

AUTHENTIC

SHAWN BOONSTRA



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*I believe there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
a unity of three coeternal Persons.*

JANUARY 1

The Good News About Who You Are

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

—Genesis 1:1

Like many adopted children, Matthew Roberts set out later in life to find his biological parents, and the search led him in a direction he could not possibly have predicted. After some legwork, he managed to find his birth mother, but she proved to be hesitant to reveal his father's identity. When she finally divulged it, Roberts was horrified: his biological father was Charles Manson, the notorious sixties cult leader and serial killer.

The news was unsettling, to say the least. Would Matthew inherit his father's tendencies? Would he turn out to be as psychotic as his father?

"I didn't want to believe it," Matthew said. "It's like finding out that Adolf Hitler is your father. I'm a peaceful person—trapped in the face of a monster."★

Most of us instinctively sense that origins matter. Where we come from plays a role in determining who we are, the tendencies we have, and the direction we are headed. Across cultures and around the globe, the search for our human origin is one of humanity's most basic instincts—and our deepest needs.

Matthew Roberts's search led to a troubling conclusion, but our search need not. The Bible offers good news with the first four words on the very first page: "In the beginning *God*." He is the origin of everything that exists, and He is the reason that you have life. Much of the twenty-first-century world has tried to portray God as untrustworthy: a cruel dictator, a malevolent deity not unlike the capricious gods of pagan mythology. And if all we read were the first few words of the book of Genesis, we might be tempted to draw a similar conclusion: if God gave birth to all that is, then perhaps God is not good.

Fortunately, the Bible contains many more words—astonishing words that paint a picture of hope. God is anxious to have us rediscover Him and find the truth about ourselves. You and I are but a mere shadow of what God intended the human race to be; but in finding the truth about God, we will have a better sense of who we are—or who we are *supposed* to be.

★ Mail Foreign Service, " 'It's Like Finding Out Hitler Is Your Dad': DJ Matthew Roberts Tracks Down Long-Lost Father ... But Discovers He's Charles Manson," *Daily Mail*, November 24, 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1230439/>.

Your Deepest Need

*Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me,
that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight," says the LORD.*

—Jeremiah 9:23, 24

Ask a group of people what a human being's greatest need is, and you are likely to hear the word *love*. It is a natural assumption, given the way that popular culture has become saturated with the concept. From the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" to nearly every pop song written since, we have been told, millions of times over, that love is the most important need we have.

There is little doubt that human beings have a profound need for genuine love and affection. For example, studies have repeatedly shown that in orphanages, neglected babies fare more poorly than those who receive personal attention. We *need* personal relationships with people who care.

But is love our *most* profound need? Probably not. It would seem that our search for *meaning* runs far deeper than our search for love. We want to know that our lives have purpose. To that end, many pursue power and wealth, as Jeremiah points out. The problem with such pursuits, however, is that they rarely satisfy our search for significance: the wealthy and powerful have also been known to suffer from depression and have feelings of hopelessness and suicidal thoughts.

The Creator offers a much surer path to meaning. God says, "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Not only does this passage offer purpose and hope, but it also reveals something profound about the nature of God: He is *knowable*. Even though God is infinite and we are emphatically finite; even though God is vast and we are small; even though our capacity to grasp things outside of our own experience is deficient, God tells us that we can know and understand Him. Not only is He discoverable, He also is understandable.

And what we find as we get to know Him will not only give us purpose, it will offer us incredible hope: God is both loving and just. His character inspires hope. He can be trusted.

The wise understand that human achievement passes away and that might or riches are always fleeting. But those who anchor their existence in the One who gave it, those who long to understand God, will find cause to glory.

He's Waiting—Outside

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen,
being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power
and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.*

—Romans 1:20

The English clergyman William Paley is probably best remembered today for his watchmaker analogy. “Let’s say you’re walking around,” he argued, “and you find a watch on the ground. As you examine it, you marvel at the intricately complex interweaving of its parts . . . surely you wouldn’t think this marvel would have come about by itself.” So it is with nature, he explained: something as complex as the universe could not possibly have come into being on its own.

The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, building on the work of Greek philosophers, argued that since everything has a cause, the universe must have been brought into existence by something without a cause—in other words, the Creator.

The current wave of neo-atheists is unhappy with such thinking. For example, the late Christopher Hitchens, in his (tragically) best-selling book *God Is Not Great*, stated that “the postulate of a designer or creator only raises the unanswerable question of who designed the designer or created the creator.”* Sam Harris, another of the so-called four horsemen of atheism, agrees: “The notion of a creator poses an immediate problem of an infinite regress. If God created the universe, what created God?”†

For many nonbelievers, this rebuttal of Paul’s defense seems unanswerable: If complex things demand a creator, and God is infinitely complex, who created *Him*?

It is a flawed premise because, by definition, God is not a *creation*, He is a *creator*. “What a beautiful work of art!” someone exclaims when presented with a Rembrandt painting. “It’s so detailed—so complex! I wonder who painted *Rembrandt*?”

It is silly: Rembrandt is a painter, not a painting. God is an eternal Creator, not a creation. While His work clearly reveals His existence and reflects His mind, He is not identical with His work. He is above it and differs from it. Atheists have unwittingly fallen into the same trap as ancient pagans: “We ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising,” Paul reminded his audience in Athens (Acts 17:29).

Tragically, human civilization has largely moved indoors. We find ourselves glued to screens for hours each day, separated from the stunning evidence of a loving and purposeful God, all the while wondering if He really exists.

* Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 120, Kindle.

† Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2006), 651, 652, Kindle.

Above It All

*Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*

—Psalm 90:2

There is an old story about a shepherd boy so wise that the king had him brought to the palace. “How many seconds are there in eternity?” the king asked him.

“A long way from here,” the boy replied, “there is a mountain made of diamond. It is one-hour high, one-hour wide, one-hour deep, and it reaches one-hour down into the earth. Once every one hundred years, a little bird comes to sharpen its beak on the mountain, and eventually, when it has worn away the whole thing, the first second of eternity will have passed.”

“Everlasting” is a very long time. It is hard for those of us with a defined beginning and end to imagine what the Bible means by “everlasting.” We are born, we live a few short years (hopefully happy ones), and then we die. Not so with God. The Bible says that He has no beginning and no end.

Dorion Sagan said of his famous scientist father, Carl Sagan, “My father believed in the God of Spinoza and Einstein, God not behind nature but as nature, equivalent to it.”* Theologians and philosophers would label that view *pantheism*: the belief that God is not a personal Being who exists apart from creation; instead, He is said to be identical with His creation. Pantheism, in part, was the downfall of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, who, in an 1897 talk titled “God in Nature,” exclaimed, “What a wonderful thought, that this mighty God that keeps the whole universe in order, is in us!”† In 1899, he said, “[Food] is a sacred thing to eat. This grows out of the fact that God is in everything.”‡

The psalmist was clearly not a pantheist. God existed before Creation, from everlasting, and He will continue to exist after this creation passes away, to everlasting. He has always been there, and He always will be.

There is no question that God’s fingerprints are to be found all over this planet. Creation is a stunning revelation of His character; the human race is made in His image. But the Creator God is distinct from creation and above it—an understanding that counters the rather human temptation to think of *ourselves* as God.

* Lynn Margulis, and Dorion Sagan, *Dazzle Gradually: Reflections on the Nature of Nature* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007), 415, 416, Kindle.

† Arthur White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 5, *The Early Elmshaven Years: 1900-1905* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1981), 282.

‡ White, *Ellen G. White*, 5:285.

Why We Worship

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

—Revelation 4:9–11

Let's face it," controversial comedian Bill Maher reportedly once said, "God has a big ego problem. Why do we always have to worship him?"* If you know anything about Mr. Maher, you know that he is a rather poor authority on religious matters; he is cynical, sarcastic, and downright hostile to believers.

But he does raise an important question: Why worship God?

"For You created all things," heavenly beings declare, "and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11). The living creatures and the twenty-four elders understand something very important: God alone is worthy of worship because God alone is the source of life. If God did not exist, *we* would not exist.

A connection to the Living God, an understanding of who He is, and a recognition of our utter dependence on Him is vital to our well-being. We cannot function properly while separated from God; we cannot be truly *human* apart from Him; and, perhaps most important, we cannot continue to exist without Him.

The act of worship maintains our perspective and reminds us of who God is and who we are. Worship is an invitation. It is not a matter, in the words of the skeptic philosopher David Hume, of God having "a restless appetite for applause."† The ability to worship—to have a living connection and relationship with the Creator—is a gift from God. We *need* to worship Him to be spiritually and emotionally healthy, just as we need proper nutrition to be physically healthy.

It is no more ego that drives God to delight in worship than it is for a shepherd to delight in caring and providing for his sheep. "Oh come, let us worship and bow down," the psalmist writes. "Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (Psalm 95:6, 7).

The claim that ego drives God to desire worship is but a faint echo of a fallen angel's accusation that something is essentially wrong with the divine government. There is a direct path from that accusation to the misery we find in a fallen world. Worship is a path to restoration. "In Your presence is fullness of joy," David writes, "at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

* "Bill Maher Quotes," BrainyQuote.com, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/bill_maher_384911.

† David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2012), 107, Kindle.

No, Not Aliens

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*
—Genesis 2:7

Aliens. That is what they came up with: *aliens*.

Some time ago, I had the TV on in my hotel room as I was ironing shirts. The host was talking about the appearance of human life on this planet. He was at a loss to explain it.

“If we evolved,” he said, “then how did we become so hairless? Did women prefer less hairy men, and over time, the hairier men were bred out of the population? It doesn’t make sense: we need hair to stay warm.”

That is not an exact quote, but that was the gist of it. He was wrestling with the fact that human beings are highly advanced compared to the other inhabitants of our planet. Darwinian evolution did not explain it.

So he hit upon another solution: aliens. He suggested that in the distant past, aliens must have visited this planet to give the human race the extra boost it needed to sprint ahead of the other animals. Aliens, he said, must have tampered with our genetics, changing us from primates into *Homo sapiens*.

He must be kidding, I thought. He was not.

Never mind that the closest star system is impossibly far away—if you traveled 150,000 miles per hour, it would take nearly eighteen thousand years to reach the nearest star. On top of that, the radiation found in space would destroy your reproductive system, meaning that long-distance alien migrants would likely die off quickly.

It is, to say the least, highly unlikely. Yet some people prefer the alien theory to the God of Creation. Why? It does not come with any moral accountability. We would not owe an alien race such things as loyalty or obedience. We have no obligation to listen to the aliens or develop a relationship with them, and there would not be a Judgment Day.

If we came from aliens, our lives mean little, and we can live as we please.

Perhaps that is why so many people work so hard to discount what appears to be the most obvious answer. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (Genesis 1:26).

The real tragedy is the fact that it takes more energy to discount God than it takes to start building a relationship with Him.