

# 1

## Introduction

*“It was as simple as that. I started thinking about it and asking more questions, and within an hour, I was an atheist.”*

—Ricky Gervais

*“There are no foolproof methods of persuasion, and those that come closest are coercive and dangerous because they override the will rather than convince the mind.”*

—Os Guinness

Have you ever doubted what you believe?

Have you ever read a book or watched something on TV that caused you to wonder if what you believe about Christianity is actually true?

Have you ever been confronted with alternative beliefs and worldviews at work, school or campus and not known how to engage?

Have you ever experienced a tragedy that caused you to doubt whether God was good or if he even existed?

Has anyone challenged you with tough questions about your faith that left you reeling?

Do you have someone close to you that is wrestling with tough questions about God's nature and existence?

I bet that almost all of you can identify with being in one or more of these situations. Somehow, life has the mysterious ability to challenge what we believe to be true, often highlighting flaws and weaknesses in our belief systems. It is one thing to have a set of beliefs, it is quite another to have those views rigorously tested in life and in dialogue. When that happens: Will they hold up? Are they objectively true? Are they even helpful?

I had a very clear purpose when I titled this book *The Reason for Everything*, which I know sounds pretty arrogant, but I believe that whether you enjoy theology, or philosophy, or simply find yourself musing about the deeper things of life, we all begin coming to certain conclusions or reasons as to *why* things, people and events exist. For example, maybe you've found yourself saying, "Well, everything happens for a reason." Whether or not you tie religious implications into that statement, you are attempting to explain that, somehow, there must be rationale behind everything that happens.

As we build up these rationales, conclusions and reasons, we are either knowingly or unknowingly building an internal

framework of beliefs that help us experience and interpret the world around us. This is what is known as a worldview. However, we cannot separate what we *believe* to be true from reality. If anything, our system of beliefs needs to correspond consistently with reality.

Whenever anything happens, good or bad, whether you are aware of it or not, this framework or worldview helps you to make sense of it all. You may not always stop and philosophise about existential hedonism next time you're eating an ice-cream, but think about the last time you saw something horrible on the news. Maybe it was an act of violence in your neighbourhood; maybe it was a natural disaster on the other side of the world or a horrible act of racism. Think honestly about the kinds of thoughts you had at that exact moment:

“Those people had it coming.” *Or*

“No-one should ever be treated like that.” *Or*

“This proves there is definitely no God.” *Or*

“This happened for a reason.” *Or*

“I wonder what that person did to deserve that?”

Whether you've stopped to think about it or not, your internal monologue in moments like these can tell you a lot about your worldview. If, for example, you thought, “Those

people had it coming,” it indicates that you believe that people should get what they deserve, and that there is some being or force that is responsible for ensuring that people get what they deserve.

Another way our worldviews come to the surface is when they bump up against differing or conflicting worldviews. Maybe you’ve already realized how your worldview differs radically from someone else’s during a discussion around an important moral issue like abortion, the existence of God or the real meaning, purpose and value of life.

My wife and I recently spent some time travelling around the United States and we would inevitably engage in friendly conversation with whoever we happened to meet along the way. It usually didn’t take long before someone asked, “You’ve got a cool accent, where are you from?” (Interestingly, some of the guesses included Australia, England and even Canada.) Usually, the follow-up question was, “And what do you guys do?” We never quite knew how people were going to react when I responded, “I’m the pastor of a church in Johannesburg, South Africa, that my wife and I started several years ago.”

Worldviews tended to rise to the surface pretty quickly as we experienced everything from deep interest, to cool indifference, to flat out discomfort. One couple got so

uncomfortable that they mumbled something about South Africa being a dangerous place and quickly walked away, leaving their beverages behind. Depending on what different people believed about Christians, the church, God or South Africa, determined how they responded to who we are and what we do. Same data, different thoughts, different feelings, different responses.

At this early stage of our conversation, a worldview may sound like a weird, vague, inaccessible thought-aura, but do you know that you can actually begin to figure out what your worldview is? This is going to involve deep-diving what you truly believe about the big issues of life and reality. Which leads me back to the title of this book, because any worldview needs to be exactly that, not a reason for *some* things but a Reason for *Everything*.

We've established that a worldview helps you understand and interpret all of reality. As you begin your journey of understanding your worldview, doesn't it make sense to check whether or not your worldview gives you an accurate interpretation of reality?

This reminds me of a time when my family and I were on holiday with my cousins at a particularly beautiful part of the southern coast of South Africa. I was about ten years old and due to this stretch of coastline being a nature reserve, the snorkelling was incredible.

One day my two cousins and I were goofing around and jumping off the rocks when we decided to swim out around a rocky point to the bay next to the one where we were swimming. Two out of the three of us had no snorkelling gear so we had no way of seeing clearly under the water. My older cousin did and, as we were swimming out, he suddenly began panicking and made a beeline for the closest rocks. Now, you need to know that this particular family of cousins were famous for pranks and hoaxes, so I didn't expect an honest answer when I asked with some scepticism, "David, what's going on?"

While still drawing deep breaths (or pretending to, so we thought), he frantically responded, "There are sharks underneath you, get out now!"

The thing is, up to that point, we had been swimming down, picking up sand off the bottom and resurfacing only to throw it at each other's faces. Neither of us were convinced about the sharks, but we decided to play along and slowly made our way to the rocks and climbed out.

I remember feeling the blood drain out from my face as we looked down and saw the silhouettes of about a dozen sharks swimming where we had just been playing. After we recovered from our initial shock, we ran back to the beach, fetched our snorkelling gear and managed to perch ourselves on a rock with just our feet and faces in the water,

just in case one of them decided we were lunch. I remember being in anxious awe as we could now clearly, and safely, watch this small school of sharks swimming around.

You see, prior to putting on the snorkelling masks, we had an unclear picture of what was going on which caused us to completely misinterpret reality. In this case, seeing clearly made a massive difference. It wasn't enough to simply have a difference of opinion as to whether there were sharks tickling our feet or not.

In the same way, different worldviews can help reality become clearer, or they can obscure our view and experience of reality, causing us to make wrong and sometimes dangerous interpretations of the visible (and invisible) world around us.

As we evaluate what we believe, we need to be able to ask of every worldview: How *powerfully* does this worldview explain reality? Philosophers call this 'explanatory power'. We generally don't like it when we feel like we're being given weak answers by politicians or doctors or pastors or bank managers in times of challenge and difficulty. We expect answers that will powerfully explain our situations. The same is true when it comes to our worldviews. Simplistic answers will not stand up to the complexity of our experience of life.

A second question we need to ask is: How *much* of reality does this worldview explain? This is what is known as ‘explanatory scope’. Imagine the legs of a table. It is not enough to have one or two legs, even if they are made out of titanium. In the same way, it is not enough to have a worldview that can only explain one or two elements of reality, even if it manages to do so convincingly. In the case of the table, the more legs there are, the more stable it becomes. Similarly, the worldview that is better able to account for all things should be the worldview that we align our thinking and behaviours with.

In *The Reason for Everything* I want to make the argument that the Christian worldview is the framework that most powerfully explains the whole of reality. Said another way, it is the worldview that best fits the requirements of explanatory power and explanatory scope. If you are a Christian, as you navigate these questions and the supporting evidence, I hope that you develop a deeper confidence and faith in your own beliefs. My greater hope is that you feel equipped to have better conversations with your neighbours, friends, colleagues and family as they battle with these very same questions.

Finally, maybe you’re reading this book and you’re not a Christian. Maybe you grew up in a church and you felt that the answers you were getting did not stand up to the

weightiness of reality. Maybe you experienced deep pain and loss and concluded that a good God cannot exist. Maybe you've become convinced that the answers provided by alternative worldviews like atheistic naturalism better explains reality. Perhaps you've even been put off Christianity by the hypocrisy or fanaticism of other Christians or Christian leaders. If that is you, I want to invite you to patiently and courageously consider whether or not the cumulative evidence points towards the Christian worldview as The Reason for Everything.