GOD’S NOT DEAD

EVIDENCE FOR GOD IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

RICE BROOCKS
To my children’s children

So the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.

—Psalm 78:6 niv
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GROUND ZERO OF FAITH

Christianity has been successfully attacked and marginalized . . . because those who professed belief were unable to defend the faith from attack, even though its attackers’ arguments were deeply flawed.

—WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Real Christianity

“GOD, I JUST CAN’T BELIEVE IN YOU ANYMORE.” THIS WAS the frustrated conclusion of my friend Dean as he drove down the highway thinking of a conversation he had recently with an atheist—a conversation that rocked his world. He had been deeply challenged by this person’s questions and objections to the existence of God. What was most upsetting to Dean was that he had no answers. Frustrated and embarrassed by his own inability to answer this skeptical barrage, he finally told God he intended to stop believing.

What happened next was the last thing he expected. After making his declaration that he would no longer believe, he heard a voice: Who do you think you’re talking to?
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He immediately pulled his car over to the side of the road to “get his heart right” with God. And he did. Then Dean had to “get his head right.” Rather than bury his doubts, he brought them into the light and began to deal with them by studying the evidence that undergirds real faith. He says he is now able to answer the skeptic’s challenges as well as help the doubter who is struggling to find faith.

Stories like Dean’s have led me to write this book. My hope is that every believer will be able to grasp the reasons to believe in God and be able to communicate them with the world around them. This is the challenge given to us from one of history’s greatest examples of someone who recovered from the dark night of unbelief: the apostle Peter. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). There are straightforward answers for the skeptics’ questions, but most believers aren’t familiar enough with them to be able to explain those reasons to others. I hope this book changes that for those who read it.

The bluster from the ranks of the unbelieving is summed up in the words of musician and zoologist Greg Graffin of the group Bad Religion, who asserts that those who suggest life was intelligently designed have “not produced a single shred of data” to back up their claims.² Graffin is partially right. There isn’t a shred of data. There is evidence for an intelligent Creator everywhere you look. To say there is no evidence for this Creator is like saying the thousands of paintings in an art museum couldn’t have been painted because there are no artists visible in the gallery. The evidence of an intelligent mind behind the universe is so overwhelming that it has “shredded” the notion that everything was produced by nature alone. The evidence for God is not found only
in some obscure fossil or the untestable hypotheses of a theoretical physicist; it is glaringly present everywhere you turn.

I intend to give you an overview of that evidence. Faith in God is rising, yet so is skepticism. In the name of science and reason, faith is being framed as irrational and illogical. The meta-narrative of Darwinian evolution has turned many minds and hearts, teaching that life arose spontaneously from nothing, for no reason, and for no purpose, guided by the “blind watchmaker” of natural selection. The belief that everything we see around us came about through natural causes is called naturalism. As Stephen Hawking concluded, “What place, then, for a creator?”

I intend to show you the need for the Creator to explain the world around us as well as the world within us, that is, the human soul. To do this, I refer to some of the thousands of scholarly works written on the evidence for the existence of God. For centuries great minds have wrestled with the idea of an inspired creation and brilliantly answered doubts, quandaries, and accusations. And today we need the wisdom of history’s giants of philosophy, theology, and science. I will refer to their arguments alongside my own comments as you absorb the genius of those who have already fought and won the great intellectual battles for faith. My own ideas and observations have come through years of study and discussions on these topics with skeptics as well as seekers. The reality is that people come to a place of faith not against reason but through it. That’s why the first step of faith or ground zero is to believe God exists.

Make no mistake; the atheists present their case with great fervor. They assert there is no rational proof for the existence of God, the Bible is a book of fairy tales and contradictions, and religion in general is a bad thing. Furthermore, they charge that
anyone who is rational and not delusional will come to the same conclusions. They feast on unprepared religious people who unintelligently hold to beliefs they’ve merely inherited, who have only a secondhand faith. But these skeptics seldom take a second look to see how unsustainable their own views are. Instead, they believe it’s only a matter of time until everyone sees things their way. Their strategy is simple:

1. Use ridicule and mockery to label people of faith as anti-intellectual or irrational.
2. Set up a false dichotomy between science and faith, telling people to choose one or the other.
3. Keep the debate one-sided by not allowing a dissenting opinion in the public arena, making sure the only places where expressions of faith are allowed are in strictly religious settings.

The sad reality is that this strategy is working. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2007, 83 percent of millennials said they never doubted God’s existence. In 2012, the number dropped to 68 percent. That is a fifteen-point drop in five years. Other studies have shown that more than half of the young people in America who attended church will drop out after they leave high school for college. While there are a variety of reasons for this, one of them is that these students have never been prepared to handle the objections the skeptics raise. Young people must have more than an experience of Jesus if they’re going to withstand the intellectual onslaught that awaits them in college.

As a Christian minister my passion is to teach the truths believers need not only to defend themselves from getting robbed
of their faith but also to go on the offensive with the unbelieving world around them, demonstrating that God exists. Once that truth is firmly grasped, it becomes a logical necessity to seek out the nature and character of this Creator. This God has indeed revealed Himself to humanity through Jesus Christ.

One of my great joys has been watching people find a faith in God that is both intellectually satisfying and spiritually fulfilling. The good news is that there are encouraging signs of a spiritual awakening happening among young people. Though not as dramatic as the growth of the Christian faith in Africa, Asia, and South America, thousands of people in North America have come to faith in God for the first time or returned to a faith they once had; but the struggle is far from over. The new generation of skeptics is committed to its own nonbelieving agenda. Its mission is to see the elimination of all religious faith, or as atheist Sam Harris said, “the end of faith.”

People of faith cannot afford to be passive and disengaged. Many fall into the trap of thinking, *Maybe if we are nice enough, they will know we are true believers and God is real.* After all, doesn’t the Bible say to “preach the gospel and if necessary use words”? Well, no, it doesn’t. That phrase is usually attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, but it is doubtful that he ever said it. While we must certainly treat those who express hostility toward God with dignity, we must also be prepared to speak the truth boldly. No one said it would be easy. Even the great evangelist and apostle of the early church Saul of Tarsus asked people to pray for him so he could “speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:20). The evidence from the New Testament is that the apostles and the early Christians possessed this boldness to proclaim the gospel at the risk of their own lives. We must, at least, be as bold
in our witness for Christ as skeptics are in their attacks against the faith.

Those early believers grasped something we need to understand. Every worldview is in essence a story, a metanarrative that attempts to answer the real questions of our existence. As it has often been said by a wide range of authors, whoever tells the most believable story wins the age. The early Christians told their story and confirmed it with evidence: Jesus resurrected to fulfill the words of the ancient prophets. In our postmodern world people want to believe every story is equally valid, but all stories aren't equal. Once on an airplane I sat next to a strange woman who told me she believed she was God. After hearing this I smiled and said, “If you’re God, I’ve got a lot of questions for you.” Reason helps us dismiss absurd claims like this.

Similarly skeptics make claims that are thin and easily disproved as well. Other arguments require a much more thoughtful response, such as their claim that your religion depends on where you were born. If you were born in America, you would be a Christian. If you were born in India, you would be a Hindu. There’s some truth to this, but it isn’t the whole story. Just because you were born into a certain religion doesn’t mean you will remain in that faith once you are old enough to think for yourself and consider other worldviews. In fact, the lives of many of the skeptics themselves prove this point. Many of them were born into Christian families and cultures but left once they got older. The same is often true for people born in any culture. When later in life they are exposed to the free market of ideas, they change. They switch. They choose other options.

That’s why I have spent the last thirty years focusing on university campuses around the world. The campus is an exciting
place, a crossroads where a person’s cultural upbringing meets the world of ideas. It can also be the place where the truth of Jesus Christ shines the brightest. The gospel of Jesus Christ doesn’t prevail only when there are no competitors; it shines most brightly when it is held up to other faiths. Secular religions, like Darwinian naturalism, can’t make the same boast. They don’t do well when faced with competition. They try to eliminate rivals. That’s why there is enormous energy spent keeping any reference to the existence of design or intelligent creation out of the classroom. Real faith—particularly real faith in Jesus Christ—welcomes the challenge.

Remember that Christianity originally arose in the hostile culture of the Roman Empire, where to believe in Jesus Christ could cost you your life. Thousands of early believers were thrown to the lions, burned at the stake, or even crucified, as Christ was, for their faith. The experience of the early Christians wasn’t a result of the culture they were born into or the way their parents raised them. Unlike more militant religions that force people to believe at the point of the sword, early Christianity spread by a force that was fairly unknown to men at the time—the force of divine love. This is what caused those who had grown up in the Roman Empire’s culture of violence, subjugation, and fear to turn to Christianity. Christ commanded His followers to advance His message by the irresistible force of love and the power of truth.

True faith in God isn’t coerced. It arises freely. The message of Christ transformed the Roman Empire because that message was based in love and truth and because it did not coerce obedience as other religions did. That’s why skeptics, idolaters, and atheists turned to the message of Jesus in the early years of
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Christianity, regardless of where they were born. In places such as America, where the Christian faith has been practiced for generations, those born in the faith have an advantage that should not be ignored or dismissed as trivial.

THE ENDURING GOSPEL STORY

The gospel is the good news that God became man in Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived (perfectly keeping the moral law); He then died the death we should have died (for breaking that law). Three days later He rose from the dead, proving He is the Son of God and offering the gift of salvation to everyone who will repent and believe the gospel.

• God became man in Jesus Christ.
  God stepped into the world by taking on human flesh. The religions of the world call men to ascend and work their way to God. Christianity explains that God came down to us.

• He lived the life we should have lived.
  God expects us to keep the moral law. Christ lived a perfect life. His life modeled the life completely yielded to God. This was the life that God intended all men and women to live.

• He died the death we should have died.
  This is a difficult truth for skeptics to embrace, that evil must be punished. If there is no consequence for breaking a law, then the law ceases to be a law. Christ bore our
punishment by taking our place through His death on a Roman cross.

- **He rose from the dead.**
  
  Christ’s resurrection from the dead verified His identity and proved that His authority was real. It also gives us hope that there is life after death.

- **He offers salvation to those who will repent and believe.**
  
  In God’s gift of salvation we not only receive forgiveness of sins but also are delivered from the power of evil and its consequences—both in this life and the next. To repent means to turn from evil and from trusting in our own efforts to earn our own salvation. In turning from evil, we turn to Christ and believe. The promise is straightforward:

  For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

**My Story**

Despite being born in America and raised in a family that attended church, I lived as if there was no God. As long as I didn’t break any serious laws, I was okay. The notion of being religious was repulsive. Church was just a place to have weddings and funerals.

As a third-year university student, my personal problems became too big to ignore. As much as I tried to run from them or
drown them with drugs and alcohol, they only grew larger. The turning point came when I began to doubt my doubts about God and I humbled myself by admitting I had deep needs. That step of humility put me in a position to listen when someone started talking to me about the reality of God and His incarnation as Jesus Christ. I’m grateful for the people who took the time to speak to me, answer my questions, and ultimately call my bluff by challenging my unbelief.

For the first time I understood something that was truly good news. What was that something? That God had foreseen my need and provided help, long before I knew I needed it. How long before? Try two thousand years before. At the right time in history, God became man in Jesus.

I decided to believe God’s story and accept it as true—not just true for me but really true for all humanity—the metanarrative that defines reality in this age of uncertainty. That fateful decision changed the course of my life. My questions were not all answered at once. In fact, following Christ has been a journey of continually finding the answers to the questions and quandaries of our existence. Yet time and time again, the answers have come. God isn’t afraid of our questions, but we must ask them not out of hostility toward Him, but out of trust “that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Because God is real, humanity’s search for Him will not be in vain. With this hope in mind, I write this book for three types of people:

The Seeker is attempting to believe but faces doubts about whether God is real. I offer the evidence in these pages hoping that person will be able to realize that it is indeed credible as well as fulfilling to believe in God. Even before understanding
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Christianity or the Bible, there is ample evidence that the world around us is no accident.

The Believer knows God is real subjectively but cannot easily articulate this faith to unbelievers. Hopefully these chapters will make the evidence for God clear so that it can be easily comprehended and then presented to others.

The Skeptic may be reading this book from a critical point of view and a predetermined mind-set that there is no God. My hope is that regardless of how attached this reader is to skepticism, the following evidence will ironically allow a seed of doubt to be planted, helping that person break free of the matrix of a godless worldview and embrace the real story that best corresponds to the evidence, the one that declares, “God’s not dead.”
1

GOD’S NOT DEAD

What divides us is not science, we are both committed to science, but our worldviews. No one wants to base their life on a delusion, but which is a delusion? Christianity or atheism?

—John Lennox

When a Man stops believing in God he doesn’t then believe in nothing, he believes anything.

—attributed to G. K. Chesterton

I WAS IN MY THIRD YEAR OF COLLEGE WHEN MY ATHEIST older brother, Ben, decided to try to talk me out of my Christian faith. I probably looked like an easy target. I had not been a Christian that long, and Ben was in his third year of law school at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He was at the top of his class, already had a master’s degree in counseling, and had been sharpening his disdain for Christianity for a while.

We arranged to meet over a weekend at our parents’ house in Dallas. Ben prepared as if he was going to be trying a legal case,
studying the Bible to get the ammunition he needed to blow me out of my new faith. He told one of his classmates, “I’m going home to get my little brother out of this born-again thing.” He showed up with his prepared questions and finely tuned challenges, anticipating anything I might say. He was confident he could get me to abandon this whole notion of faith in God and belief in Jesus Christ.

I’d like to tell you that I had brilliant, learned answers for everything he brought up. But I never had the chance to respond. As I listened to and addressed Ben’s doubts simply, the truth of God’s Word began to soften his heart. I could see he was doubting his doubts. There was finally a moment when I told him, “Ben, it’s not what you don’t know about God that’s keeping you from believing; it’s what you do know. You know He is real and you know He is holy [meaning pure].” The apostle Paul wrote that people “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The reason? They don’t like God’s rules. The problem with this is that it’s like trying to hold a beach ball under the water: the harder you push truth down, the more forcefully it resurfaces. This was definitely what my brother was doing. He was trying to escape from the pangs of conscience that were convicting him of his behavior.

At the end of the day—the day on which he intended to talk me out of my faith—I baptized Ben in a swimming pool. Not long after he came up out of the water he said, “I don’t think you answered all my questions, but I think I was asking the wrong questions.” Today, Ben is a successful trial attorney in Austin, Texas, and a formidable witness for Christ.

That weekend thirty years ago was a turning point for both Ben and me. He became a believer in Jesus Christ while he was
trying to talk me out of “this born-again thing.” And since that
day, I’ve devoted my life to getting people out of “this atheist
thing.” I work primarily among university students around the
world, and I have been joined by thousands of others who have
found that faith in God is both spiritually revitalizing and intel-
lectually satisfying. We’ve also seen the opposite: that atheism
doesn’t satisfy a man’s heart or mind.

THE END OF FAITH?

More than forty years ago, the cover of *Time* magazine asked, “Is
God Dead?” The writers were reflecting upon the famous claim
made by nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich
Nietzsche that God is dead. Other voices from that century raised
the same issue in different words. Followers of Charles Darwin
had suggested that belief in God would soon disappear from a
scientifically progressive society. Karl Marx had said that reli-
gion is a drug, “the opium of the people.” In 1999, *The Economist*
magazine published an obituary for God.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the funeral. In
2009, the senior editor of *The Economist* cowrote the book
*God Is Back*, which served as a retraction of the 1999 article.
Christianity is experiencing astounding growth in Africa,
Asia, and Latin America. In Europe, where there has been gen-
erations of religious decline, there are encouraging signs of
spiritual growth, particularly in places such as London, Berlin,
and Dublin that have a deep history of faith in God. This is due
to an intellectual renaissance as well as a spiritual one. People
are awakening from the dogmatic slumbers of secularism and
naturalism. And in America the overwhelming majority still acknowledge the existence of God, and the nation is beginning to witness a spiritual awakening among youth. In spite of the fact that God has been virtually banished from the classroom, university and high school students are questioning what they’ve been taught—the naturalistic dogma that the universe and life are merely the product of blind, random forces—and they are acknowledging that there is rational grounds for believing in a Creator. The thick fog of unbelief that has hovered over academia is starting to burn off as more and more evidence for an intelligent Creator surfaces.

With this rise in faith worldwide has come a corresponding response. Over the last decade the secularist camp set out to stem the tide of renewed faith. The term *new atheists* has been given to a group of skeptics who have sought to revive the arguments against God and repackage them for a new generation. Ironically, very little is *new* about these atheistic arguments. In fact, the success of their claims is mostly due to the fact that the theistic responses to their claims—which are the truth about God—have not been widely circulated.

A generation ago, C. S. Lewis composed a set of lectures that were broadcast over the BBC and were transcribed and published as *Mere Christianity*. Formerly an atheist, Lewis realized that he had to ignore too much evidence to maintain his unbelief:

If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all those religions, even the queerest one, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had
to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most.  

The arguments atheists use against God quickly disappear like a mirage when they are answered by learned believers such as Lewis. Atheists claim that the universe isn't what you would expect if a supernatural God existed. All this death and suffering, they say, are plain evidence that a loving, intelligent God could not be behind it all. The truth is that God has created a world where free moral agents are able to have real choices to do good or evil. If God had created a world without that fundamental choice and option to do evil, then we wouldn't be having this discussion. God made a world where choices are real and humanity is affected by the choices of other humans. Drunk drivers kill innocent people. Some murder and steal from their fellow men. Though God gave clear commandments to humanity, we have for the most part ignored these directives. The mess that results is not God's fault. It's ours.

We are called to follow God and love Him with all our hearts and minds. This means we have to think and investigate. Truth is another word for reality. When something is true it's true everywhere. The multiplication tables are just as true in China as they are in America. Gravity works in Africa the way it does in Asia. The fact that there are moral truths that are true everywhere points to a transcendent morality that we did not invent and from which we cannot escape.

As Creator, God has placed not only natural laws in the earth but also spiritual laws. For instance, lying is wrong everywhere. So is stealing. Cruelty to children is wrong regardless of what culture you're in or country you're from. When these laws are
broken, people are broken. Not only does violating these spiritual laws separate us from God, but it causes pain in our lives and in the lives of those around us. The big question becomes, what can be done about our condition? When we break these spiritual laws, whom can we call for help? How can we be reconciled to God as well as break free from this cycle of pain and dysfunction?

Is Atheism a Religion?

Within every human is a desire for God. We sometimes attempt to satisfy this hunger by practicing a religion, by having faith in something. Atheism, in all its railings against God, also has intrinsic beliefs, dogmas, and tenets that supposedly can’t be challenged. It is itself a belief system with all the markings of a religion. In an issue entitled “Forget the Church. Follow Jesus,” *Newsweek* magazine agreed, calling atheism a “belief.”9 Atheism as a religion (a set of beliefs) is just as intolerant and closed-minded as the claims made against any faith system it assails.

With the fervor of the religious fundamentalists, these new atheists reject any competing ideas not just from religion, but also from philosophy. Stephen Hawking, in his book *The Grand Design*, declared that “philosophy is dead.”10 However Daniel Dennett, one of the so-called Four Horsemen of Atheism, has admitted, “There is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.”11 Therefore, in their minds, science becomes the only source of truth; like a ruthless dictator in a third-world country, atheists must eliminate all competition. No deviations from the atheistic, Darwinian dogma tolerated. Want to lose credibility in these
secular citadels? Merely suggest that there might be something beyond nature that’s responsible for our existence. This skeptical overreaction is simply . . . unreasonable.

**Delusion of Disbelief**

In his book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins asserts that God must be a delusion because God couldn’t exist. Dawkins, who is perhaps the world’s most famous atheist, makes the claim that though the universe appears to be designed, it couldn’t have been because we are still left with the question “Who designed the Designer?” This is itself an example of the irrational, unyielding position of the atheistic mind. The truth is you don’t have to have an explanation for every explanation. Such a demand sets up an infinite regress where nothing would be knowable and science and reason would all break down (granted, that is a worse-case scenario).

If you were walking through the woods and found a turtle on top of a fence post, you could rationally conclude that it didn’t get there by itself. Someone put it there. Even if you didn’t have an explanation for who did it, you would be reasonable in assuming that time and chance wouldn’t eventually place a turtle on a fence post.

Sigmund Freud spoke of religious belief as a *wish-fulfillment*, the desire to have some “father-figure in the sky” who can straighten things out for us and talk to us when we are lonely. David Aikman, a former senior correspondent for *Time* and author of *The Delusion of Disbelief*, put atheism in the same category as religion, saying, “Atheism is itself a delusion,” the ultimate wish-fulfillment. There are real reasons why unbelievers don’t want
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God to exist or at least seek to reduce Him to a blind impersonal force. No God—no accountability. No God—no real morals. “If God is dead,” said Malcolm Muggeridge, “somebody is going to have to take his place,” and that somebody else is usually man himself.

Think about it: more than 90 percent of the planet believes that God exists. To maintain that those who believe in God are deluded means atheists (or radical skeptics as I call them) believe the majority of the world is under some kind of mass delusion. In order to maintain this position from an objective intellectual standpoint, they would have to dismiss all evidence of God and then explain how everything we see around us arose on its own—by chance.

The taunt of the skeptic is that those of us who have faith have no real proof for that faith. Skeptics say it’s all based on feelings or delusions or due to our religious upbringings. One of the standard lines from atheists sounds like this: “When I’m asked to prove god doesn’t exist, I ask believers to prove there are no fire-breathing dragons living in the center of the earth.” Some of the other analogies commonly used are the tooth fairy and Richard Dawkins’s personal favorite, the “Flying Spaghetti Monster.” They sit back as if this alone justifies their disbelief, but they are wrong. There are no good reasons to believe in a Flying Spaghetti Monster, the tooth fairy, or fire-breathing dragons in the center of the earth. There are good reasons to believe in God.

The real question is, how much proof is enough proof to convince you that God is real? Most of the time atheists haven’t thought about what it would actually take to get them to believe. When Dawkins was asked this during a public debate, he said, “That’s a very difficult and interesting question because, I mean,
I used to think that if somehow, you know, great big giant, nine-hundred-foot-high Jesus with a voice like Paul Robeson suddenly strode in and said ‘I exist. Here I am,’ but even that, I actually sometimes wonder whether that would . . .” He doesn’t appear to have given much thought to this trivial answer. In fact, if someone else claimed to see a nine-hundred-foot Jesus, he or she would be ridiculed. The truth is, if your mind is made up about what you don’t believe and won’t believe, then no amount of evidence will convince you. You will dismiss even the most devastating testimony against your position.

I have been challenged repeatedly on university campuses: “You’re going to have to prove to me that God exists and Christianity is true.” My response? “If I do, will you believe in Him and follow Christ?” When they say no I respond, “Your problem is not a lack of information. If you have all your questions answered and still don’t believe, then your real problem is spiritual, not intellectual.”

War of the Worldviews

No one comes to these discussions completely neutral or objective. In other words, reason isn’t always reasonable. Our reason can be compromised by our own selfish motives. People who act corruptly or destructively may think they have reasons that justify their actions. On top of that, they have a way in which they view the world. Their worldview consists of a set of presuppositions that bias reason.

The theistic worldview centers on God. Theos is the Greek word meaning “god,” therefore a theist believes in God and sees God as the creator and sustainer of life and the world around us.
The physical laws, the constants in nature, and the complexity of life all point to a rational intelligence. Theists push that logic, believing this intelligence isn’t merely an impersonal force but is conscious and relational as humans are conscious and relational beings. Just as we desire intimacy, trust, and love from the relationships we value, so does our Creator.

The atheist worldview, also described as naturalistic, centers on nature. A- is the Greek prefix meaning “absence,” therefore an atheist believes in the absence of God. Everything can be explained by natural causes and effects. As the lead singer for Bad Religion stated in his book *Anarchy Evolution*:

> If people ask me about my worldview, I say that I am a naturalist. When most people hear that word, they think of someone who spends a lot of time outdoors watching birds and admiring landscapes—and I suppose that description applies to me. But I think of naturalism as a philosophy rather than a lifestyle. From a philosophical perspective, naturalists believe that the physical universe *is* the universe. In other words, there are no supernatural entities or forces acting on nature, because there is no empirical evidence for anything beyond or outside of nature.

This worldview eliminates the possibility of God from the outset; therefore, no evidence for an intelligent Creator will ever be convincing.

The pretense of many atheists is that somehow they don’t really possess any of these presuppositions. They project this air of objectivity, arguing with Socrates, “Scientists follow the evidence wherever it leads.” Unless, of course, it leads to God.
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To say that nothing exists outside the physical world is a statement of faith. There is no way that anyone can prove that is true. Atheism and other worldviews are just ideas—big ideas—and as history has proven, ideas have consequences. For example, the naturalistic worldview stemming from Darwinian evolution has had disastrous repercussions when applied philosophically and ethically: millions died at the hands of atheist Communists and Nazis during the twentieth century.

“Imagine There’s No Heaven”

If there is an anthem of unbelief, it is no doubt the song “Imagine” written by the late John Lennon: “Imagine there’s no heaven . . .” What if Lennon’s song were true? Would the world be a better place if there were no God? Let’s imagine.

If there is no heaven, then there is no God. If there is no God or heaven, then this life is all there is: when you’re dead, you’re dead. What John Lennon imagined, Vladimir Lenin had already built in the communist state of Russia. The godless world of that Lenin was a living nightmare of torture, genocide, and darkness. The twentieth century was the bloodiest century in history, thanks to the atheistic regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mao Zedong.

If God is dead, then man is dead as well. Utopian dreams of humanistic paradise seem ideal until one fatal fact is recalled: man is the true cause of evil. Without the restraint of God and His law, humanity is free to act out any impulse, desire, or passion. Nothing would be ultimately right or wrong. Imagine an announcement was made in any major city of the world that the
police were taking the week off. No crimes would be prosecuted, no laws enforced. What do you imagine would be the result? Peace and tranquility or lawlessness and chaos?

If there is no heaven, then there is no reward for any good deed done. Why sacrifice your life for your country or any other cause? If there is no hell, then there is no ultimate punishment for any crime. In other words, the terrorists who commit atrocities against their fellow men will, in the end, get away with it.

The experiment to build a society without God has been tried. It has failed. At the same time religion without God is equally disastrous. The prophets of old warned that people could worship with their lips while their hearts were far away from God. The warning is echoed in the writings of the New Testament, saying some people will be seen “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). Looking back over our shoulders into history, it doesn’t take long to realize that some Christians have given the critics of faith a lot of ammunition. Most of the failures resulted from disobeying the commands of Christ to love, serve, and forgive. Jesus was totally against powerless, compassionless religion and called it hypocrisy; but make no mistake: religion has no corner on the market of hypocrisy.

During the last century, arrogance and ignorance hurt Christianity in public discourse with skeptics. In this century, however, the roles have been reversed. One of atheists’ favorite tactics is to use mockery and ridicule to attempt to discredit anything of a religious nature, particularly Christianity. Any
baseless claim is given credibility if it serves to undermine faith in God. If believers aren’t prepared, they can be wrongly influenced to think their faith is misplaced.

A student once told me he had heard this question in a philosophy class: If God is all-powerful, could He make a rock so big He couldn’t move it? He told me that when he couldn’t come up with the answer, he eventually backslid. My thought was, If one riddle shook your faith, then you didn’t have far to slide. We shouldn’t abandon truth when these evangelists of unbelief shout their confident lies at us. The question actually violates logic’s “law of non-contradiction.” And the answer to the philosopher’s riddle is simple: because God is all-powerful, He could not create anything He could not handle.

Other challenges are much more absurd. Late-night comic and professional cynic Bill Maher (pronounced like the verb mar) regularly uses ridicule to denounce religion. Most of his arguments are what philosophy calls straw men: false pictures of something that have been created only so they can be easily confuted. Maher often takes the worst parts of anything associated with religion (suicide bombers, priests who abuse children, and especially anyone who refuses to accept evolution as fact) and paints them all in the worst possible light. He then announces, “Religion must die.”

While many bad things have been done in the name of religion, and even in the name of Jesus Christ, an honest inquiry can quickly separate truth from error, fact from fiction. False claims must be challenged and seen for what they are—vain imaginations. Fanaticism is a human problem, not a religion problem. Don’t believe it? Just watch any sporting event, rock concert, or political rally. Atheist fanatics are just as unreasonable as
their religious counterparts. Just as you don’t dismiss politics because there are bad politicians or commerce because there are bad businesses, you certainly must know how to separate the precious from the worthless when it comes to God and faith.

Again, Jesus Christ stands apart from man-made philosophy and religion. He was the original critic of empty religious practices and shallow lives. With a little effort, you can have a faith that is “un-mahered,” one that is free from defects or stains. This kind of faith begins with a rock-solid knowledge that God is indeed real. The false notions of the age must be examined like the one-hundred-dollar bill a cashier examines as potential counterfeit. We must not be misled by phony arguments or phony lives. Remember, it isn’t enough simply to know God is real. Even the demons believe in God and tremble. We must be able to demonstrate and articulate God’s truth in a way the people around us can clearly understand.

**What 9/11 Taught Us**

Just days after the attacks I drove with some friends to New York to see how we could serve that great city in its unprecedented time of crisis. It didn’t take long to realize that we needed to plant a church in the heart of New York City to minister to the spiritual needs of as many as possible on a consistent basis. Within a month we were flying every Sunday night from Nashville to New York and holding Sunday night services. Today that church, Morning Star New York, consists of three congregations.

After we had been flying in for a few weeks for the Sunday night meetings, the owner of one of my favorite restaurants was thanking us for our commitment to help his city. I recounted an
incident that occurred in his restaurant in my book *Finding Faith at Ground Zero*. Sandy, the owner of Carnegie Deli, called me over to a table of TV-network executives for an introduction. He said, “Reverend [I really don’t like it when people call me that!], these men are having to burn their furniture because of anthrax-poisoned letters they have been receiving. They need answers about what’s going on.”

I sat down at the table with these very important media leaders and paused to consider what I could say that might make an impact for Christ in a wise and believable way. I said, “Well, if there’s anything 9/11 taught us, it’s that all religions are not the same. The god that told those men to get in airplanes and come to this city and hurt people is not the same God that inspired us to get into airplanes each week and come here and help people.”

There is no way you can group every religious belief and practice together and then smugly denounce religion as a whole. All beliefs are not equal. Some are true, and others are false. History has proven that ideas—religious, philosophical, or scientific—have consequences.

**Breaking News**

The greatest idea in history, the one that has produced the most significant and enduring benefit to humanity, is Jesus Christ. God’s idea to come to earth as a human, undeniably demonstrating the power of truth, has given us the ultimate message of hope, called the *gospel* or *good news*. God’s good news is as current as any breaking news you’ll see or hear today on any news channel.
GOD’S NOT DEAD

It is so encouraging I will refer to it as often as I can so its message is not missed or misunderstood. The good news announces that God became man in Jesus Christ, He lived the life we should have lived, and in our place He died the death we should have died. Three days later He came back to life to verify His identity as the Son of God, and now He offers full pardon and forgiveness to all who will believe and turn from the darkness of sin and the futility of trying to save themselves. Those who turn and put their trust in Him will never be ashamed.

This message of hope, this good news, is true no matter what country or culture you’re from. Christ came to deal with the legal consequences of humanity breaking God’s law once and for all. Far from wanting us to be religious, He calls us simply to love Him and love others. The gospel changes us from the inside out. That is why many are quick to say that Christ didn’t call us into religion but into relationship, relationship with Him and with one another.

Why God’s Existence Matters

Once in Argentina at the University of Buenos Aires, I spent time talking to five young students who identified themselves as atheists. I spent a lot of time asking questions about the reasons for their atheism. Thanks to a good translator, Phillip Steele, I was able to understand the details of their disbelief. As I listened intently, a young man carrying a guitar with him asked me, “Why should we even be concerned with the question, ‘Does God exist?’ Does it really matter?”
I asked him, “Have you ever written a song?”
His facial expression changed instantly as it seemed I was changing the subject from God and to something he really wanted to talk about. He said yes, then I asked, “Why did you want to write a song?”
He raised his hand to emphasize his passion. “I wanted to share my feelings with others, to create something they could enjoy as well as express my heart and my thoughts.”
“What would you do if you wrote a song for those noble reasons and someone either denied you wrote the song or mistakenly gave credit to someone else for writing it instead of you? Would that bother you?”
Looking like he knew I was going to make a bigger point, he agreed, “Yes, I would be upset if I didn’t get recognized as the author of the song I wrote.”
I paused for just a moment. “What if you created a planet?”
You could see the evidence of the connection between the two thoughts on his face.
God deserves the recognition for all He has created. Knowing that a Creator exists changes everything in our outlook and worldview. It should inspire us to honor Him more than we would honor any woman or man for any human achievement. It should also cause us to seek Him, to earnestly desire a relationship with Him.
The reality of God as Creator compels us to investigate the world He created with greater confidence and to understand His nature and character. All the beauty, grandeur, and provision on the planet should produce a gratitude that overwhelms us. This is the spirit of evangelism that sends us out with a message of love, hope, and reconciliation, not hate and division.
GOD’S NOT DEAD

Summary

When you hear “God is back,” that obviously doesn’t mean He actually went anywhere. Faith in God is back. Not a blind, unreasonable faith, but one that is well grounded in evidence. The grounded evidence is the basis to communicate that faith in a straightforward, clear manner. If nothing else, the writings of the new atheists have succeeded in awakening millions of Christians from their dogmatic slumbers.

This book is one of the many works that have been inspired by the audacity and arrogance of some of these skeptical writers who have decided to take their personal battle and hatred of religion public. When I was doing my doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary, my mentor Dan Shaw would constantly advise me to keep my writing from sounding “preachy.” The goal was to produce a doctoral thesis based on empirical data and research with personal opinions and preachments at a minimum. While I still endeavor to present sound, rational arguments for the existence of God based on the best explanation of the evidence, I also want to offer the encouragement and hope that real faith in God produces. Let’s now turn to the reasons to believe in the existence of God—starting with reason itself.