



A Faith and Culture Devotional

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A Christian Theory of Everything

By **Sam Storms**, PhD, former professor of theology, Wheaton College. Adapted from his book *One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God*. Storms left Wheaton to found Enjoying God Ministries in Kansas City, Missouri; www.enjoyinggodministries.com.

Physicists and cosmologists are ever in search of what they call “a theory of everything,” an all-encompassing theory that can account for everything from the subatomic world of particle physics to the galactic expanse of supernovas and black holes.

Brian Greene, professor of physics and mathematics at Columbia University, argues that for the first time in the history of physics we have a framework with that capacity. Scientists call it *string theory*. The idea is that everything in the universe at its most microscopic level consists of combinations of vibrating strings. According to Greene, “string theory provides a single explanatory framework capable of encompassing all forces and all matter.”

The problem isn’t that Greene and others have gone too far in making this claim. The problem is they haven’t gone nearly far enough! Greene is clearly drawn to this theory because strings make sense of every fundamental feature of physical reality. But what makes sense of strings? Why do *they* exist? If they explain “all forces and all matter,” *what explains them*? What accounts for the shape they take and the functions they serve?

The answer is that everything exists for the glory of God. Everything — from quarks to quasars, from butterflies to brain cells — was created and is sustained so that you and I might delight in the display of divine glory. Only humans are fashioned in the image of God. We are the only species that establishes schools and conducts research and preserves archives of information. We alone have been granted remarkable capacities to reason and reflect, deduce and conclude. We alone can glorify God by *rejoicing* in the beauty of his creative handiwork and *relishing* the splendor of his self-revelation in the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

We’re touching here on the most profound question anyone could ever ask: Why is there something rather than nothing? The simple answer is that God chose to create. This was certainly not from the anguish born of need, as if

creation might supply God what he lacked. God didn't take inventory and suddenly realize there was a shortage that only you and I could fill. So what prompted God to act?

The source of God's creative energy was the joy of infinite and eternal abundance! *God chose to create from the endless and self-replenishing overflow of delight in himself.*

We must begin with the recognition that God delights infinitely in his own eternal beauty. When God the Father gazes at the Son and sees a perfect reflection of his own holiness, he is immeasurably happy. The Father rejoices in the beauty of the Son and Spirit, and the Son revels in the beauty of the Spirit and Father, and the Spirit delights in that of the Father and Son. God is his own fan club! God created us out of this eternal community, this overflow of mutual love, delight, and admiration, so that we might joyfully share in it, to God's eternal glory.

God doesn't simply think about himself or talk to himself. He *enjoys* himself! He celebrates with infinite and eternal intensity the beauty of who he is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we've been created to join the party!

To relish and rejoice in the beauty of God alone accounts for why we exist. Enjoying God is the soul's sole satisfaction, with which no rival pleasure can hope to compete. Glorifying God by enjoying him forever. It's the Christian Theory of Everything.

For reflection or discussion

- Does this view challenge your assumptions about life and the universe? If so, how?
- What are the greatest barriers to your enjoyment of God?
- Perhaps you're not enjoying God as much as you would like. What step could you take to begin to change that (Psalms 84:2; 16:11)?
- How might today be different if you lived as though you were created to enjoy God as your greatest treasure?

Abraham, Father of Three Faiths

Note: You'll discover a fairly serendipitous arrangement of topics in each subject area with the exception of history. God is telling a larger story and, as meaning-seeking creatures, we are always looking to discover what he is up to. So history unfolds chronologically, tracing his drama of redemption through the ages.

By Kelly Monroe Kullberg and David Kullberg

Though their antecedents are rarely explored in the evening news, present tensions in the Middle East are rooted in a family story that is more than four thousand years old. This drama begins with Abraham, a model of faith and a father to Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Muslims learn about Abraham through the Qur'an (Koran) of Islam. Jews and Christians learn about Abraham through what the Jews call the Torah and Christians call the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis.¹

The first chapters of Genesis shed light on some basic questions — our origins and purpose, why we fight, why we die, and how we live meaningfully. We find glory, beauty, love, deception, shame, blame, punishment, sibling rivalry, murder, expulsion — all in the first *four* chapters of Genesis. Before long, God grieved the sin among his people and re-created the world through a flood, a baptism, if you will. As author Madeleine L'Engle suggested, “The flood was God’s tears.”² But God found one righteous family, Noah’s, through which he rebirthed a freshly storied world.

From Genesis 10 on, the focus of Scripture is on covenant relationships. In the context of cultural confusion in ancient Babel, where men were building a great city for personal glory, the Lord not only separated people through unique languages, he also planted the seed of a remarkable people who were asked to reject idolatry and live in love. Like us, these were fallible and three-dimensional people, making Genesis a vivid, candid, R-rated page-turner.

Through it all God was faithful, and over many generations the seed grew into a life-giving tree. Any person could be grafted into that tree, not by fortune of lineage or wealth but simply by faith in God and in his promised Messiah. God begins with a remarkable father and mother, a patriarch and

matriarch. Abram and Sarai (whom God renamed Abraham and Sarah) were citizens of Ur, a great center of ancient Mesopotamia. And the Lord said to Abraham, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:1 – 2).

Muslims honor Abraham as the first monotheist, worshiper of the one true God they call Allah. Muslims trace their heritage through Abraham and Hagar, the servant who was Sarah’s childbearing surrogate, and their son, Ishmael (Abraham’s firstborn child). Muslims prize the promise God made to Hagar when she was abandoned in the wilderness: “Lift the boy [Ishmael] up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation” (Genesis 21:18). Indeed, Ishmael was blessed with life and progeny, for he had twelve sons, and his numbers quickly grew.

Jews and Christians trace their lineage through the son God promised Sarah and Abraham — Isaac, the miraculously conceived son of the free woman, through whom God would foreshadow and fulfill his covenant promises. Isaac’s son Jacob then bore twelve sons, whose descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel.

The account of Abraham and Sarah continues the theme of God’s covenant (beginning with Noah) to one particular family. The Lord said to Abraham,

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

GENESIS 12:3

I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. . . . I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

GENESIS 17:1, 6

The branches of this family tree would be known by their fruit. They would, as a way of life, turn curses into blessings. Joseph, son of Jacob, grandson of Isaac, converted the curse of exile into blessing: not only did Joseph save his own brothers who’d sold him into slavery but he saved non-Jews as well, including all of Egypt, from famine. The children of God would, and will, become a blessing to the nations. “Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah” (Matthew 1:17).

This shared respect for Abraham, with differing ideas of the past, present, and future, makes the conflicts among Jews/Christians and Muslims — from

the medieval crusades to today’s Middle Eastern clashes — surprising on one hand and understandable on the other. But embedded within the tension there is also hope — that any cousin who so chooses will be present at the family reunion.

For reflection and discussion

- How do you see this ancient story unfolding in our time?
- At the age of one hundred years, “Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him” (Genesis 21:3). Why do you think Abraham chose a name that means, in Hebrew, “he laughs”? Sarah also laughed. Why?

The theme of Abrahamic covenant is so essential that the apostle Paul revisited it two millennia later. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells Christ-followers that they are not children of slavery but of freedom. In Galatians 3:26–28 and Galatians 5:1, he writes:

You are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. . . . It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

- What is it to be a child of slavery? What is it to be a child of freedom and the Spirit? How might people in freedom *bless* those in slavery?
- What resources have you been given to share as a blessing to another?

Belief, Knowledge, and Truth

By Lael Arrington

Truman Burbank was born and raised on a TV set, the star of his own show. He is completely unaware of reality. He believes he lives on a coastal island. He believes that his wife and friends, all paid actors, really love him. Christoff, the producer in the film, says, “While the world he inhabits is . . . counterfeit, there’s nothing fake about Truman himself.” Truman is real. That’s what makes him “so good to watch.”³

The 1998 film *The Truman Show* illustrates the often confusing distinctions between belief and knowledge, truth and untruth. What constitutes knowledge? Most philosophers would agree that knowledge is justified true belief. It is belief, something we take to be true by at least 51 percent, that agrees with the evidence. At the beginning of the movie, Truman *believes* that his life on Seahaven is real, not a scripted TV show. But his belief does not qualify as *knowledge* because it is not justified by the evidence of which the viewing audience is clearly aware.

What is truth? Truth is telling it like it really is. Truth is not a thing, but rather a *relationship* between our words or ideas and *reality*. Whether Truman can see it or not, whether he believes it or not, whether his words agree with it or not, his life is entertainment for the masses. Truman’s beliefs do not correspond to reality. They are false.

We may think of belief as an all-or-nothing proposition. But belief is more of a continuum. In the course of the movie, we see Truman’s confidence in what he believes to be true steadily diminish. Lighting canisters fall out of the “sky.” The man he knew as “Dad” shows up one day, trying to warn him before he is hustled onto a bus. He catches on to his wife doing product placement commercials. You can almost see the needle on the continuum between belief and unbelief falling, falling past the 50/50 point. He suspects he is being deceived and controlled. When he escapes on a sailboat, the producer creates a ferocious storm. Truman shouts to the sky, “Is that the best you can do? You’re going to have to kill me!” He survives and sails on until the ship reaches the edge of the watery set and, quite literally, pokes a hole in the bubble of deceit that has been his life.

In the same way, we can live in deceit and illusion until one day we hit the wall of reality. When our false beliefs collide with reality, we then have a choice: Will we live according to knowledge — true belief justified by good evidence? Or will we settle for illusion? The producer promises Truman an illusion of safety. Truman chooses the truth that sets him free. The cheers from the audience gradually subside as they stare at their blank screens, then grope around for their TV guides and some other virtual adventure to soothe and distract. But that is another story.

To seek knowledge, we weigh all our beliefs against the best evidence — God’s revelation, both general and special. In order to live and speak with truth, we do so “in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). That is, we live and speak words that correspond to reality as God created it and as The One Who Sees Everything sees it. Frederica Mathewes-Green has said, “Reality is God’s home address.”⁴ To be a person of truth is to live before God in the reality he created rather than to settle for illusions, even those of our own making.

For reflection and discussion

As I look back over seasons of pain and escape into distraction and day-dreams, I think of how I described my journey in my book *Godsight*:

“I think how the emptiness I often felt came from being in a place, either in my head or on a screen, where I was not present to God. My life did not correspond to his reality.

“I sensed the lack of integrity deep in my bones. The reality of my own life, full of potential moments of love and service to God and others was ticking by. My escapes were killing me softly — one evening of entertainment, one daydream at a time.

“What is most real is eternal life. Jesus said, ‘Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ (John 17:3). If we truly want to love and seek God, we find him when our words and lives correspond to reality, even painful reality. Not in untruth, fantasy or distraction.”⁵

- Have you experienced hitting the wall of reality? Did you discover that any of your beliefs were untrue?
- What counts for true knowledge in today’s world? What limitations might you find with today’s approach to knowledge?

- When Truman discovered his life was an illusion, the director begged him to stay in the safety of Seahaven. He didn't stay. Why do you think it is so hard to live in an illusion? Why not enjoy the safety?
- Are there places in your life or heart that do not correspond to reality as God sees it? What reality have you constructed?
- What greater reality might God be inviting you into?
- What might you want to say to God about being a person of truth?