



THE MISSING CHAPTER

ATHEISTS IN GOD'S FLOWER
GARDEN

Atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning.

Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust.

—C. S. Lewis

DR. DAN MYERS
WWW.WHEREWASGOD.ORG

Back to the Question

Thus far, we have looked at the question, *Where was God when I needed Him?* For the most part, our conclusions have come from within the Christian Family of Faith. For people of faith, the answers and findings may be more than adequate, for others who doubt the existence of God, or who simply do not believe in the Creator, they are much more comfortable with the No. 1 argument of the ages. It is the atheistic creed of faith: “If there’s a loving and all-powerful God, how can He allow the human race—His children, made in His image—to suffer so terribly?”¹ Some have called this the manifesto of atheism.

Sam Harris, a torchbearer for the atheist gospel, wrote a ninety-six-page book titled, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, the focus is primarily on Christians in the United States. This book was written in response to thousands of letters he received following his first book, *The End of Faith*.

In his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris is relentless in proclaiming the doctrines of his atheistic “faith” while at the same time endeavoring to destroy the building blocks of Christianity. He writes, “At this very moment millions of sentient people are suffering unimaginable physical and mental afflictions, in circumstances where the compassion of God is nowhere to be seen, and the compassion of human beings is often hobbled by preposterous ideas about sin and salvation.”² From Harris’s perspective, he’s a bit like the coach of a football team leading by a score of 95 to nothing, and in the final minute, he wants to score just one more time to rub the faces of his competitors in the gridiron mud. He continues:

Somewhere in the world, a man has abducted a little girl. Soon he will rape, torture, and kill her. If an atrocity of this kind is not occurring at precisely this moment, it will happen in a few hours or days at most. Such is the confidence we can draw from the statistical laws that govern the lives of six billion human beings. The same statistics also suggest that this girl’s parents believe—as you believe—that an all-powerful and all-loving God is watching over them and their family. Are they right to believe this? Is it *good* that they believe this?”³

Harris answers his question, “No,” and then with a note of triumph declares, “The entirety of atheism is contained in this response. Atheism is not a philosophy; it is not even a view of the world; it is simply an admission of the obvious. In fact, ‘atheism’ is a term that should not even exist.”⁴

C. S. Lewis, once an atheist himself, responds to the folly and faith of atheism; “A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, ‘darkness’ on the wall of his cell.”⁵

“Boys this is paradise.”

Those are the words, according to local legend, that led to the small mill town gaining its name in the 1880s. William Leonard and his crew are said to have just returned from delivering lumber to a mill when he sat down underneath a pine tree, looked out at the view, and spoke those words. Over time Paradise grew to be a pleasant town of twenty-seven thousand residents, known for its cooler temperatures and slower pace of life among the trees.

There was the Gold Nugget Museum, that talked of the Native American prospectors who first settled the area. There was the Black Bear Diner, with its all-day breakfasts and friendly sign: “Welcome to Bearadise.” There were the pine trees, the ones that William Leonard sat under in the 1880s, the ones that played their part in the 2018 destruction of the town.

In the aftermath of California’s most devastating fire, relatives of approximately a thousand people of Paradise still officially missing were asked to give DNA samples so police could match them to any remains that were found. Police dogs trained to pick up the scent of bodies were led through the piles of ash where homes, schools, businesses, hospitals, and churches once stood.

“I will forever be changed, as so many thousands of others were,” Tamara Ferguson says. She continued, “Not by what was physically lost, but by the reminder that life changes quickly.”

Paradise is no longer a beautiful pristine mountain community. It’s unusual name once created a visual image of magnificence nestled in a valley between giant mountains laced with pine trees. Ninety-five percent of all that was is now no more.

Before all, the data was in the Camp Fire destroyed 151,000 acres of forest beauty and 12,500 pieces of property. Atheists were quick to focus on the 2018 fires of Paradise and other California mountain communities. These become the kindling to torch people of faith. They are relentless in their proposition that the Christian God is a fable, and if He exists, must undoubtedly be unconcerned about the plight of His creation.⁶

An Atheist Makes His Case

It may seem that Harris is our favorite atheist flavor of the day, not so. Nevertheless, he is a very

articulate spokesman for atheists who want to prove the non-existence of God, especially whenever human suffering knocks at the door. David Kupelian, in his excellent article *The Atheist's Awakening*, summarizes Harris's gospel gathered from the news of the day. He begins by quoting Harris.

The city of New Orleans, for instance, was recently destroyed by a hurricane. More than a thousand people died; tens of thousands lost all their earthly possessions, and nearly a million were displaced. It is safe to say that almost every person living in New Orleans at the moment Hurricane Katrina struck shared your belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and compassionate God. But what was God doing while Katrina laid waste to their city? Surely, He heard the prayers of those elderly men and women who fled the rising waters for the safety of their attics, only to be slowly drowned there. These were people of faith. These were good men and women who had prayed throughout their lives. Do you have the courage to admit the obvious? These poor people died talking to an imaginary friend.⁷

For those who live outside the boundaries of faith, Harris raises questions that seem without answers unless one accepts the foundational premise of atheism, "There is no God." While the atheist has many issues, most are designed to destroy what they consider to be the ignorance of their opponents. Others on the planet have engaged with the question atheists are unable to find, "How can human suffering be compatible with an all-powerful and benevolent God?" Since atheists do not believe in God, this question becomes a non-starter in the thinking of atheists. They just do not have the tools for debating the issues. I am not suggesting they do not have faith. Their faith in atheism is often more aggressive than the faith of some Christians.

It is not my intent to review the basis for a Christian's faith and belief, as we have in earlier chapters. However, it may be helpful to understand and appreciate that people of faith, specifically Christians, and atheists, have different beginnings in their pursuit of truth. Christians have a conviction that the Bible is God's truth for man, and therefore it becomes both a means for personal salvation and a blueprint for living. The atheist has faith, a faith in one's understanding of "truth," causing him to believe there is no God. The atheist truth is subjective at best. An atheist has difficulty defining truth without empirical evidence, yet, their "truth" that God does not exist is absolute in their thinking. It is difficult to imagine there can be common ground between Christians and atheists, yet we continue to dialogue.

If you are a Christian and have been troubled by Harris's attempt to destroy every teaching of the Christian faith, you would do well to acquire a copy of R.C. Metcalf's book, *Letter to a Christian Nation: CounterPoint*. Dr. Metcalf was raised in an atheist home. Metcalf is both a scientist and a Christian. In his book,

he presents a compelling counter-response to Sam Harris. You will read it to your advantage.

Once an Atheist - Now a Christian

Let us move in a different direction. Kupelian takes us down a path we would not expect. He introduces a very famous but angry author who considers God to be both cruel and sadistic. See if you can identify whom he has in mind:

What reason have we, except our desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard, we can conceive, “good”? Doesn’t all the prima facie evidence suggest exactly the opposite? What have we to set against it? We set Christ against it.⁸ If God’s goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good, or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all, we can imagine.⁹

I suspect your mind is racing through a list of all the renowned atheists. What atheist who denies the existence of God, then rants and raves about a nonexistent God’s who is cruel (how can a nonexistent God be evil)? There are two that immediately come to mind. Could it be Christopher Hitchens, the atheist journalist that appeared like an enraged incensed bull charging a matador? Or, might it be Richard Dawkins, the atheist Oxford professor known for his arrogant, pompous, self-important manner?

Neither of these men fit the bill. However, it is another Oxford professor that soared far above Dawkins, and whose literary accomplishments and intellect is light years ahead of Hitchens’s. C. S. Lewis is the man. Lewis is one of the brightest literary lights from the twentieth Century, one of the most articulate defenders of Christianity. His books have sold in the millions. Many believe he is the most influential Christian writer of his Century.

Lewis lived a good deal of his early life as an atheist. It was not until his early thirties he began a gradual awakening when he eventually became convinced that God did indeed exist. I suspect that God was relieved for this verification from no less a scholar as Brother Lewis. As Lewis pursued his search for the faith, he found considerable help from J. R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*. There was another unnamed colleague who helped him embrace Christianity and a personal relationship with both the Father and the Son, both of which he had previously denied.¹⁰

During my years in seminary, I read and reread his *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The*

Chronicles of Narnia, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* was named by *Christianity Today* as the number one Christian book of the 20th Century. While Billy Graham reached millions around the world through his crusades and preaching, Lewis reached millions through his writings. *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and his much-loved series *The Chronicles of Narnia* became vehicles that transported many into the presence of God.

Kupelian raises the question when writing about Lewis;

So, you must be thinking, these angry anti-God words from the great C.S. Lewis must have come from his early, whacked-out atheist years - right? Wrong. They were written after *Narnia*, after *Mere Christianity*, after all the acclaim of an appreciative Christian world. They were written, to be precise, after the 1960 death of Lewis's wife, Joy.¹¹

For most of his life, well into his fifties, Lewis had been a bachelor. Then he met Helen Joy Davidman, a gifted American writer and poet of Jewish background who had converted from atheistic communism to Christianity, in part due to Lewis's writings. After they corresponded for several years, she moved to England, and they married in 1956 when Lewis was fifty-seven.

Both of them knew Joy had bone cancer; they were married at her hospital bedside.

Amazingly, Joy experienced a dramatic remission, during which time the couple lived together happily, and traveled and enjoyed each other to the fullest. But this blissful period was short-lived, and Joy died when her cancer returned with a vengeance in 1960.¹²

C.S. Lewis and His “Grief Observed”

A year after his wife died, Lewis wrote: *A Grief Observed*. In this book, Lewis reveals his humanity. He was impacted by rage, anger, and doubts about everything he had written. Lewis is often referred to as the 20th Century apostle Paul who taught about the love of God. How could such a man who had taken his pen and paper to express God's love ever question what he had written over the previous decades? Lewis was expressing anger and love at the same time. It has been said that tears are the liability of love. At that moment of profound, penetrating loss, one often slips into a very dark place. Lewis was in such a place when he wrote and released, *A Grief Observed*. He did so under the pseudonym of N. W. Clerk, not wanting his readers to identify him with the book.

Douglas Gresham, the son-in-law of C.S. Lewis, writes in the introduction to *A Grief Observed*. He helps us walk beside Lewis in that time following Joy's death.

C. S. Lewis, the writer of so much that is so clear and so right, the thinker whose acuity of mind and clarity of expression enabled us to understand so much, this strong and determined Christian, he too fell headlong into the vortex of whirling thoughts and feelings and dizzily grouped for support and guidance deep in the dark chasm of grief. How I wish that he had been blessed with just such a book as this.¹³

The point is, not the devastation Lewis experienced in the loss of his wife. The question on the mind of every Lewis admirer is, how did he respond to his own loss and personal suffering, which left him with a feeling of being alienated from God? Out of his pain, what conclusions did he embrace about God?

As Lewis begins to regain his emotional and spiritual balance, he raised my question long before it ever fell from my lips: Where is God when you need Him? His question is phrased a bit differently, but the meaning is the same. Lewis makes the point by suggesting:

When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be - or so it feels - welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate when all other help is vain and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double-bolting on the inside. After that, silence.¹⁴

C.S. Lewis and His Brief Flight of Faith

Lewis was mired in a murky moment. When there was no answer or consolation to his grief caused by his loss of wife and love, he experienced a brief flight of faith. It is not a happy time when all is well. Long before Simon and Garfunkel wrote and sang the words, Lewis was crying out without a voice, "The Sound of Silence."

Even so, Lewis writes, "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him."¹⁵ This is beginning to sound a bit like Sam Harris and others who fly under the banner of atheism. Lewis is asking, Who or what can possibly make us

conclude that God is actually good when most everything that happens in this life seems to “suggest exactly the opposite”?¹⁶

In his desert of despair, he revisits his thoughts about Christ. What about this Son of God? Is he the ultimate cosmic joke, the final act of God’s creation? Or, can we see a selfless life and sacrificial death demonstrating God’s love and goodness? Most Christians would affirm the latter.

Lewis says, perhaps, and then he raised the unthinkable question. What if Jesus' words on the cross—*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Mark 15:34). What if they were clear evidence of God’s spite, hostility, and hatred toward us? Could it possibly be that Jesus while dying on the cross “found that the Being He called Father was horribly and infinitely different from what He had supposed,” and the whole idea of saving mankind was like a pit of quicksand, nothing more than a “long and carefully prepared” and “subtly baited” trap. And what if God was the Creator of it all, “the vile practical joke” sprung in that moment of Christ’s final breath? To be careful, these are not the thoughts of Christ, they are the questions Lewis raises in the moments of his despair. What happened to the Lewis of *Mere Christianity*?¹⁷

C. S. Lewis Surviving a Vile Practical Joke

In what may have been the darkest moments of Lewis’s life, he continues to contemplate another unthinkable “vile practical joke,” and this too apparently from God. Lewis and his late wife Joy become the targets. Lewis complains that every time he makes an effort to pray, he is “choked” by the memories of all the times he and Joy had prayed, all the false hopes they held, the encouragements from “false diagnoses, by X-ray photographs, by strange remissions,” including that one “temporary recovery” that seemed so certain to be a miracle. Is Lewis alone in his agony? I think not. Lewis and his wife dared to believe that God’s grace was orchestrating a recovery. It now seems clear that God, while appearing gracious “was actually preparing the next torture.”¹⁸ We have been there with similar questions or conclusions in times of crisis... In such a moment, Lewis cries out, “I was at this time living, like so many Atheists or Antitheists, in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing.”¹⁹ We have wondered if anything preached from pulpits, “truth” confessed by Christians, or even the Bible has truth and relevance we can believe and count on? When we lose sight of the Creator, and become beaten down, we fall into a dark hole empathizing

with Lewis when he said, “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”²⁰

Lewis’s Reboot

The next morning Lewis wondered if God “was really preparing the next torture.” He identifies his childish tirade and clears his mind by asking the question, “is it really rational to believe in a bad God?” or, as he puts it with a staccato, “the Cosmic Sadist, the spiteful imbecile?”²¹

Lewis will not stay down long. The spiritual paramedics have visited to help him regain his God-focused pulse. He begins the process of rebooting his connection with God with whom he had put hard questions since the loss of his love. Once again, he starts to breathe the fresh air of God’s grace, and gives evidence of that when he asks, “Why do I make room in my mind for such filth and nonsense?” He begins to wonder about his miserable attempts to create pain into something at least bearable, “the senseless writings of a man who won’t accept the fact there is nothing we can do with suffering except to suffer it?”²²

Kupelian describes this moment in Lewis’s life;

Eventually, his grief and doubts about God fully vented, his rage spent, Lewis begins to reconnect with his natural understanding and reverence for his Creator. A few weeks have passed, he’s recovered from his physical exhaustion, and he’s more lighthearted. His personal relationship with God now restored, Lewis affirms the truism that “these things are spent to try us,” quickly clarifying that he realizes God wasn’t “trying an experiment on my faith or love to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn’t.” Finally, Lewis admits a shattering but liberating personal truth: He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize that fact was to knock it down.²³

Lewis is the master of metaphors. In *A Grief Observed*, he provides his understanding or explanation of how God takes our human suffering and translates that into a powerful redemptive purpose or use. Lewis uses bridge players to make his point:

Bridge-players tell me that there must be some money on the game “or else people won’t take it seriously.” It’s like that. Your bid - for God or no God, for a good God or the Cosmic Sadist, for eternal life or nonentity - will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high until you find that you are playing not for counters or for sixpence but for every penny you have in the world. Nothing less will shake a man - or at any rate a man like me - out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth. Only under torture does he discover it himself.²⁴

American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 crashed in the twin towers on September 11, 2001. It was a day that will be etched in the history of America until the end of time. If Franklin Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor was his “Day of Infamy,” then 9/11 was surely President George W. Bush’s day of equal if not greater tragedy and loss as well. The Twin Towers attacks, American Airlines Flight 77 that crashed into the Pentagon, and United Flight 93, which crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, snatched the lives of 2,996, injured over six thousand others, and caused at least ten billion in infrastructure and property damage.

On that day, the emotional psychic of America was shaken but not destroyed. There were at least two groups of people that emerged through the destruction, death, and thick smoke that day. Many were confirmed or converted to atheism; the **faith** predicated upon the absence of a Creator. Their mantra was set in the question, “How could a just, holy and loving God allow such human loss and tragedy?” Lewis, speaking of those embedded in this first group, says, “A creature revolting against a creator is revolting against the source of his own powers-including even his power to revolt...it is like the scent of a flower trying to destroy the flower.”²⁵ On that day when the towers fell, thousands around the world were like the bridge players Lewis describes. They held hands in which all of their lives were invested and when their world came crashing down, many sought their Creator to find meaning and purpose out of chaos.

The question for the ages and for which many books have been written; how can a person who suffers such unimaginable loss also lose his belief in God? Another who has gone through the same experience somehow rises like the mythical Phoenix bird to find a higher purpose and meaning in his relationship with God. Could the answer partly be, he understands God’s love is never to be defined by the evil of men? When God created us with free will, the reality is, at some time in life, we will all suffer the evil exercise of that

freedom. Furthermore, that will be true for the just and the unjust alike. Our daughter's accident and eventual death was not the result of evil within, but rather from external evidence of the evil that came from a person driving drunk living a reckless, irresponsible life. The same can be said for so many who died on 9/11.

I have visited Hitler's death camps in Europe. There is no way to describe what is unimaginable. As you walk through those camps, they have been sanitized, but if you use a bit of imagination, you can smell the stench from the ovens of burning flesh, the last place on earth where millions last breath would be taken, or the last sound of their voices heard. Few survived what histories remember as the Nazi Holocaust. It is not difficult to understand why camp victims and families of victims concluded there is no God—and even if such a God exists, they will live out their lives as atheists. Yet, what may be even more surprising, rising out of humanities unspeakable confines other survivors took their places with kindness living out their lives in adoration of the very God the atheists denied.

Can you explain what some have called a mystery? I admit it is difficult, but when I have looked into the worn faces of some Holocaust survivors, I have seen a connection between the Creator and His creation. They seem to have humility, a forgiving spirit, a grace seldom seen. They are the ones who have an abiding faith in God. While there are few left today, I am comforted with the thought they have lived through the worst of times to be received by God their Creator.

These creatures created by God were treated like rats by men who also were created by God; men who willfully chose the side of evil and darkness rather than light. Kupelian observes when speaking of the victim's qualities;

What words can describe this mysterious quality? Humility, blessedness, grace? It is actually beyond words, perhaps some unexplainable connection between our soul and God, some backchannel that enables us to keep attuned to a proper perspective regardless of difficult circumstances.

That unique quality - C.S. Lewis had it - is the secret ingredient that makes the good things that happen to us truly good, and the bad stuff also "good" in the sense that they have a redemptive value because God uses them to perfect us. In the same way, for people who live from the energy and motivation of pride, which is connected to the invisible realm of evil. The bad things that happen remain bad (non-redemptive), but even the good things (success, wealth, fame) are not ultimately good, either, because they just build pride, in ever-increasing conflict with God.²⁶

So many of these faceless wonders of humanity seemed to possess the ability to live above the worst of men and focus on the best from God. Does that sound like words from one mentally insane?

The Apostle Paul Speaks Truth

The apostle Paul helps us understand it from within the context of a relationship with God. The great preaching apostle was in Rome, not in the way he had expected. He was there as a prisoner to be placed on trial. The cynics may have looked upon Paul's arrest with skepticism, but not his guards. Most, if not all, were unbelievers, yet they knew there was something different about this prisoner. They realized that Paul was no criminal. They appeared to understand the real issue was the Gospel itself, and Paul's freedom to preach about Jesus Christ. Soon Paul would go on trial before Caesar. He would be declared guilty for crimes he had not committed. A guilty verdict would mean his execution, an execution that would soon be his fate.

Like no other man, Paul spoke while living but speaks even more so through his New Testament letters now that he is present with His Lord. Paul, like so many of us, might have cried out with the question, *God where are you when I need you?* But that is not his question. His focus was on God rather than his circumstances. In Romans 1:17, he ends that verse by proclaiming, *"The just shall live by faith."* It is a prelude to what follows. I discovered Gordon Fee's translation of verses 18-20 enlightening and compelling:

For I know that through your prayers and God's supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this shall turn out (as with Job) to mean vindication for me, which will also be in keeping with my earnest expectation and hope, namely, that in no way will I be brought to shame, but rather than with all openness/boldness - as always so now - Christ will be magnified in my body, whether I am released or executed.²⁷

Keeping a proper attitude and expressing an unexplainable faith is a quality possessed by C.S. Lewis, the apostle Paul, survivors of the Holocaust, and many from 9/11. Their humility, suffering, and grace can become what Lewis called God's "grand enterprise." Lewis is such a master at turning the glass to help us see that such an enterprise produces a glass filled with both discovery and adventure. This concept may be challenging to comprehend if we confuse the outer and inner journeys of life. Many of us live in the outer realm, and often that is the opposite of a life that is fulfilling and exciting. It may even end in death, as is the case with so many. How is it possible to live life so long without some sense of an inner awareness of God, and how do we find such serenity and peace?

Kupelian answers our question when he speaks of such an adventure:

I'm referring to the inner adventure we're meant to experience, whereby through progressive realization and repentance, we are inwardly transformed in our Creator's image, and for his purpose. The beauty of such a life is subtle and private – no one else will know about it – but it's surely more magical than anything in *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Lord of the Rings* or the Harry Potter books or any other fantasy from the mind of man. Because we are living characters, set in a story not from the mind of man, but from the mind of God. And that story is full of wonder.²⁸

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” This is often attributed to Albert Einstein. “Gilbert Fowler White may have inadvertently invented this Einstein quote based on his understanding of Einstein's conversation with David Reichenstein.”²⁹

However, back to the quote. For our purpose, its authorship is irrelevant. Christians and non-Christians will see something different here. Christians are comfortable with the concept and reality of miracles and make the point that wonders surround us. The non-Christian would be hesitant to go down that road if at all.

If a Christian suggested that air travel is a miracle, an atheist would reply, “Not so fast. It might appear to be a miracle to our forefathers who traveled by foot or in ox carts, but not a miracle. The marvel of today's air travel is merely the result of scientific technology refined over time. There is nothing miraculous about it; it is simply man discovering the science that has made flying possible.”

The Christian is quick to respond by stating that miracles surround us. For Christians, the issue is not a question about the reality of miracles but to recognize a miracle and what it is. My purpose is not to list every claimed miracle and provide evidence for why they are considered to be miraculous. Admittedly some are credible with evidence, and some are not. Some alleged miracles are merely an event for which we do not know how the incident happened, and so we call it a miracle. There are miraculous events that no empirical data or scientific method can explain. Let me turn to an illustration from nature.

In the Bible, we have a prophetic reference to the Four Horsemen. These riders are described with different colors, each bringing God's judgment on the earth. The first rider on the white horse is none other than the Antichrist, arriving on the world scene to be recognized as the world dictator. He will masquerade as a ruler of peace but will prove to be the opposite (Revelation 6:2). The second rider on the flaming red horse removed any remnants of peace from the earth. He carried a *machaira* a great assassin's sword. He then encouraged

people to kill one another (Revelation 6:4). The third rider enters on a black horse holding a pair of scales in his hands. The scales are to measure the amount that could be purchased with one denarius, a day's wages. One quart of wheat would cost one denarius, and three quarts of barley would cost the same, enough for one day. The result, massive starvation will plague the earth (Revelation 6:5-6).

As the world is devastated by the first three riders, John, the writer of the Apocalypse, says, "Wait, there is more." The pale horse rider was there to put a wrap on anything missed by the first three horsemen. The name of the rider on the pale horse is death. Hades follows right behind this rider. Death is given the power over a fourth of the earth, and what does he do? He kills with the sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:7-8).

These four horsemen are tools used by God to bring judgment against the world that has rejected his offer of love, forgiveness, redemption, and salvation. It was never the will of God to destroy any of His creation because He is holy, He is unable to allow sin to abide in His presence, and so He is forced to annihilate the last remnants of sin and rebellion. His acts in the final days of time will not be unlike the days of Noah when the flood destroyed all except for Noah and his family, who remained faithful and obedient.

Now all of this about judgment, eschatology (teachings of last things) are Christian fairy tales to those who pride themselves as atheists. As you have been able to see, I have read Sam Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation*. He is one member of another group referred to by Christians and others as "The Four Horsemen of Atheism." This stable is generally recognize as Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris. They are all very bright and articulate and express well the tenants of their faith, atheism. These horsemen present some challenges and accusations that Christians need to hear. They are more than competent in calling out the abuses within the Christian faith. Yet, they have never put to the test the reality of a just and loving God.

They do not have the tools to offer a critical examination of the Christian faith itself. When the scriptures speak of God's Spirit bearing witness with a Christian's spirit or mind (this is utterly foreign to these riders, such a thought is denied and rejected as another Christian softball without merit or credibility.

Meaningful dialogue between atheists and Christians is awkward at best. Our world view begins with the sovereign God of creation. The atheist starts by saying, "I do not believe in such a being." So, when Christians who put their faith in God begin to quote passages from God's blueprint for living, the atheist sees that as all smoke and mirrors, the illusions of simple-minded people. While it makes no sense to atheists, Christians base their faith on a personal relationship with God, confidence in His Word rather than the hypothesis of the atheist who denies that God exists. Christians embrace the teachings of the apostle Paul, and primarily when he writes in his letter to the Romans, he declares, "*The Spirit (God) himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*" (Romans 8:16).

The battle between atheists and Christians is more than an intellectual exercise; it is a conflict for the

very soul of man. If Christians are right and atheists are wrong, and we both one day stand before the presence of God, I prefer my faith over his clever arguments that God does not exist. Standing there before God, can you imagine the deafening silence of my friend who has wasted his life convincing himself and others that the very presence of God never existed. If I am right in my faith, I have lost nothing and gained all, while he has lost everything. If he is right and I am wrong, then we would not even be standing in the celestial abode of his nonexistent God.

These four and others of like mind remind me of the proverbial mouse dancing around the wine keg. There is a tiny leak in the cask. The mouse takes a couple of good licks of the drippings and soon finds himself completely drunk. For a moment, he has lost the ability to think clearly as an enlightened atheist. He reverts to some primordial question, "Could it be there is a God?" Mr. Mouse has heard Christians speak of this God who he believes is filled with rage and judgment, he says to himself, *I must find this Cat, and destroy him so that others of my kind will never be devoured by such intellectual Tomfoolery.* Of course, Mr. Mouse does not really believe in this Cat, but just in case he wants to remove any doubts in the minds of his friends and help them realize such a menace never really existed except in the brains of simple-minded mice. In his drunken stupor he circles the keg many times, just in case, but never finds the Cat which only supports his original theory, Cat never existed in the first place. What Mr. Mouse did not know, Cat all the time, while watching Mr. Mouse, was sitting on the top edge of the keg watching this pathetic creature below who could never understand the words of Christ, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

The Four Horsemen of Revelation will bring starvation, suffering, and death to billions in the final days. These Four Horsemen of Atheism, maybe as devastating in corrupting the minds of unnumbered millions because of their gospel.

The Face of God in His Creation

I turn the page now to make a couple of statements to respond to those who have faith that God does not exist. What I say will be foolishness to those who embrace atheism, they cannot see the face of God in the face of a baby, in the beauty of a flower, in the love of a mother, in the unlimited variety of God's creation.

Have you walked beneath the towering forest of the California Redwoods? They outlive any human who ever lived. Their average life span is five hundred to seven hundred years, with some living to 3,200 years, and many growing to the height of 360 feet. Hyperion, the tallest of them all is more than 380 feet, which is nearly six stories taller than the Statue of Liberty. Because of their bark and tannic acid, they are resistant to disease and insect infestation, and their thick, fibrous bark makes it nearly impossible for fire to destroy them. There are three members of the redwood family; Coast redwoods of the California coastal fog belt that grow to a height of

380 feet and have a diameter up to twenty-eight feet. The giant sequoias of the Sierra Nevada grow between five thousand to eight thousand feet elevation, live up to 3,200 years, and can grow up to a height of 311 feet, and have diameters up to forty feet. The Dawn Redwoods of central China are the only Redwood forest outside the United States.³⁰

When you stand at the foot of such a magnificent display of nature, you don't think miracle, but the thought catches one that no man could create the first tree out of nothing. Yet a seed falls to the ground, and in hundreds of years, it becomes one of the great spectacles of the universe. Some would say a miracle of God's creation; others would not. It seems to do just fine without the help of man. Man doesn't water it, prune it, or even cultivate it. The best we can do is seek to conserve it. If such a tree or forest happened in a moment, we would speak of miracles.³¹ Every news organization in the world would descend on the growth site. News coverage of every venue would be writing and splashing news videos across the globe, describing the paranormal phenomenon of this miracle tree. The evening news would become twenty-four-hour news coverage. But since the slow-motion miracle that extends many times beyond the lifetime of any human being throughout hundreds of years, we become unaware and oblivious to the miracle happening, moment by moment, day by day, year by year, decade by decade, century by century.

Look at another piece of the tapestry in answering our question about God. Here many atheists will check out of our conversation, but for many, we move on. We move on from the trees to the possible miracles of character rising within us. Sometimes it takes years and sometimes a lifetime before we understand the ways of God. Sometimes our miraculous transformation is brought about by adversity and loss—but only if we endure it with patience, dignity, and faith.³²

Human suffering is not what we wake up for in the morning. We don't say, I'm going to take sixteen ounces of suffering in order to make my day. Yet, suffering can come in many forms. It came on that morning when I was nearly killed in the process of my car being stolen. Yet, my moment of pain was minor compared to the young lady who was eventually arrested, convicted, and incarcerated. For Donna, that was a sufferable moment, and God used it to change the life of a young single mother who was caught in the grips of death, sinking from a life on the streets, drugs, and utter hopelessness. Even though she continues to serve time for her crimes. Those who knew her before and after faith in the living Christ, declare God has worked nothing short of a miracle in her life. The whole tragic experience meant for evil became a transformational moment when God, through His miraculous grace, made something beautiful from brokenness and strife. Gloria and Bill Gaither express so beautifully God's miracle in song.

Something Beautiful

Something beautiful, something good
 All my confusion He understood
 All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife
 But he made something beautiful of my life.

If there ever were dreams
 That were lofty and noble,
 They were my dreams at the start;
 And the hopes for life's best
 Were the hopes that I harbored
 Down deep in my heart;
 But my dreams turned to ashes,
 My castles all crumbled,
 My fortune turned to loss,
 So, I wrapped it all
 In the Rags of my life
 And laid it at the cross!

Something beautiful, something good
 All my confusion He understood
 All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife
 But he made something beautiful of my life.

We may recoil at the thought we can learn through obedience and suffering. We want to hang on to our question, *Where Was God When I Needed Him?* In a sense, that question enables us to hold God responsible for our suffering. Learning, obedience, patience, dignity, and faith are all gifts lost as we seek to find the answer to our question. Even though it is natural for us to flee suffering, Jesus Christ is a classic model when unavoidable suffering looks us in the face. Obedience for Christ was a “learned” experience according to Scripture; “*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*” (Hebrews 5:8-9).

C.S. Lewis would never return to the flower garden created by God and engage with his atheist friends of years past. He has left those conversations about the existence or lack of God's existence in such a beautiful place that can be explained only by a Creator. The tiny redwood seed dies to itself and, through the miracle of time, becomes a massive tree that stands above any forest in the world. In some ways, we are like the tree; we die to self to be resurrected from the hands of God. Resurrection means something has died, something has suffered, neither can be avoided and like those majestic trees of the Giant Sequoias, something new replaces the old as we grasp the magic in our eternal walk with God.

Notes

1. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019. www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening.
2. Sam Harris. *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Kindle ed., (A Knoff ebook, 2006, New York, Loc 36 of 98).
3. Ibid. Loc 49-50 of 98.
4. Ibid. Loc 50 of 98.
5. Lewis, C. S. *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.173.
6. Hughes, Roland. "California Wildfires: The Day Paradise Burned Down." *BBC News*, 16 Nov. 2018. Accessed January 12, 2019. www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46198498. This piece was produced from original interviews conducted by BBC correspondents, affiliates, and UGC staff and incorporated social media posts by survivors.
7. Adapted from David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019. www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening.
8. Lewis, C.S. "Chapter Two" *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks,1961, 41).
9. Ibid., 40.
10. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019. <https://www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening>.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Lewis, C.S. "Introduction." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., HarperCollins ebooks, 1961) 14. Douglas H. Gresham in Introduction.
14. Lewis, C.S. "Chapter One." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks, 1961), 17.
15. Ibid.
16. Lewis, C.S. "Chapter Two." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks, 1961), 41
17. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WMD: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019.<https://www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening>.
18. Adapted from Lewis, C.S. "Chapter One." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks, 1961), 41.
19. Lewis, C. S. *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), p. 61.
20. Lewis, C. S. *Joyful Christian*, (Simon and Schuster, 1996), p.7.
21. Adapted from Lewis, C.S. "Chapter One." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks, 1961), pp.41-43.
22. Ibid. 44.
23. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening>.
24. Lewis, C.S. "Chapter Three." *A Grief Observed*. Kindle ed., (HarperCollins ebooks, 1961). pp 48-49.
25. Lewis, C. S., *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003). p. 104.

26. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine. December 25, 2018. Accessed January 14, 2019, https://www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening_
27. Gordon E. Fee. *Philippians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers Grove, IL, USA: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 67.
28. Ibid.
29. Robert E. Hinshaw. *Living With Nature's Extremes: The Life of Gilbert Fowler White* (2006), 62. In this book, Hinshaw quotes Gilbert Fowler White's *Journal of France and Germany 1942-1944* as the source of the quote. www.quora.com/What-quotes-are-most-commonly-misattributed-to-Albert-Einstein.
30. Adapted from Humboldt California's Redwood Coast, Redwood www.visitredwoods.com/listing/redwood-facts/186/.
31. David Kupelian. "The Atheist's Awakening." WND: Whistleblower Digital Magazine, Dec. 25, 2018). Accessed Jan.16, 2019. <https://www.wnd.com/2018/12/the-atheists-awakening>.