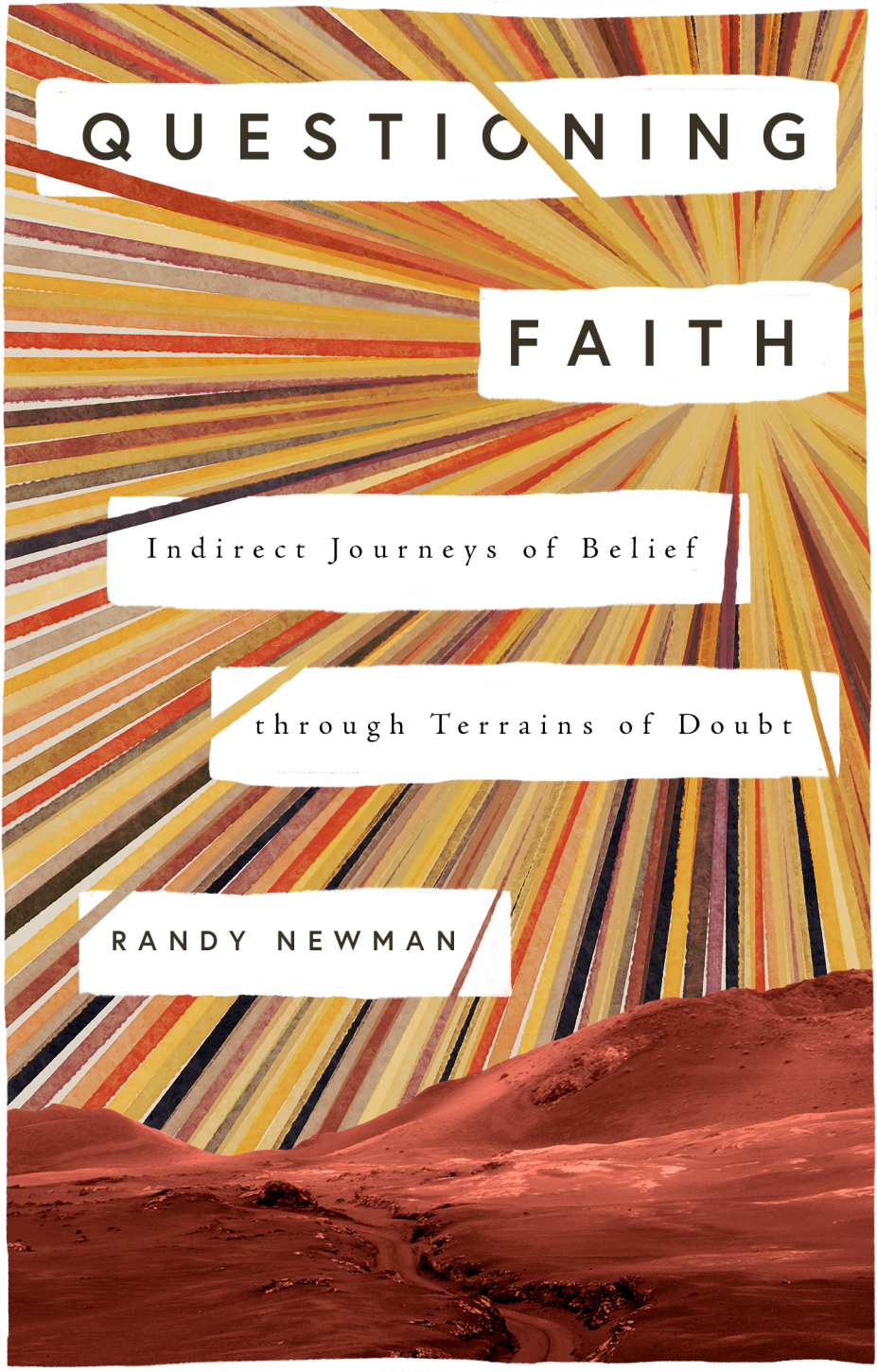
QUESTIONING
FAITH
Indirect Journeys of Belief
through Terrains of Doubt
RANDY NEWMAN

"I found this book riveting, not least because Randy Newman has given so much of his life to really hearing people's stories. He has listened to their questions and is deeply engaged with their convictions and emotions. The result is a book that profoundly and humanely engages with what is going on beneath the surface in our culture."

Rico Tice, Cofounder, Christianity Explored; author, *Capturing God*; *Finding More*; and *The Ultimate Christmas Wishlist*

"Atheists like me, and other religious skeptics, are sometimes quick to dismiss popular apologies of traditional Christian faith. But this can be unfair, and in the case of Randy Newman's new book, it would be. The book is well argued, well informed, and thought-provoking. It is also, I might add, not Pollyannaish. Newman readily acknowledges the weaknesses and uncertainties of some of his arguments but insists that the other side faces even greater problems. As to whether he successfully makes his case—well, the issues here are complicated. Newman does make a strong case that the virtues of faith cannot easily be dismissed. But the virtue that I think matters most is epistemic virtue. Does faith produce knowledge, or at least rational belief, more rational than its denial? Newman offers some interesting and thought-provoking arguments that it does, but I don't think those arguments ultimately succeed. Still, the book is worthy of serious consideration, and I very much recommend it, including to religious skeptics like me."

Emmett L. Holman, Associate Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, George Mason University

"A book like this will be enormously helpful, and Randy Newman is the right person to write it. *Questioning Faith* addresses many of the questions people ask as they consider Christ, and it does so with insight, compassion, sensitivity, and humor. I expect I'll be giving away copies often."

Mike McKinley, Pastor, Sterling Park Baptist Church, Sterling, Virginia; author, *Friendship with God*

"Cynicism and unbelief are easy, particularly when they are trending. But then what *do* you believe? Do you have any roots or anchor, or do you drift with the ever-changing sentiments of society? Do you have any solid, satisfying hope, any spark of joy in your soul deep enough to withstand life's successive waves of disappointment and pain? Randy Newman is a reliable voice to engage people who are questioning faith and looking for lasting answers. He himself has journeyed through terrains of doubt. He knows how to help the fainthearted. He has mercy on those who raise tough questions. He has patience to follow the twists and turns of your own story—and to invite you to explore ultimate questions about its destination."

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Rich Wounds*

"In a time of instant outrage, Randy Newman delves into the most divisive of topics with refreshingly earnest, patient, and contemplative attention. This book offers an examination of the self whose usefulness extends far beyond the scope of religious discourse alone. This exploration of faith and the human experience is a great model for how to learn about yourself and the world through discourse."

Samuel Nealy, Assistant State Director, Virginia, American Atheists

"I remember searching for inner peace. Even more, I was hoping to find some way of making sense of my life, the modern world, and my Jewish upbringing. Somehow, I knew in the depth of my soul that part of the solution to these deeper questions would involve my Creator. I was raised to believe in God, but in fact I was far from faith. It is too bad *Questioning Faith* was not around at that time, as it would have sped up the discovery of an intimate and personal relationship with God that I have enjoyed now for many years. If you are searching, Randy Newman's new volume will help you find what you are looking for—and more!"

Mitch Glaser, President, Chosen People Ministries

Questioning Faith

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Questioning Faith

Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt

Randy Newman

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In memory of Greg Boros,
dearly loved,
greatly missed

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Introduction

Through Many Twists and Turns

YEARS AGO, MY SON DAVID AND I scaled the challenging Angels Landing Hike in Zion National Park. It's only a little over two miles from the parking lot to its magnificent zenith. But the climb conquers over sixteen hundred feet in elevation gain, earning it the distinction of "challenging" in every hiking guidebook you can find. (Truth in advertising: we did not attempt the final half mile, where hikers need to cling to chains to prevent falling to their death—as fourteen people have done since the year 2000!)

At one point, while gasping for air, I asked some climbers passing us on their descent, "How much farther?" They smiled politely and offered encouragements like "You can do it" and "It's well worth it." I doubted their reports. A bit later, we arrived at the intimidating start of twenty-one switchbacks known as Walter's Wiggles. Staring straight up at these zigzag paths of the final ascent of 250 feet, I really hoped it would be "well worth it."

Switchbacks are ingenious inventions to make steep mountain climbs possible. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online defines

a switchback as "a zigzag road, trail, or section of railroad tracks for climbing a steep hill." Had it not been for Walter's Wiggles, I would have needed six more hours, several oxygen tanks, numerous climbing ropes, or—forgetting all that—a helicopter! Though not easy, switchbacks make the task less difficult. Sometimes the indirect route, through many twists and turns, is the best.

When we arrived at our goal, Scout Lookout, we gazed down at the tiny parking lot where we began our hike. Were those people or ants down there? Then we began our descent—far less rigorous but no less glorious. In fact, the views we could now take in, no longer gasping for breath, made the entire experience one of the highlights of my life. Surprisingly, we noted several other series of switchbacks we had failed to recognize on our way up. These were more gradual than Walter's Wiggles, thus more subtle. Sometimes, when you look back over a past event, you see things you hadn't noticed before.

Indirect Journeys of Faith

This book is about spiritual journeys, not mountain climbing. But, after listening to hundreds of people's stories of faith, throughout more than forty years of serving as a kind of spiritual guide, I've come to see that spiritual journeys resemble a series of twists and turns more than a direct ascent from one belief to another. My own story certainly fits that description. (I'll share more about my wanderings later.)

Some of the stories I've heard move from unbelief to faith. Others move in a variety of other directions. Quite a few travel through terrains of doubt. I find them all fascinating and illu-

minating. I think they have a lot to say to a lot of people. They can point searchers in helpful directions. They can encourage weary travelers to keep going. Each chapter that follows shares several people's stories and tries to identify common themes that tie them together.

Maybe you've picked up this book because you once had faith but haven't for a while. Or perhaps you've never had faith and now wonder if it's worth considering. Or maybe you've been part of a faith tradition and find some of it unsatisfying. Then again, maybe you just love good stories. Some narratives might resonate with your own experience or reignite your search or remind you of what was good before you disconnected from spiritual pursuits. Stories of faith can challenge assumptions that stymie the process of searching for answers. Whatever your motivations, my hope is that the stories I recount in this book can help you as you step into the next chapters of your own story. But before someone's story can be helpful, we must be willing to listen.

Will You Listen?

My father fought in World War II, serving in the Coast Guard on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. He actually served on three ships—German U-boats sank the first two. I remember hearing my father recount dozens of times when his first ship was torpedoed and sinking. He and his crewmates clung to life vests or flotsam or whatever they could find for thirty-six hours, waiting for rescue ships to arrive. Astonishingly, the horrors of that situation never hit me while my father told the story. *There goes Dad again*, I thought, *telling that story of floating in the Mediterranean*. I cringe now as I admit my callous heart.

What must it have been like to grasp desperately to a floating hunk of wood or something equally flimsy, wondering how long you could hang on before drowning? While my father and his crewmen waited those thirty-six hours, it wasn't as if they had booked a rescue squad. No one assured them: "Just hang on guys. We only have a few more hours before they get here!" They had no idea if anyone anywhere knew their ship had been sunk or that survivors were floating and waiting for rescue. Did some of them fail to hang on and drown? That seems almost certain. Did my father watch comrades slip into the sea, never to resurface? It's hard not to assume so. How many didn't survive? Most? How many persevered and climbed aboard a rescue ship—waterlogged, starving, and barely able to move?

It's possible to hear a story but not really hear it. In fact, repetition may not wake you to the reality of the story. The repeated telling might increase the dullness of hearing. Some of my deafness to my father's stories came from the culture of anti-war sentiment in which I was raised. Whether we realize it or not, what saturates the culture around us influences what we accept inside us. The same can happen with stories of faith. We can hear them so often, we grow deaf to them. Or our current climate may overshadow our desire to consider different perspectives.

Consider these confusing cultural factors that can keep us from listening well when someone shares his or her spiritual journey:

1. Many religious traditions are declining or merely maintaining their numbers today, but one category is skyrocketing—the "nones." Those who say they have no particular religious belief have grown in the US from 5 percent to at least 30

percent in the last forty years.[1] Are you in this category? If you were asked in an online survey about your religious beliefs, which label would you select from the multitude of choices in a drop-down menu?

2. The category labeled *evangelical*, a camp that once defined itself with specific Christian beliefs, now has people signing on from Jewish, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and agnostic perspectives. They define *evangelical* primarily as a political category.[2] What do the words *evangelical* or *Christian* mean anymore? Do they mean anything at all?
3. An atmosphere of doubt and cynicism pervades our society. You may have noticed that many people "get their news" through comedians who feel no need for accuracy or fairness, so long as their material gets laughs. We could debate whether the comedians are a forming influence on our society or merely reflect a culture that is already cynical, but there's no doubt that irony and skepticism shape many aspects of peoples' lives, including their spirituality. As journalist Adam Gopnik observed, "Modern people are drawn to faith while practicing doubt, as our ancestors confessed their doubts while practicing faith."[3] Does this generally skeptical attitude describe you?

Somewhat surprisingly, given the skepticism and confusion of our culture, a lot of people still pursue spiritual answers. Recent

1 Ryan Burge, "Why 'Evangelical' Is Becoming Another Word for 'Republican,'" *New York Times*, October 26, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/.

2 Burge, "Why 'Evangelical.'"

3 Adam Gopnik, introduction to *The Good Book: Writers Reflect on Favorite Bible Passages*, ed. Andrew Blauner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), x.

research found that a high percentage (79 percent) of people who do not affiliate with any religion are very willing to discuss the topic with a friend—if that friend takes his or her faith seriously.[4] My hope is that you're one of them, that you'll listen to the stories that follow with open ears and an open mind. Like my climb up Walter's Wiggles, it may just be "well worth it."

4 Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 58.

1

The Question of Motives

What If We Aren't Blank Slates?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, the famed atheist, converted Alex.[1] In fact, he converted him twice. From the time he was just fourteen, Alex devoured Hitchens's scorching atheist rants in *Vanity Fair* and on an ever-expanding list of skeptical websites. Raised in a rural, anti-intellectual community, Alex grew in rage to match the wrath of his hero, the author of the bestselling *God Is Not Great.*

I knew none of this when I first met Alex. He was twenty-five at the time and worked for a Christian organization in the same office building where I worked. When I asked him how he got connected to a Christian organization, he told me about his two conversions. I was intrigued. He began with Hitchens. Two journeys—Alex's and Christopher's—shape this chapter

1 Not his real name.

and help us consider the question of motives. They show us that we all bring more to the table than mere intellectual curiosity.

Alex loved the ways Hitchens mixed brilliant articulation with piercing wit. Alex felt proud in rejecting his parents' Christian faith, his so-called Christian school, and, as he described them, other "knuckle-dragging Baptists" he knew. Watching hours of YouTube videos of Hitchens skewering his opponents armed him with both substance and style for ridiculing hypocritical Christians.

Hitchens wasn't just an atheist. He called himself an "anti-theist" and bombarded religious people with relentless attacks, bolstering his claim that "religion poisons everything."[2] Older atheists like Bertrand Russell engaged in philosophical arguments that were out of reach for most nonacademics. They seemed tame compared with Hitchens and other so-called new atheists. Hitchens held back nothing. He even wrote a tirade against Mother Teresa. For Hitchens, nothing was beyond the pale. And Alex ate it all up with glee.

As Alex recounted his journey from presumed faith to rejected faith to newfound faith, I kept wondering if there was more to the story than mere changes in intellectual beliefs. In addition to rational arguments, I wondered what other dynamics contributed to this journey. I'd heard enough personal stories to know they include more than just logic and reason. We're whole persons, not just brains on a stick. And we approach the topic of faith with a menagerie of motives, not just intellectual curiosity.

2 Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

Below the surface, Hitchens's message resonated with Alex for more than just intellectual reasons. They both saw and experienced disgusting hypocrisy in the Christianity they were immersed in from childhood. For Hitchens, it came through a nominally Christian school in the UK. For Alex, it permeated a nominally Christian school in the southern US. Both settings failed to live up to the Christian mottos on their walls and the sermons preached in their chapels. Both schools' administrations merely winked at sexual abuse, leading both young men—Hitchens and Alex—to declare themselves atheists before the age of sixteen, with no shame or felt need to justify the newfound label.

"Hitchens gave me reasons to believe what I believed," Alex told me, quickening his speech. "More than that, he provided a replacement for the Christianity of my upbringing, an all-encompassing worldview without holes. Atheism also gave me approval to live the way I wanted." The connection dug deeper than just ideology. "Hitchens was full of rage and so was I," Alex continued. "It was as if he dismissed Christianity for the same reasons I had. Both of us rejected the so-called Christian faith we saw at our schools and said: 'If that's Christianity, I don't want it. And *no one* should want it.' "

At that point in our conversation, Alex paused and shook his head in what looked like unbelief. I asked him what was going on inside him and he struggled to find words. "I'm kinda amazed," he began. "So many twists and turns. I really was a very different person. I almost don't recognize that guy back there." I'd heard these expressions of contrasting personhoods before. Even so, I found Alex's story unique. Our journeys often manifest commonalities

with others'. Yet, somehow, every story is unique. There is only one trail to the top of Angels Landing in Zion National Park. But everyone's experience up that path is distinct.

Christopher Hitchens's journey to anti-faith involves more ingredients than just intellectual disagreement and condemnation of hypocrisy. In his memoir *Hitch 22*, he gives ample space to sexual experimentation outside the bounds of traditional morality with no accompanying guilt. Finding those experiences pleasurable, he gained fuel to mock the intolerance of anyone who condemned *any* sexual expressions simply because of religious prejudices. Hitchens went further. "I always take it for granted that sexual moralizing by public figures is a sign of hypocrisy or worse, and most usually a desire to perform the very act that is most being condemned."[3]

The Story behind the Stories

One other trauma may have contributed to Hitchens's atheism, although the link may not seem immediately apparent. In his memoir, he detailed a fond affection for his mother while disdaining his cold, "morose" father. His painful recounting of the horrific suicide of his beloved mother may point to an iceberg of which his public debates against Christians was only the tip. In a radio interview upon the release of *Hitch 22*, Hitchens summed up that episode and its effect on him this way:

> My father was, as you say, a lifelong Navy man, so I had this rather morose Tory in my background who was hit off bril-

3 Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch 22: A Memoir* (New York: Twelve, 2010), 78.

liantly, by contrast, by my mother, who I always called Yvonne. And I call her Yvonne in my chapter, because it's a stylish name and because she was a stylish girl.

And her story's a tragic one and it ended tragically, in that having waited I think rather too long, because divorce and separation were extremely frowned upon in that set in those days. She did take up with another man after my brother and I had grown up, and it didn't quite work out. In fact, it didn't work out at all. And they made a decision to put an end to their lives and committed suicide together in Athens.

I think I had a chance to save her and failed to grasp it. She tried to call me from Athens and failed. Though I might have just missed the call by a few minutes, I don't know. But I've always been certain that if she'd heard my voice, she wouldn't have done it. So I've been trying to write my way out of that ever since.[4]

"Trying to write my way out of that ever since." Can you imagine the pain just below that surface? Hitchens was renowned for his capacity to consume alcohol. Is it possible that self-medication for emotional pain explains more than just a preference for the taste of Johnnie Walker Black?

Unexpected and Unwanted Turns

At some point, Alex's delight in Hitchens took a surprising detour. Hitchens condemned large numbers of people who didn't agree with his political views (like his support of the Iraq

4 Christopher Hitchens, in "Christopher Hitchens' Unusual and Radical Life," interview by Scott Simon, NPR, June 5, 2010, https://www.npr.org/.

War), always claiming a kind of moral high ground. But Alex wondered how he could do so. To word it the way Dostoyevsky did in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "If there is no immortality of the soul, then there is no virtue, and therefore everything is permitted." And "if there's no infinite God, then there's no virtue either"[5] and, by extension, no objective basis to condemn anything. Alex wondered what foundation Hitchens used for his moral pontifications. Suddenly his hero seemed a little full of himself.

Alex wasn't the only one who observed this inconsistency. More and more public figures poked at what might have been a chink in Hitchens's armor, asking, "If there is no god, on what basis do you make moral judgements about right and wrong?" Hitchens dismissively and repeatedly responded:

> Morality is innate in human beings. . . . Religion didn't create morality or make moral judgments first. People found morality within themselves and religion followed. . . . The awareness of the difference between right and wrong is innate in human beings . . . and it can be observed . . . in societies where Christianity has never yet penetrated. . . . Religion gets its morality from humans. It's a feedback loop.[6]

But Hitchens's insistence that "morality is innate" didn't resolve things for Alex. He wrestled terribly for quite some time.

5 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 82, 632.

6 *Collision: Christopher Hitchens vs. Douglas Wilson*, directed by Darren Doane, produced by Crux Pictures/Gorilla Poet Productions (Level4 Studios, 2009), min. 20.

He wondered: *If morality is innate in people, why isn't it innate in all people? If Christopher Hitchens is right for condemning Saddam Hussein, why didn't that innate sense of right and wrong evolve in the many followers of Hussein?* When Hitchens supported the war in Iraq, for what he deemed moral reasons, why hadn't all his secular, liberal, fellow journalists agreed, based on their "innate" sense of right and wrong? Even more disturbing to Alex was the thought that perhaps Hitchens's morality flowed more consistently from a theistic worldview than from an atheist one.

This did more than create intellectual headaches for Alex as he began his freshman year in college. Hitchens's failure to consistently defend his view of ethics triggered panic attacks in Alex, along with sleeplessness and a sense that a foundation was crumbling. Not all spiritual journeys are pleasant—at least, not at every point along the way. But we should not quit climbing just because the terrain poses difficulties.

Social Signposts

Hitchens's arrogance and hypocrisy stood out starkly for Alex as he spent time with some Christians on his campus.

> They were nice to me even though they had no reason to be. I certainly wasn't nice to them! One of my favorite tactics was to insult Christians until they blasted back at me with unkind attacks. Then I'd smile and say, "I guess Jesus is really pleased with you right now." But the Christian guys I met in college didn't fall for that. It didn't work on them. They seemed calm—a dramatic contrast to what I'd seen growing up. These Christians also showed amazing respect for people with whom they

disagreed—a dramatic contrast to what Christopher Hitchens displayed almost all the time.

The complexity of spiritual journeys is due in part to the social environment around us. Like Alex, Hitchens found Christians to be nicer than expected. In an online article titled "Faith No More: What I've Learned from Debating Religious People around the World," he admitted, "The so-called Christian right is much less monolithic, and very much more polite and hospitable, than I would once have thought, or than most liberals believe."[7]

Almost against his better judgement, Alex agreed to discuss the Bible with a few Christians he had come to respect. They focused their investigation on the book of Romans in the New Testament. The first thing Alex noticed was the book's high estimation of nature. In the very first chapter, the argument begins with, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."[8] Alex loved the outdoors, walking through heavily wooded areas near his home and hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This is where he felt peace, a dramatic contrast to the angst and anger that surrounded him at his religious school. Reading Romans made him wonder if his experiences in the outdoors were closer to what God intended than the nonsense at the indoor religion of his church. This was both comforting and confusing.

7 Christopher Hitchens, "Faith No More: What I've Learned from Debating Religious People around the World," October 26, 2009, *Slate*, http://www.slate.com/.

8 Romans 1:20.

Then he came to more pointed teaching in Romans. "I loved the fact that the Bible promised punishment to sinful people. When I read 'on account of this, the wrath of God is coming,'[9] I said, 'Yeah! Those hypocrites at my school deserve to be nuked." The problem was, as Alex let down his guard, he had to admit he *also* might deserve punishment for his own nastiness.

> I wasn't too happy with the verse, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"[10] but I couldn't totally dismiss it. At the same time, I was struck by the statement that God was both "just and the justifier."[11] God demands payment for sin, but he also provides payment for sin. As I started accepting this idea, I found I was able to sleep—perhaps for the first time in years. And I was no longer angry. I couldn't quite explain it, but I couldn't deny it either.

Alex's and Hitchens's multifaceted stories point to an important observation on our indirect journey of questioning faith:

People approach faith with many motives, not just one.

As multifaceted persons, we don't address complex topics like God, belief, faith, and religion with impartial rationality. Our motives are many, not singular; mixed, not pure; complex, not simple; woven through many aspects of our personhood, not just through logical intellect. We must admit this if we're to make progress in

9 See Romans 1:18.
10 Romans 3:23.
11 Romans 3:26.

firming up important foundational issues of our lives, even if it surfaces things we'd rather not see.

Social psychologists and other researchers have asserted this from numerous angles. They make statements like "Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second"[12] and "Motivation is a forest full of twisting trees, unexplored rivers, threatening insects, weird plants, and colorful birds."[13] They use phrases like "predictably irrational"[14] and suggest that we have different ways of thinking, some of which are not all that logical.[15]

Somehow, many of us have not considered this as much as we should, particularly when it comes to faith. Thus, both believers and doubters oversimplify their bases for embracing or shunning spiritual considerations.

When writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley reflected on his beliefs, he acknowledged:

> I had motives for not wanting the world to have any meaning; consequently assumed that it had not; and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. . . . For myself . . . the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.[16]

12 Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), 91.

13 Dan Ariely, *Payoff: The Hidden Logic That Shapes Our Motivations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 3.

14 Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

15 See, for example, Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

16 Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1941), 272.

More succinctly and more recently, philosophy professor Thomas Nagel has written: "It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."[17]

To be fair, I must point out that mixed motives can push people toward religion as well as away from it. Edward Gibbon, the English historian, acknowledged that his conversion to Roman Catholicism years earlier was "provoked by theological arguments, but it was undoubtedly also an act of rebellion against his father." Leo Damrosch, professor of literature at Harvard, concluded that "a few years later [James] Boswell would do the same thing."[18]

Honest Introspection

The thread of anger ties Alex's and Christopher's journeys together. You felt it while reading their accounts, didn't you? I saw it on Alex's face as he sat across from me at a coffee shop remembering emotions as well as ideas. But his whole demeanor changed when he shared the next section of his path. His times with his new friends felt like a confluence of rivers—stimulating ideas from the book of Romans, deepening appreciation for the beauty of nature, laughter with friends instead of anger, and—best of all—dramatically better sleep. Somewhere amid all that, Alex became a Christian. I realize that last sentence needs a lot of clarification. We'll explore that further in the chapters ahead.

17 Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 130.

18 Leo Damrosch, *The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 325n6; and Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life*, ed. Georges A. Bonnard (London: Nelson, 1966), 56–61.

For now, it's worth considering one more segment of Alex's journey. Several years later, when he learned of Hitchens's diagnosis of stage 4 cancer, he wrote his former hero a letter, encouraging him to reconsider faith. "Mostly, I was writing him to thank him. Ironically, Hitchens may have been the most influential person in my Christian conversion. But I never heard back from him."

After one public debate, a camera caught Hitchens in an unguarded moment when he recalled a conversation with Richard Dawkins. The fellow atheist had posed the idea of wiping out all religion through debate and reason. Hitchens shared:

> At one point, if I could convert everyone in the world, not convert but convince, to be a non-believer and I'd really done brilliantly, and there's only one left. One more, and then it'd be done. There'd be no more religion in the world. No more deism, theism. I wouldn't do it.
>
> And Dawkins said, "What do you mean you wouldn't do it?" I said, "I don't quite know why I wouldn't do it." And it's not just because there'd be nothing left to argue with, and no one left to argue with. It's not just that. Though it would be that. Somehow if I could drive it out of the world, I wouldn't. And the incredulity with which he [Dawkins] looked at me, stays with me still, I've got to say.[19]

As we continue to question faith in the chapters ahead, ask yourself if you're approaching faith with a mix of motives. Are

19 *Collision: Christopher Hitchens vs. Douglas Wilson*, 1:24:15.

you willing to raise the question of whether you're even aware of all your motivations? You may not realize all that's going on inside you as you encounter claims or arguments or clues about realms outside your everyday life. You might not see clearly the path you're on until you reach a higher vantage point and turn around. But it may still be worth the journey—even if the terrain seems a bit daunting.