For example, the color of an object is absolute, and it is a property of the object in question in reality. Whereas, the deliciousness of a burger is a matter of opinion and is therefore relative to a person. If I say, “I think burgers are delicious,” I'm making a statement that reflects reality as I know it – reflecting the fact that I think burgers are delicious. If you come along and say, “No, they're not... they're disgusting.” Then you've just attempted to assert a relative truth as an absolute truth. This is what happens in arguments of opinion. So, we'll agree to stop arguing about opinions.
- e. God as “Ultimate Truth” – The matter of God's existence is not a relative truth, it is not a matter of opinion. It is an absolute assertion. Either God exists, or He doesn't. God can't both exist and not exist anymore than I can both exist and not exist, and this truth is independent of who you ask. Now, someone may not know that I exist, but that doesn't change the truth of whether or not I exist, and this is the same with God. The God of the Bible either exists or He doesn't. Presuming God does exist, the question then becomes “can You Know Truth?” Again, presuming we accept this definition that truth is that which reflects reality, then you might be asking, “Well, can you really know truth?” The short answer is, “Yes.” The interesting thing about this is that the God of the Bible wants to be known, and the Bible is God's Self-Revelation of Himself. Look at this

rationally, if God is Supernatural existing beyond the natural plane of existence where I reside, I could never find God unless He revealed Himself to me... the Bible is that Self-Revelation.

- f. Science as Truth – Science is humanity’s discovery of Truth which reflects reality as we understand it. Science helps us understand some aspects of the reality we live in and can explore. It is a source of truth; however, it also has its limitations. For example:
 - i. Science pertains only to the physical world.
 - 1. Science helps us understand the physical aspect of reality. It is limited to what we can measure, test and observe of our physical reality. However, Absolute Truth is not constrained only to the material world. Science is limited to the physical, the material... matter and energy. If God exists, He exists apart from and independently from creation. If God exists, He is part of the Greater Reality, but He is independent of the physical universe, thus science can’t measure Him.
 - 2. Think of creation like a box, and everything we know to exist physically including our universe, is inside this box. Now imagine God as someone holding that box. God made the box, He filled the box with contents, and He exists independently of the box. Science is what allows us to explore, probe, and understand all that exists within the box, but science does not allow us to explore, probe, and understand what exists outside the box. Science is thus limited in this regard.
 - ii. Science is changing... Ultimate Truth is not.
 - 1. Science evolves over time. It consists of theories that get tested, and those theories either stand the test of time or they’re disproven and changed or updated.
 - 2. For example, classical physics worked to accurately measure, describe, and understand our physical universe for quite some time. That is, until we started applying the laws and equations of physics as we understood them to the physical world at a much smaller scale, such as the behavior and properties of particles, electrons, etc. Suddenly our equations didn’t work, and thus quantum physics was born.
 - 3. It isn’t that our understanding of the physical world was completely wrong, it’s that it was incomplete, and our error or the gap in our understanding wasn’t noticeable at the macro scale (dealing with everyday objects) but zooming in to the micro scale made us realize there were dynamics and nuances at play that were previously completely unknown to us. They existed, but we lacked the understanding of them because we hadn’t discovered them as yet.
 - 4. In this assessment, the nature and properties of the physical world weren’t changing, instead our understanding of it was. Sometimes our understanding changes in significant ways, such as discovering that the Earth revolves around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the Earth. Ignorance and/or misunderstanding can complicate our reality.
 - 5. A British physicist and professor at the University of Bristol by the name of Kathy Sykes once said this: “I would teach the world that science is not about truth but is about trying to get closer to the truth. This is important because, too often, people look to scientists as having the ‘truth’. What truth science has is wrapped in uncertainties, caveats and simplifications.”

6. Science can be known and understood, however it is limited by our understanding and interpretation of reality. Does that mean I think science should be ignored or distrusted? No. I think science should be understood for what it is: A tool for exploring, probing, and learning about the physical universe. But science as a source of and authority of absolute truth is not possible. At best, it helps get us closer to understanding the operational truths of our physical world. It does nothing to get us closer to understanding the Absolute Truths of reality that exist outside of the physical universe, except for instances where those absolute truths manifest within our physical world.

2. DISCUSSION OF AN ULTIMATE TRUTH – Justin’s insights about the layered nuances of what we call truth are quite revealing. However, this discussion begs the question, “If truth is personal and relative to each individual, can it be called truth at all?” In this regard, isn’t it more appropriately called “perspective” OR “view” of reality?” To which I would argue an emphatic “YES!”

- a. For something to be absolutely true, it must be true for everyone throughout time. It thus becomes a “truth” of a different order. This is the nature of the difference of scientific truth and Biblical Truth. Scientific truth may explain something about the reality in which we reside, and such truth evolves over time as it is informed with new discoveries and new understandings. Similarly, Absolute Truth may also be informed by new discoveries and better interpretations, but the underlying TRUTH upon which the thought structure is developed is necessarily enduring because it is personally transformational.
- b. Truth of this higher order necessarily has an outcome in people... it may be informational explaining something about the natural order; but it necessarily must be transformational fundamentally changing not just how I see or interact with the reality I find myself in, but also my nature and character. Truth as information is usually developmental... meaning it is part of a larger discussion of what is true; it is always helpful and occasionally life changing. Transformational Truth is always life changing and enduring. Truth of this order is doesn’t change over time... instead the application of this order of Truth changes the individual and their reality as they know it for the better. Such is the meaning of Jesus’ teaching on the nature of good trees bearing good fruit – in Luke 6:43-45 – “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”
- c. An example of transformational truth being illuminated by new observations and interpretations is found in the book The Lost World of Genesis One – Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate. John Walton states “It is *true* that the God of the Bible is far different from the gods of the other ancient cultures. But Israel understood its God in reference to what others around them believed.” Of all the peoples of the earth, Israel was chosen by God to carry and preserve God’s Self-Revelation. This was a great honor and a great responsibility. God’s revelation always occurred within an historical timeline [redemptive history] and was shaped by what was known to be true at the time.
- d. Anthropologists and theologians call this “context.” What we know and believe does not emerge

in a vacuum... it develops over time within a context. The Judaeo-Christian faith structure is known as a revelation of *Divine Truth* from God. As such, its inherent *Truth* is understood as being absolute and also inerrant... that is free from error and True for all-time. This does not mean our understanding of this truth stays static over time, instead it evolves within our cultural world view as it is informed with new discoveries and developing interpretations.

- e. The article below is intriguing because it shines a light on the changing nature of scientific truth as it is informed by newer revelations.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE CHANGING NATURE OF CULTURE AND SCIENTIFIC TRUTH:

- a. The following article is by noted Christian Apologist William Lane Craig and can be found on his website "Reasonable Faith." I've included this article because it captures a great view of "Myth, Truth, and the Evolution of Science" in Western Culture.

https://pages.e2ma.net/pages/1787618/8581?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=READ%20MORE&utm_campaign=Monthly%20Report%20-%20June%202018



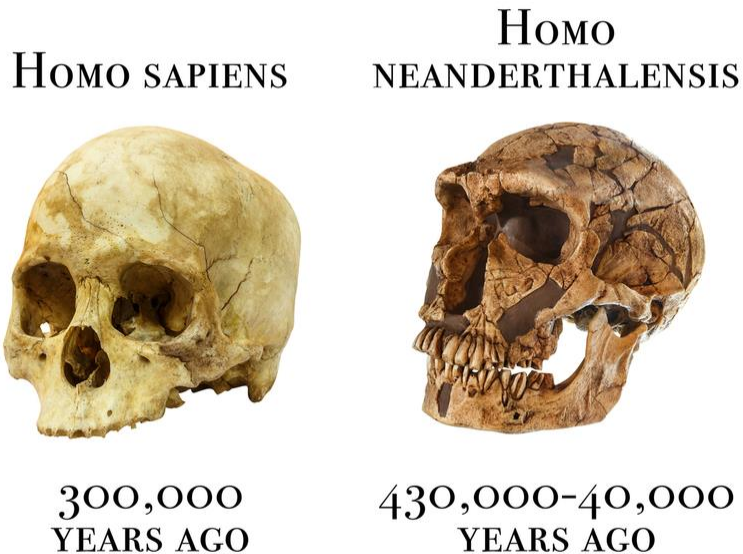
Adam and Eve by Jacob Jordaens, c. 1640-1650

Having completed my work on the doctrine of the atonement, I've decided to tackle a new topic which has become very controversial in recent days: the question of the historical Adam (and Eve). Traditionally, Christian theology has understood the Bible to teach that Adam and Eve were historical persons from whom all anatomically modern humans are descended. (One has

to state the doctrine in this rather anachronistic way in order to distinguish the traditional view from various contemporary alternatives.) Two challenges to this doctrine arise from modern science, one fairly old and the other very recent.

First is the old problem of the antiquity of man. It's estimated that anatomically modern humans originated around 300,000 years ago. Archaeology and genetics reveal that there were once human-like beings such as Neanderthals that are now extinct. They exhibited many human qualities and even interbred with modern humans (our DNA includes

segments derived from Neanderthal DNA). Were Neanderthals human? Where in the lineage leading to modern man do we place Adam and Eve? Even if we deny that Neanderthals were human, despite their similarities physically and culturally to modern humans, the stories of Adam and Eve in Genesis do not fit stone age people 300,000 years ago but rather an agricultural society of several thousand years ago.



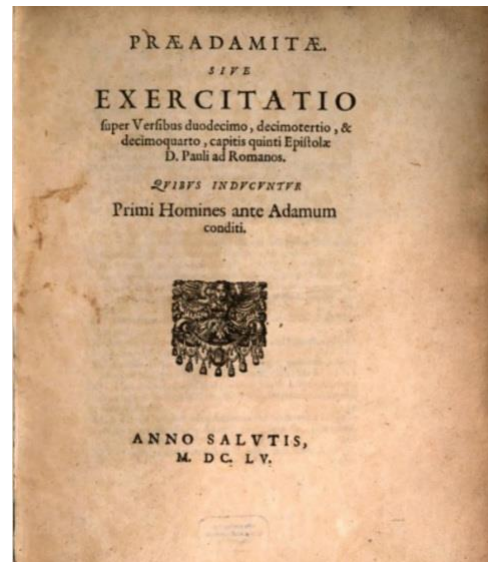
Second is the new challenge posed by population genetics. Geneticists comparing the DNA of different people have shown how widely divergent their DNA is in terms of the mutations it exhibits. These mutations are why we differ in skin color, size, facial contours, etc., etc. Mutations in human beings occur at a very slow rate. In order for the present, divergent mutations to develop, it's estimated that more than 500,000 years would be required if the human race began with a solitary couple. For that reason, geneticists think that the human race did not begin with an isolated pair but stretches back to a population of ancestors no fewer than 10,000 in number. Thus, there was no Adam and Eve.

There is great turmoil among contemporary theologians about how best to deal with these challenges. In fact, later this month I'm going to be participating in a conference put on by The Creation Project at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

which will bring together theologians and scientists to discuss these and related issues. A number of alternatives have been proposed to deal with these challenges.

(1) *Mythological interpretation.* Some scholars hold that the Genesis narratives about prehistoric events are of the genre of myth, not history. Thus, there can be no conflict with science. What is important about these stories are the theological truths they teach, e.g., people, though morally fallen, are in God's image and therefore of intrinsic value. This view must explain how it is that Paul in his epistles seems to affirm the historicity of Adam and Eve.

(2) *Men before Adam.* In 1655 a maverick theologian named Isaac de LaPèyrere argued in his book *Prae-Adamitae* that Adam and Eve were historical persons who were part of a wider human population. God specially selected them to be in relation to Him to fulfill His salvific purposes. Today this view is receiving new attention. So long as there were other people about to interbreed with Adam and Eve's descendants, there is no problem in holding that everyone alive today (or even at the time of Christ) is descended from an original pair. These two could be located anywhere in the human lineage prior to several thousand years ago. Since our DNA is the product, not only of their DNA, but also of all the other people with whom their descendants interbred, the genetic divergence observed today is no problem. This view is consistent with the archaeological and genetic evidence, but is it really the natural reading of the biblical text?



Isaac de LaPèyrere's *Prae-Adamitae*.

(3) *Non-human contemporaries of Adam.* This view is like the second, except that the wider population of which Adam and Eve were a part were not truly human. They may have been anatomically indistinguishable from humans, but they were not in the image of God, as were Adam and Eve. Perhaps they lacked a human soul and so were not truly human. This view allows one to affirm that only Adam

and Eve and their progeny were created in the image of God; but it has the drawback that it seems to consign their progeny to engaging in bestiality.

I am currently exploring the genetic evidence that is said to rule out an original pair of modern humans. In talking with genetic scientists, I've found that there is enormous confusion about this question today. Popularizers have misrepresented the arguments, thereby inviting misguided responses. The issues are very technical and difficult to understand. I'm just beginning to get my feet wet and don't want to misrepresent the science. I want to know how firm the evidence is and what it would cost intellectually to maintain the traditional view. For example, one scientist estimates that for the entire human race to have originated from an isolated pair 100,000 years ago, the mutation rate would have to be five times what it is observed today. Is that too outlandish to affirm?

- b. MYTH AND SCIENCE - In contrast to science, myth is often described as a folklore genre that consists of sacred narratives about gods and plays a fundamental role in society. According to Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko:**

“Myth, a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of cult.”

Many ancient cultures had faith-ritual Practitioners... in the more “primitive” cultures this might be a village or tribal shaman, and in the more developed cultures a Temple priest. The Pagan, Polytheistic and Pantheistic cultures in particular employed practices of divination where ritualized practices aided in determining the will of their deity. Cultural anthropologists have discovered such practices dating back to the Sumerian and Akkadian cultures.

- c. The New World Online Encyclopedia describes aspects of the ancient Mesopotamian religion:**
The Sumerian and Akkadian cultures began circa 3500 BC. The earliest undercurrents of a more formalized Mesopotamian religious thought date to the mid-4th millennium BC were the Sumerians and involved the worship of forces of nature as providers of sustenance. In the 3rd millennium BC objects of worship were becoming more personified and became an expansive cast of divinities each with a particular function.
- d.** The last stages of Mesopotamian polytheism, which developed in the 2nd and 1st millenniums, introduced a greater emphasis on personal religion and structured the gods moving into a monarchical hierarchy with the national god being the head of the pantheon.
- e.** The Akkadians worshiped a pantheon of gods. These were conceived as having human form, and, like humans, they were at times wise, at times silly, at times humorous, at times angry. Their

status differed, as each was associated with an aspect of nature and controlled the seasons. Principal deities included An, the sky god, Enlil the air-god, Nanna the moon-god and Utu, the sun-god.

- f. The gods also ruled through the king, Sargon I, who was their representative and outranked the priests of the temples. People were created to serve the gods, and to clothe and to feed them. The Akkadian gods did not concern themselves with morals or ethics. Sargon's mother may have been a Temple prostitute, possibly of Ishtar, the goddess of light with whom the king may have had an annual sexual union during the New Year's festival. Ishtar was also associated with war, and with fertility; she also bestowed authority upon human rulers. Sargon credited Ishtar for his victories. The high priestess may have been the king's sister. Ishtar is also associated with the paradoxical emotions of joy and sadness, friendliness and hostility. She is said to have protected alehouses and prostitutes. She was sometimes called "Queen of the Universe."

As these cultures developed a more comprehensive religious structure, many scientists and sociologists studying them often conclude that "all such religious beliefs are merely myths, to be dispelled as the culture is informed and transformed by science." However, as Old Testament professor John Walton asserts:

For the people to whom that mythology belonged, it was a real description of deep beliefs. Their mythology expressed their beliefs concerning what made the world what it was; it expressed their theories of origins and how their world worked. By this definition, our modern mythology is represented by science – our theories of origins and operations. Science provides what is generally viewed as the consensus concerning what the world is – how it works and how it came to be. Today, science makes no room for deity (though neither does it disprove deity), in contrast to the ancient explanations which were filled with deity.

Walton argues that we are all products of our own cultures. For example, we do not borrow the idea of consumerism, nor are we merely influenced by it. We are consumers because we live in a capitalist society that is built on consumerism.

In many ways, modern religious practices have devolved from an organized system defining and informing a culture's moral and ethical identity, into a smorgasbord of personal views and preferences that may be changed or discarded as suits the individual [situational morality and ethics]. It may be argued that a culture lacking a unifying moral and ethical identity is a culture in decline.

4. DISCUSSION OF CROSS CULTURAL RELIGIOUS COMPARISONS OF THE FOUR MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS:

- a. In the moving video "Tears of the Saints" – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtQbzRmmMfk> – an appeal is made for Christian Missionaries to spread the Gospel message both in foreign countries abroad and domestically. Some of the statistics quoted are moving:

- i. There are 16,000 distinct people groups in the world, 7,000 of them unreached with the Gospel.
- ii. Three major religions – Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist comprise one half of the world's population, however 86% of this group do not personally know a Christian.
- iii. One-third of the world has never heard the Gospel.
- iv. There are more statistics relative to the Fallen State in the world today:
 - 1. 140 million orphans.
 - 2. 150 million street children.
 - 3. One billion people are slum dwellers.
 - 4. One and a half billion people live on less than \$1.25 USD per day.
 - 5. 72 women and children are sold into slavery every hour.
 - 6. 237 people die of HIV/AIDS every hour.
 - 7. 869 people die of chronic hunger every hour.
 - 8. 1,250 people die of preventable diseases every hour.

It is obvious that the needs of suffering people in the world today are very great, but the workers are few. This is made all the more perplexing because Christian agencies are doing a disproportionate amount of the service work to those in need.

Rather than attempting to prove or disprove these divergent cultural belief structures, the remainder of this article will focus on the four major world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity – In terms of what they practice and what is their “Ultimate Hope” in terms of their belief system promises the individual Practitioner... in other words, what is the end-game or end-result of those practicing these faiths.

b. Hinduism – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#Concept_of_God]

- i. Hinduism is an Indian religion and way of life [*dharma*], developed and widely practiced throughout the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world, and sometimes referred to as the eternal tradition. Scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots and no founder. This "Hindu synthesis" started to develop between 500 BCE and 300 CE, following the Vedic period (1500 BCE to 500 BCE).
- ii. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include the four proper goals or aims of human life, namely 1) Dharma – ethics & duties, 2) Artha – prosperity & work), 3) Kama – desires & passions, and 4) Moksha – liberation or freedom. Other aspects of the faith are 1) karma – action, intent and consequences, 2) Saṃsāra – cycle of life-death-rebirth, and the 3) Yogas – paths or practices to attain moksha.
- iii. Hindu practices include rituals such as 1) puja [worship] and rishis [chanting, recitations], 2) meditation, 3) rites of passage, 4) annual festivals, and 5) occasional pilgrimages. Some Hindus leave their social world and material possessions to purposefully engage in

- remaining lifelong Sannyasa [monastic practices] to achieve Moksha... the release from Samsara and escape from the cycle of moving from one life to another.
- iv. Hinduism prescribes the eternal duties, such as honesty, refraining from injuring living beings [ahimsa], patience, forbearance, self-restraint, and compassion, among others.
 - v. The three cosmic functions of *Brahman* are creation, preservation and destruction of the universe are personified as *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* who form the Hindu trinity known as the Trimurti: 1) Brahma – the creator, 2) Vishnu – the preserver, 3) Shiva – the destroyer/transformer. Each god has a female consort as relates to the order of the Trimurti 1) Saraswati – goddess of knowledge, music and the arts, 2) Lakshmi – goddess of wealth and prosperity, 3) Parvati – the divine mother.
 - vi. *Atman* may be generally translated as a soul, or the inner-self, the spark of divinity that Hindus believe exists within every human being. Hindus believe that *Atman* is the core of every person's "self" and not the mind or the ego as Western philosophy proposes, and that all *Atmas* [souls] emanate from *Brahman* [Super-soul]. This concludes that every soul's fundamental awareness is the same as that of *Brahman*'s which is eternal, essential, and ageless. The only difference is that the *atma*'s awareness is finite and limited. Therefore, the realization of *Aham Brahmasmi* [I am *Brahman*] is the ultimate experiential knowledge that a Hindu seeks, which is essentially the extinguishing or extermination of self-identity and merging into the cosmic consciousness [Pantheism].
 - vii. The *Vedas* are an authorless set of ancient texts that Hindus believe were originally revealed by Brahman, which were then passed down by the chanting of the *rishis* (wise sages) through generations, until writing came along. The first written texts are believed to date back to around 1500 BCE. The Sanskrit word *Veda* means "knowledge", and is derived from the root word *vid*, or "to know." The philosophical essence of the *Vedas* is distilled into what is known as *Vedanta*, literally meaning the "end of knowledge." Many Hindus believe *Vedanta* is the end goal of the *Vedas*, and of one who studies the *Vedas* (a spiritual seeker).
 - viii. Hindus believe all life is sacred and tied to their Pantheistic god. All life well lived moves one up the life-form cycle and the social cycle [Caste System]. Life is either ascendant moving toward union with Brahman and release from Samsara, or descendent moving further away from union with Brahman. Being born into the higher aspects of the system is evidence they are moving closer to the escape of Samsara cycle of life-death-rebirth cycle. Release from Samsara is the greatest good and releases an individual into union with an impersonal pantheistic god. Escape from Samsara and merging [union] with god is the highest good where the *Atman* [divine spark] is reunited with the creator [Brahman].

c. Buddhism - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_and_Hinduism

- i. Hinduism and Buddhism have common origins in the Ganges culture of northern India during the so-called "second urbanization" around 500 BC. They have shared parallel beliefs that have existed side by side, but also pronounced differences. Buddhism attained prominence in the Indian subcontinent as it was supported by royal courts, but started to

- decline after the Gupta era, and virtually disappeared from India in the 11th century CE, except in some pockets of India. It has continued to exist outside India and is the major religion in several Asian countries.
- ii. Before becoming enlightened Gautama was raised in privilege in a high caste in India. He became troubled by the suffering he witnessed of the common people trapped in the caste system and the infinite samsaric cycle of life-death-rebirth. The inner-path of enlightenment he discovered offered a form of hope in breaking this cycle and Gautama became “The Buddha” or enlightened one. Though he was very ambiguous about the existence of a Creator Deity [Brahman] and the Eternal Self [Atman] and rejected them both. Various sources from the Pali Cannon and others suggest that the Buddha taught that belief in a Creator deity was not essential to attaining liberation from suffering, and perhaps chose to ignore theological questions because they were "fascinating to discuss," but frequently brought about more conflict and anger than peace.
 - iii. The Buddha did not deny the existence of the popular gods of the Vedic pantheon, but rather argued that these gods [or devas], who may be in a more exalted state than humans, are still nevertheless trapped in the same samsaric cycle of suffering as other beings and are not necessarily worthy of veneration and worship. The focus of the Noble Eightfold Path, while inheriting many practices and ideologies from the previous Hindu yogic tradition, deviates from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and earlier works of the Dharmic Religions in that liberation [Nirvana or Moksha] is not attained via unity with Brahman in the Godhead, or Self-realization or worship. Rather, the Buddha's teaching centers around what Eknath Easwaran described as a "psychology of desire," that is attaining liberation from suffering by the extermination of self-will along with all selfish desire and passions. This is not to say however, that such teachings are absent from the previous Hindu tradition, rather they are singled out and separated from Vedic Theology.
 - iv. The Buddha (as portrayed in the Pali scriptures, the agamas) set an important trend in Buddhism by establishing a somewhat non-normalized theistic view on the notion of an omnipotent God, generally ignoring the issue as being irrelevant to his teachings. Nevertheless, in many passages in the Tripitaka gods [devas] are mentioned and specific examples are given of individuals who were reborn as a god, or gods who were reborn as humans. Buddhist cosmology recognizes various levels and types of gods, but none of these gods is considered the creator of the world or of the human race.
 - v. The Buddha preached that attachment with people was the cause of sorrow when 'death' happens and therefore proposes detachment from people. Hinduism though proposes detachment from fruits of action and stresses on performance of duty [*dharma*], but it is not solely focused on it. In Hinduism, Lord Shiva explains 'death' to be the journey of the immortal soul in pursuit of 'Moksha' and therefore a fact of life.
 - vi. While Buddhism says retirement into forest for meditation is to take place starting from childhood, this is viewed as escapism by Hinduism, Hinduism allows for this to happen only after performing all *dharma*s or duties of one's life, starting from studying scriptures,

- working to support children and family and taking care of aged parents and lastly after all the dharma is done to family and society, only then to retire to the forest and slowly meditate and fast to reach the ultimate truth or *Brahman*.
- vii. Buddhism explained that attachment is the cause of sorrow in society. Therefore, Buddhism's cure for sorrow was detachment and non-involvement (non-action). Hinduism on the other hand explained that both sorrow or happiness is due to 'Karma' or past actions and bad Karma can be overcome and good Karma can be obtained by following righteous dharma or righteous duty (pro-action or positive action) which will ultimately provide 'Moksha' i.e. overcoming the cycle of life and joining *Brahman*.
 - viii. The net result of both Hinduism and Buddhism is the extermination of the individual self-identity, and the individual being absorbed into the cosmic consciousness [Pantheism]. Thus, both Hinduism and Buddhism hope for the eradication of the individual and the end of the constant Samsaric Cycle or Birth-Life-Death-Rebirth.

d. Islam [Muslim] – <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Islam>

- i. Islam means "obedience or submission to God." It is a monotheistic faith, and not unlike Mormonism is viewed as one of the Abrahamic religions. Obedience is rigidly enforced through the application of Sharia Law, which is interpreted and applied through the Islamic clergy. Sharia Law is both brutal and repressive. Far more rigid and less humane than the Jewish Mosaic Law. Islam is also far more repressive of women than the Jewish Torah.
- ii. Islam is the world's second largest religion. Many Muslims dislike the term religion, since to them it implies a "private individual faith" whereas the ideal for most Muslims is a "faith community" in which the religious, social, and political order are united. Islam is thus a Theocratic Religious-Societal-Government with the hierarchical clergy as the sole interpreters of Allah's will in applying justice.
- iii. Muhammad is seen as the prophet of Islam who governed the first Muslim *ummah* (nation or community). His model of rule being a "single, trans-cultural, trans-racial community." Some Muslims fail to see this ideal expressed in Western views of the nation state, and thus see the latter as an alien to their view of human social organization. Islam seeks to represent for believers God's ideal – a life of harmony and balance between spiritual and material concerns, between pleasure and worship, work and prayer. However, the application of the Law as interpreted by the local Islamic clergy demonstrates a 6th Century AD mindset in which the culture is locked. Islam's strict moral code though it seems to encourage the ethics of generosity and concern for the disadvantaged or oppressed, does so as long as they remain compliant and obedient to Sharia Law within their social structure.
- iv. Islam encourages the development of a sense of "God-Consciousness" (*taqwa*). The world is regarded as a sacred trust (*amana*) from God for which humanity will be required to render an account. However, the primacy of advancing Islam takes precedent over the needs of the poor and disenfranchised. Leaders are content to negotiate with other

- nations, but signing an enduring treaty is strictly rejected by the Qur'an which favors conquest over diplomacy and view negotiation as a sign of weakness.
- v. Followers of Islam, known as Muslims, believe that God (or, in Arabic, *Allah*, a masculine noun) revealed his direct word for mankind to Muhammad (c. 570 – 632) and other prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, as dictated by the Angel Gabriel. Muhammad, who is considered by Muslims as the last Prophet received the first revelation of a chapter of the Qur'an in 610 C.E. and the last just before he died in 632 C.E. Muslims assert that the Qur'an as revealed to Muhammad is the main written record of revelation to humankind, which they believe to be flawless, immutable, and the final revelation of God. Muslims believe that parts of the Gospels, Torah, and Jewish prophetic books though important have been forgotten, misinterpreted, or distorted by their followers, although there is discussion as to whether distortion is textual or interpretive. Most Muslims, however, view the Qur'an as corrective of Jewish and Christian scriptures.
 - vi. There are six basic beliefs shared by all Muslims:
 - 1. Belief (*Iman*) in God, the one and only one worthy of all worship.
 - 2. Belief in all the Prophets (*Nabi*) and Messengers (*Rasul*) (sent by God). Messengers all received a fresh revelation in the form of a scripture (*Kitab*, or book) from God. Prophets remind people of God's message.
 - 3. Belief in the Books (*Kutub*, plural of *Kitab*) sent by God. These include all the scriptures given to the prophets.
 - 4. Belief in the Angels (*Malaikah*).
 - 5. Belief in the Day of Judgment (*Qiyamah*) and in the Resurrection.
 - 6. Belief in Destiny (Fate) (*Qadar*); however, this does not mean one is predetermined to act or live a certain life. God has given the free will to do and make decisions.
 - vii. Islamic eschatology is concerned with the *Qiyamah* (end of the world) and the final judgment of humanity. Like Christianity and some sects of modern Judaism, Islam teaches the bodily resurrection of the dead, the fulfillment of a divine plan for creation, and the immortality of the human soul; the righteous are rewarded with the pleasures of *Jannah* (Paradise), while the unrighteous are punished in *Jahannam* (a fiery Hell, from the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* or "valley of Hinnom"; usually rendered in English as Gehenna). A significant fraction of the Qur'an deals with these beliefs, with many hadiths elaborating on the themes and details. Muslim descriptions of Paradise (the promise of virgins in heaven, for example; see Qur'an 55: 60f) have been much ridiculed and censored by non-Muslims but such criticism often fails to appreciate the allegorical nature of these passages.
 - viii. Popular end-time Islamic traditions give Jesus a special role in helping Islam to defeat ad-Dajjal, the last enemy of righteousness. He will then break the cross and judge humanity not by the Gospel but by the Qur'an. Many Muslims believe that before this, Jesus will first marry and have children. Some think that he will then die having not died on the Cross, since in the Qur'an he was taken straight up into heaven without dying (Qur'an 4:171).

- Qur'an 4:159 states, "and he will be a witness against them on the day of resurrection" implies a judgmental role for Jesus.
- ix. The figure of al-Mahdi (the twelfth Shi'a Imam) is also eschatological. When he returns, the kingdom of justice and peace will be established. Historically, several people have been called the Mahdi and some claimed the title for themselves. Many Sunnis also cite a tradition attributed to Muhammad that before the Day of Judgment, a member of his own house will appear, end tyranny and injustice, and establish universal peace... as interpreted by Islamic clerics. This figure is associated with the Madhi, who will be born in Mecca as was Muhammad, and whose father will have the same name as Muhammad's, that is, Abdullah.
 - x. Tradition has it that both Jesus and the Mahdi will live out their natural lives on earth, once ad-Dajjal has been defeated. All people will then embrace Islam. The tradition is not found in the most authoritative collection, but it is considered sound.
 - xi. Other beliefs include the existence of Angels, the Jinns (a species of beings not composed of solid matter, but fire), and the existence of magic... the practice of which is strictly forbidden.
 - xii. **One of the key tenants of Christianity is the "imminence or nearness of God." Jesus stated that the Kingdom of God has come upon you" – Matthew 12:28. God created humanity for relationship with Himself as well as with one another. This is a broad departure from Islam where one of the key tenants is the distance of God from humanity. God is seen as so unapproachable that humanity cannot be in immediate juxtaposition with God. While Christianity which emerged from Judaism through Isaac, and Islam which emerged from Judaism and Christianity through Ishmael, are both Abraham's sons, the two faiths are widely different in terms of Grace. There is little Grace in Islam, while Christianity is defined by Grace... Grace meaning God's unmerited favor. Islam is a law-based faith with Sharia law being brutal and judgment swift and often capricious. Christianity is a Grace-based faith where individuals receive what they don't deserve... God's unmerited favor. Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words defines Grace in this manner – Grace is a dominant New Testament theme. Salvation is by grace, not by works (Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:5). Grace releases us from the dominion of sin, for believers are "not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14)." New Testament letters begin and conclude with the wish that grace will be with the readers, and the New Testament closes with these words: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen (Revelation 22:21)."**
 - xiii. **Paradise in Islam is a place of pleasure but not in the immediate Presence of God who is utterly unapproachable by humanity. Heaven in Christianity is a place of peace and joy where humanity and God live together for eternity. These are two very different visions of eternity.**

e. Christianity – Gospel Centered Grace - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Theology%204.2%20-%20Gospel%20Centered%20Ministry.pdf>

- i. Many people [including some misinformed Christians] believe in a “Universalist” approach to faith and religions... meaning they believe each faith is a separate path up the same mountain leading into the same eternity. The Bible however, presents a much different view. The Bible is understood as God’s unique revelation of Himself to humanity through the emissary of inspired prophets throughout Redemptive History... meaning God’s plan revealed throughout history to redeem humanity and restore them to a relational state with Him.
- ii. Distinctive qualities of Christianity:
 1. The Bible is a unified message inspired by God through the Holy Spirit who came upon chosen individuals who were invited into a role of Prophet to record God’s messages to humanity.
 2. God reserved for Himself the responsibility to redeem and empower humanity to both know Him and be relationally connected with Him. The prophetic message of Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” and Joel’s “pouring out of the Spirit” predicted Jesus’ life, ministry, death, resurrection and Pentecost centuries before these events occurred.
 3. The Judaea-Christian faith is the least repressive and most socially conscious relative to the social environment as it emerged in redemptive history. It treats women, children, servants, and the poor and disenfranchised as valued members of the social order with prescribed rights and protections.
 4. God’s Grace is available to all as a free gift of God’s Love. While too many tend to focus on God’s Law, Grace is the Law’s constant companion. [check out this article - <https://www.mcusa.org/a-tale-of-two-trees/>].
 5. The promise of Christ is to never leave His followers, to be with us always, even to the end of time; and that where He is we will be also. The promise of the Spirit is to perfect in Jesus’ followers the grace God began in us, until in eternity we are presented to the Father as His redeemed creations to remain with Him forever.
- iii. Most Reformed Christian Denominations prescribe to the primacy of the “Five Pillars of the Reformation” known as the Five Solas and to these Catholics would add the authority of the Pope and the church:
 1. ***Sola Scriptura*** - "by Scripture alone" - is upheld by all Reformed theologies. This asserts that Scripture must govern over church traditions, leadership and interpretations which are themselves held to be subject to Scripture. Under this provision all church traditions, creeds, and teachings must be in unity with the teachings of Scripture as the divinely inspired Word of God.
 2. ***Sola Fide*** - "by Faith alone" - asserts that good works are not a means or prerequisite for salvation. *Sola fide* is the teaching that justification (interpreted as "being declared just by God") is received by faith alone, without any need for good

works on the part of the individual. In classical Lutheran and Reformed theologies, good works are seen to be *evidence* of saving faith, but the good works themselves do not determine salvation.

3. ***Sola Gratia*** - "by Grace alone" – this specifically excludes the merit done by a person as part of achieving salvation. *Sola gratia* is the teaching that salvation comes by divine grace or "God's unmerited favor" only, not as something merited by the sinner. This means that salvation is an unearned gift from God for Jesus's sake.
4. ***Solus Christus*** - "by Christ alone" or "through Christ alone" - is the teaching that Christ is the One and only mediator between God and man, and that there is salvation through no other (hence, the phrase is sometimes rendered in the ablative case, *solo Christo*, meaning that salvation is "by Christ alone"). While rejecting all other mediators between God and man.
5. ***Soli Deo Gloria*** - "glory to God alone" - is the teaching that all glory is to be due to God alone, since salvation is accomplished solely through His will and action – not only the gift of the all-sufficient atonement of Jesus on the cross but also the sanctifying gift of faith in that atonement sealed in the heart of the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. A Christian's life and values should reflect the Spirit's on-going transformational work in the life of every believer, but their evidence serves to Glorify God rather than justify the believer.

iv. **The Statement of Beliefs of Christianity is well defined in the Nicene Creed. *The Nicene Creed [also called the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed], is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian church. In its present form this creed dates back partially to the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). It was accepted in its present form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The creed is in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Christian faith:***

1. We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made.
3. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made human.
4. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried.
5. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
6. He will come again with glory, to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.
7. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets.

- 8. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.**
<http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%206.6%20-%20Basic%20Doctrine%20&%20Theology.pdf>
- v. The hope of the Christian faith is to be incrementally transformed by the inner-working of the Holy Spirit [the Third Person of the Christian Triune God or Trinity] Who indwells all believers. This indwelling is the sealing of the promise that we as individuals will spend eternity with God in Heaven, where we will be perfected.**
- 1. I remember well as a young man not being satisfied with the person I was. I wanted to be better, I wanted to feel good about myself, but I kept failing to be the person I knew I wanted to be. I remember talking with a friend and asking “why would God want anything to do with me? I’m not good enough, and I’m not smart enough.**
- 2. Then I read this passage from the Bible in Romans 7:15-8:2 Living Translation:**
I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can’t help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can’t make myself do right. I want to, but I can’t. Even when I want to do good, I don’t. And when I try not to do wrong, I somehow do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I want to love God and His laws with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.
- vi. Christian faith is a once and done deal in regard to my salvation... my position with God as His beloved child, but life as a Christian on earth is a process of Jesus’ character and nature being formed with me. God did the hard work of providing Grace through Jesus, and He keeps doing the heavy lifting forming Jesus’ character within me... in my mind and thought life as well as my actions.**
- vii. The entire message of the Bible is the incremental process whereby God brings His people into the restorative state of perfection we were always intended to enjoy with Him in the**

Garden of Eden. The Bible begins in the perfection in the best place on earth... the Garden of Eden, and ends with God's people being in a New Heaven and Earth... the best place in the universe. The Bible is thus shown to be an extended love-letter from God, with one Author... the Holy Spirit, and one purpose... to restore humanity into relational unity with God.

- viii. I've studied the world's religions and meta-physics, and I can tell you with certainty, no other faith offers it's practitioners what Christianity does. It is life of a whole different order with a much better promise of eternity.**

5. IN CONCLUSION: We have explored truth in its many aspects. How the world of the natural and supernatural can exist side by side has been compellingly demonstrated. The premise of the dominant scientific world-view is "Scientific Naturalism" which excludes the reality of the Supernatural Realm where God and Eternity exist "outside the box" of the physical world or natural realm. Because we cannot scientifically explore it, doesn't mean we can't experience. The ancients have employed various methods including mysticism, meditation, prayer, etc. to connect with the Supernatural. Presuming God exists in some form outside the box of the physical realm, there must be non-normative means of engagement. Scientific truth is constantly being developed and revised. Aspects of the natural realm we thought we understood are revised based on new methods of discovery. We observed that science and myth have much in common as means of describing a world view. We also observed that the four major religions have very different ideals about the role of faith within the culture and its application to eternity. It is my opinion that Christianity of all the major faiths offers more to it's adherents than the others. In Christianity alone, God entered the physical realm to solve humanities most pressing problem, that there is something fundamentally wrong in our nature that we can't fix, but God can. Jesus came to bring hope to the oppressed, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised... instead of judgment, He brought Grace and Hope as a free gift we don't deserve. Jesus paid the ultimate price for a condition called sin that humanity cannot heal. Two final thoughts:

- a. Ravi Zacharias discusses how you can know that "Christianity is the One True World View" in this interesting video:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWY-6xBA0Pk>
- b. Catholic Bishop Robert Barron talks about the importance of faith and love and what we believe in this video "Why What You Believe Matters" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=carFbpDsRPI>**
- c. The following was written by evangelist Greg Laurie in discussing the emergence of Christianity within the context of a Pagan Greco-Roman Empire:**
 - i. Centuries later, the mighty empire of Rome tried to crush the Christian faith. There were ten waves of persecution beginning with the wicked Caesar Nero and culminating with Diocletian. Christian believers were fed to animals in the Colosseum for blood sport to entertain the Roman citizens. Christians were covered with pitch and lit on fire to light the gardens of Caesar Nero. Christians were tortured, beheaded—all sorts of horrible things happened to eradicate them and their beliefs from the face of the earth. So confident was Diocletian in his success that he had a coin struck, there in Rome, with this statement on it:**

“The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the [Roman] gods is restored.” Well, I’ve had the privilege of being in Rome. There are some beautiful ruins and some great pasta. But the empire is gone. And Christianity? Why, it is alive and well. So, they failed. And so, will every person who opposes God.

- ii. If you would like to become a follower of Jesus Christ, pray this prayer now:

Dear God, I want to live a life of meaning and fulfill the purpose that I was created for. I’ve been going my own way and doing my own thing and I want to heed the warnings that You’ve given me to turn from my sin. I want to obey You instead. I believe that You sent Your Son Jesus to die on my behalf so that I don’t have to face the consequences of that sin: eternal separation from you in Hell. Instead I want to be with You in Heaven. So, I ask You to come inside my life and be my Lord and Savior. I want to follow You from this moment on. Thank You, God, for giving me forgiveness and everlasting life. Amen.

You can find out more about how to follow God and grow in your relationship with Him at KnowGod.org - <https://www.harvest.org/know-god>