



GOSPEL
SOCIETY
& CULTURE



Conversations with Friends

Understanding worldview to better understand our neighbours

Bible Study Guide

Conversations with friends: worldview

A framework for loving people toward the kingdom

These studies are designed for bible study groups or one-to-one discipleship relationships. They are appropriate for Christians.

The aim of these studies is to provide you and your group with a framework for better understanding — and loving — your neighbours. This framework is evangelistic in nature, but it is not a method for explaining the gospel. There are plenty of good gospel tracts designed for that purpose. Instead, the purpose of these studies are to lower some natural barriers we often have to evangelism of any kind. These studies aim to enrich our neighbourly relationships and embolden us to share the gospel more winsomely and fruitfully.

Why worldview matters...

A 'worldview' is the framework one uses to navigate life and answer the essential questions about who we are and why we are here. In our world, diversity is highly valued and yet actually discussing our differences is taboo. These studies equip you to discuss differences as a means of beginning gospel-directed conversations. Discussing worldview is a means of generating a real interest in others. This interest might, by God's grace, draw our neighbours toward the truth and freedom of the Christian worldview.

Where we're going

These studies use the framework of worldviews to ask good questions about the differences between us and our friends. As such, these studies do not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of any particular worldview, but rather simply to heighten our awareness of where differences are likely to be found and how to mine them for good conversation.

- Study 1 - Worldview: everyone has one
- Study 2 - Humility and God's desires
- Study 3 - Asking better questions
- Study 4 - Keeping your footing while exploring differences

Study 1

Worldview: everyone has one

1. Opening activities

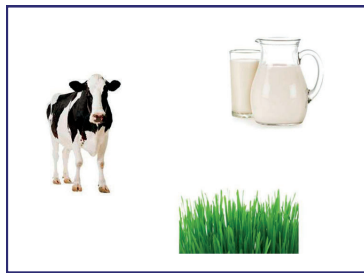
a. Exercise: Point of view

- i. Two people from your group sit in chairs back-to-back.
- ii. Get each to list 10-20 things they see.
- iii. Note similarities and differences in the two worlds you see.
 - a. Are there exits, chairs, windows?
 - b. What is normal in your world?
- iv. If that is all you know about the world, where could disagreements arise?

Are there relationships you can think of or situations you've experienced where this kind of difference was a factor in (mis)understanding what was happening?

b. Exercise: Culture

- i. From the image below, select the pair of objects that you feel most belong together.¹
- ii. There is no correct answer!



- c. Share around the group the reasons you chose the option you did.
- d. What kinds of broader views might be represented by the different options?
 - cow-milk - more individualist, functional, how do I get my milk?
 - cow-grass - more collective, where things belong by their nature
 - grass-milk - probably a mark of insanity or trying to buck the trend
- e. Are there relationships you can think of or situations you've experienced where this kind of difference was a factor in (mis)understanding what was happening?

2. Defining Worldview

In *The Universe Next Door*, James Sire defines a worldview as follows.

"A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions, that may be true, partially true or false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic constitution of **reality**, and that provides that foundation on which we live and move and have our being."²

- a. Discuss the definition to help everyone come to common understanding of what it means.

Worldviews develop non-rationally and are complex. They are formed consciously and unconsciously and often, if not always, are internally inconsistent.

b. Brainstorm some sources that might shape our worldviews. Consider both experiences, stories and presuppositions.

E.g.

Experience: nation, language, culture, ethnicity, family, geography, education, generation, local community, friends. Stories: aboriginal dreaming, biblical narrative, national / historical legends

Presuppositions: 'The material universe is all that exists', 'God is the loving ruler of the world'

3. Keeping it real!

These studies are designed to help you have more meaningful communication with friends, family, workmates, shopkeepers, and parents at the school gate — so let's name names.

a. Pair up with someone else in the group and spend two minutes writing down the names of three unbelievers with whom you would like to share the Gospel. Pray for each person on this list.

4. The Bible is God's objective 'worldview'

Our worldviews are built from our subjective experiences. As a result, every person's worldview will only be a partial and imperfect picture of the world. God's 'worldview' is perfect. He has a perfectly objective perspective on reality. He has made this perspective available to us in the Bible. While our human interpretations of the Bible are imperfect, the Bible remains the most reliable guide for understanding God's world and forming our worldview.

a. Fill in these rows in the below table: God, Creation, the past

The Bible Table

Below is a table which will lead your group through a series of worldview questions, as answered in key Bible passages. We will re-visit this table during each study, so we recommend ensuring each member of the group has access to a copy. You may either print multiple copies of the below page or create your own version to share digitally.

Using the table

Each study will assign particular worldview topics for you to focus on (eg. Creation, humanity, the future).

Read through the passages. You may divide the passages among your group or choose to go through each passage together. As you read the passages, fill in the table considering two questions:

a. What does the passage say about the topic?

b. How is this different to what our society says about the topic?

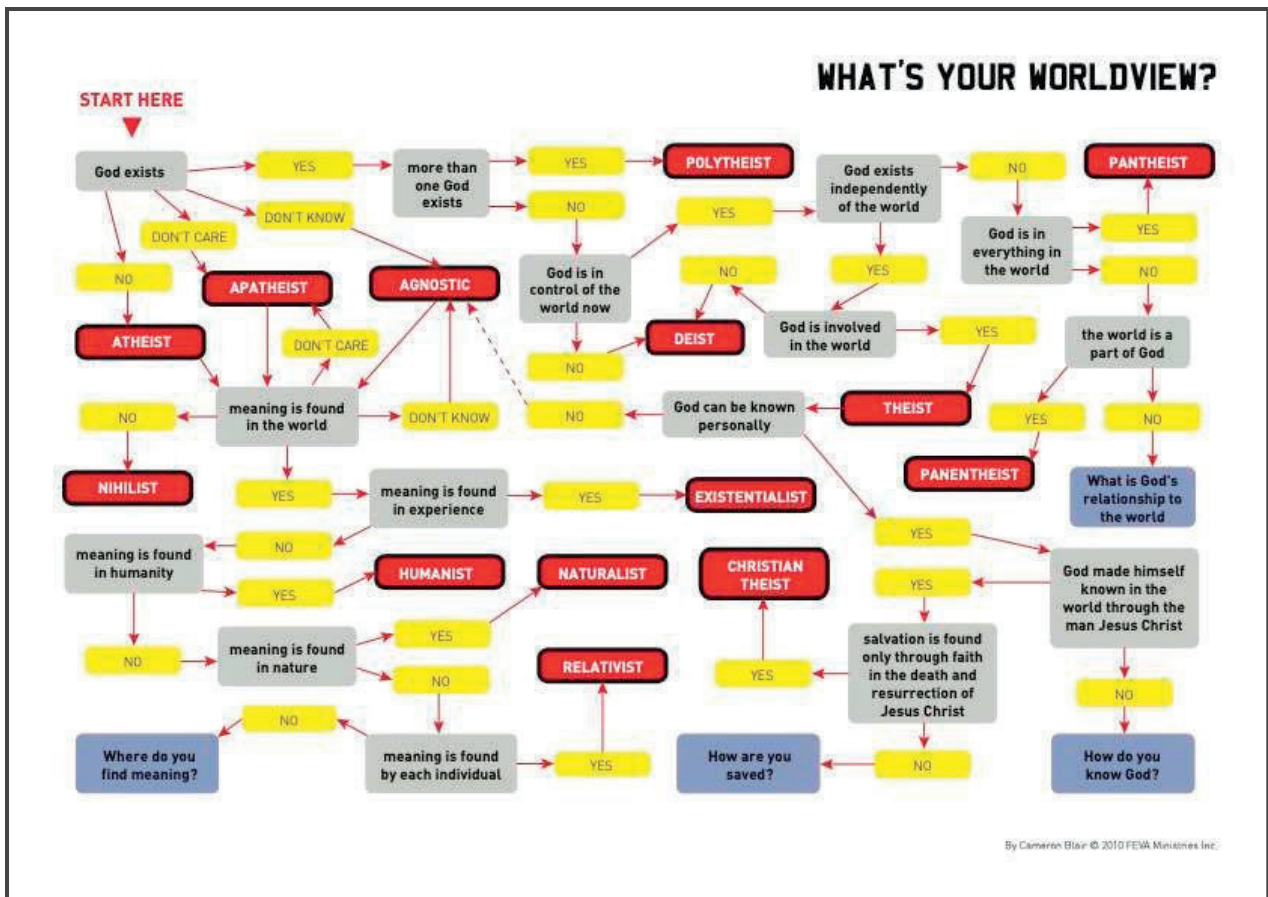
There are several blank rows in the table if you wish to add your own topics.

Topic/ Passage	Genesis 1-2	Rev. 21-22	Genesis 3	Revelation 20	John 1	Colossians 1
God						
Creation						
Humanity						
The past						
The future						
The present						

5. Concluding discussion

a. How does your worldview impact the way you interact with others of who share your worldview and those who don't?

b. Consider the below 'worldview flow chart'. What do you make of it? ³



5. Conversations for homework

If you get the opportunity this week, see if you can learn something new about the worldview of a non-Christian friend. Show genuine interest and be ready to share your own thoughts. Here are some questions to try:

- How do you determine right from wrong?
- Where is humanity going? What is our future?
- What happens to people after they die?

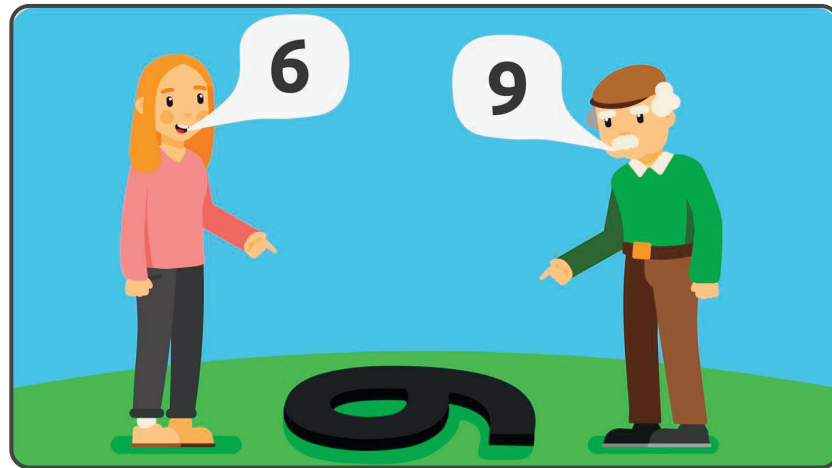
Study 2

Humility and God's desires

1. How we know

As discussed briefly in Study 1, worldviews — including the Christian worldview — are informed by both the objective and the subjective.

Consider the below image.



(Source: <https://www.braingymmer.com/en/blog/perception/>)

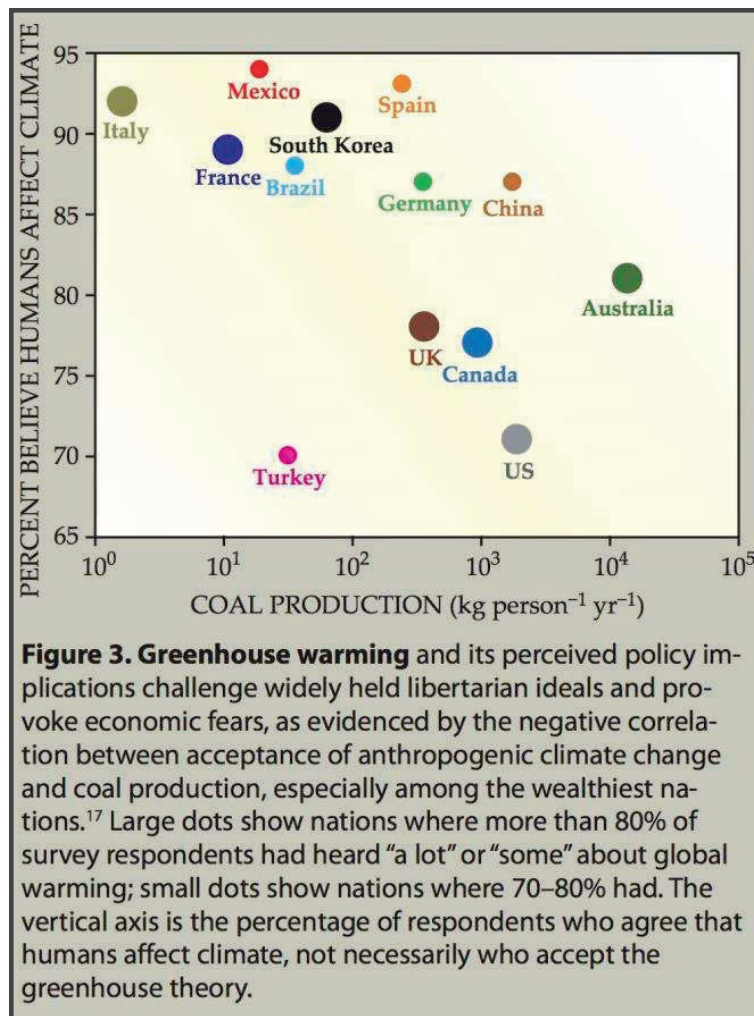
There are 3 important points illustrated by this graphic.

1. There really is a particular number on the ground. There is an objective world that exists without us. This is guaranteed by the fact that there is a God who created it.
2. Both people are 'correct' in their claims, according to their perspective. Any knowledge which is drawn from our subjective experience of the world is uncertain. We cannot remove our own limitations or know anything outside beyond our limited perspective. This is where worldview impacts belief because it is the lens through which we see everything else.
3. The conflict between these people is really a conflict of interpretation. Conflicts we experience between the Bible and our experience of the world are also conflicts of interpretation — rather than direct conflicts between the world and the bible.

Points 2 and 3 should highlight for us the need for humility in all our dealings. Not only is this the right stance to take, but our friends and conversation partners will probably appreciate it as well!

Here is another example of how perspective necessarily influences our worldview. The below graphic shows the relationship between tonnes of coal produced by a country and the prevalence of belief in that country that human beings affect the climate (anthropogenic climate change).⁴

- a. What does a graph like this suggest about cultural blind spots?
- b. Share examples of when you have seen this sort of difference at play in interactions or relationships?



All of this calls for humility and awareness. Here's a helpful conversational habit to try. When conversing with non-Christian neighbours about your actions or beliefs, explain that these stem from your Christian worldview - or better yet from the Bible! Slowly, this may help friends to realise that their beliefs come from a worldview too.

2. God's desires

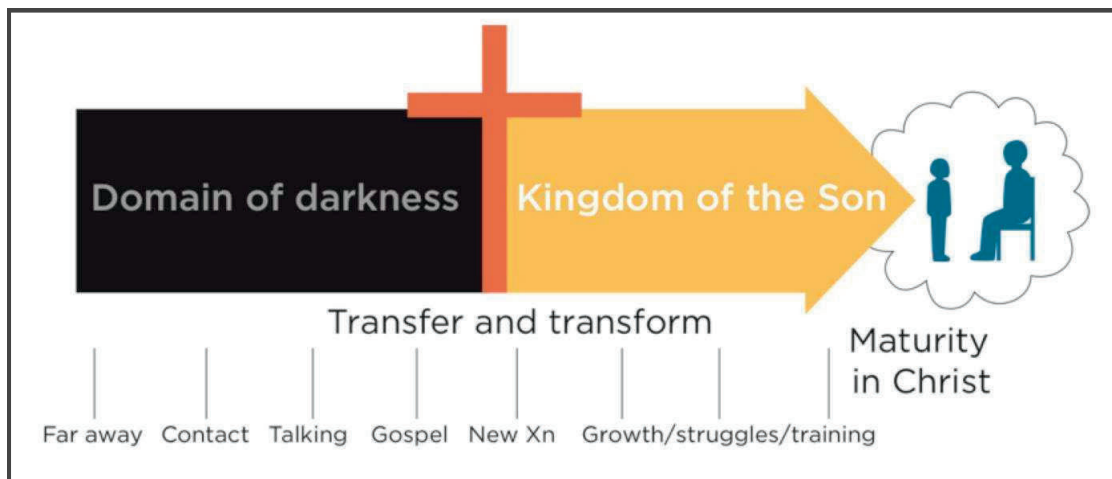
It's time to put some more work into our Bible table.

- Fill in these rows in your table: Humanity, The future, God's plans for you and the world
- What do you think God's plans and purposes are for your relationships? Discuss as a group.

For further reading, consider: Ephesians 1:1-14, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 24:44-47, Colossians 1:9-14, Colossians 1:28

3. Aim for something

We see from the Bible that God wants us to seek the good of others, particularly their salvation. Our friendships and relationships have an important purpose. Use the below diagram and list of milestones to consider your friendships and make prayerful goals.⁵



Milestones:

1. Personal conversation
 2. Knows I'm a Christian
 3. Social activity
 4. Worldview conversation
 5. Conversation about the Bible, Jesus or God
 6. Explained the Gospel
 7. Read the Bible together
 8. Activity exploring faith
 9. Becomes a Christian
 10. Established in a local church
- a. Considering this list of milestones, pray for a particular opportunity with a friend or acquaintance. You can pray in pairs or as a whole group.

Study 3 - Asking better questions

1. Sin, judgement and the gospel

Sin and judgement are inescapably pillars of the Christian faith. These are often some of the most uncomfortable elements of our faith to speak about. Yet, the reality is, these concepts are fundamental to our worldview. And — every worldview has something to say about these topics.

No worldview is 'neutral' about issues of good, evil, moral responsibility or justice.

a. Turn to your Bible table and fill in these rows:

- What is good?
- What is evil?
- How do we know what is good and evil?
- The present
- What happens after death?

2. Comparing worldviews

James Sire, in his book *The Universe Next Door*, offers a set of seven questions to trace differences between worldviews. We will use his questions to complete the below table. You may choose to complete this table or simply use it to structure a group discussion. This is an 'open book' task, so feel free to use Google, books or each other's experiences to help you find the answers.

Appendix A in this study is a brief comparison of common worldviews.

Here is a link to a completed version of the below table, using the answers from James Sire's book: <https://cristinao.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/sire-cristinao.pdf>.

Feel free to give your group access to this resource to help them fill in their own table. You might agree or disagree with Sire's answers.

Worldview Questions	Christian worldview	Theism	Deism	Naturalism	Nihilism	Atheistic Existentialism	Eastern Pantheistic Monism	New Age philosophy	Postmodernism
1 What is prime reality – the really real?									
2 What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?									
3 What is a human being?									
4 What happens to a person at death?									
5 Why is it possible to know anything at all?									
6 How do we know what is right and wrong?									
7 What is the meaning of human history?									

3. Focusing on sin and judgement

a. Discussion questions:

1. Based on the comparative table you've just completed, reflect on how your non-Christian friends and neighbours might think about concepts of sin and judgement. How would their stance differ from a Christian worldview?
2. What is it about their worldview which leads them to think about sin and judgement differently to you?
3. Do you have any commonalities regarding these issues (Eg. Do you both think that good and evil are objective? Do you agree that justice matters?).

4. Homework conversations

If the opportunity arises, talk to a non-Christian friend about their way of approaching issues of sin and judgement. Be aware that this vocabulary will be foreign to them. Instead of using words like 'sin' and 'judgement', try speaking about concepts of justice, right and wrong, and consequences. World affairs and the news often present opportunities for these conversations. Similarly, sharing stories of moral decision making and justice from your own life might spark helpful conversations. Be curious to better understand how your friends think about these fundamental worldview concepts.

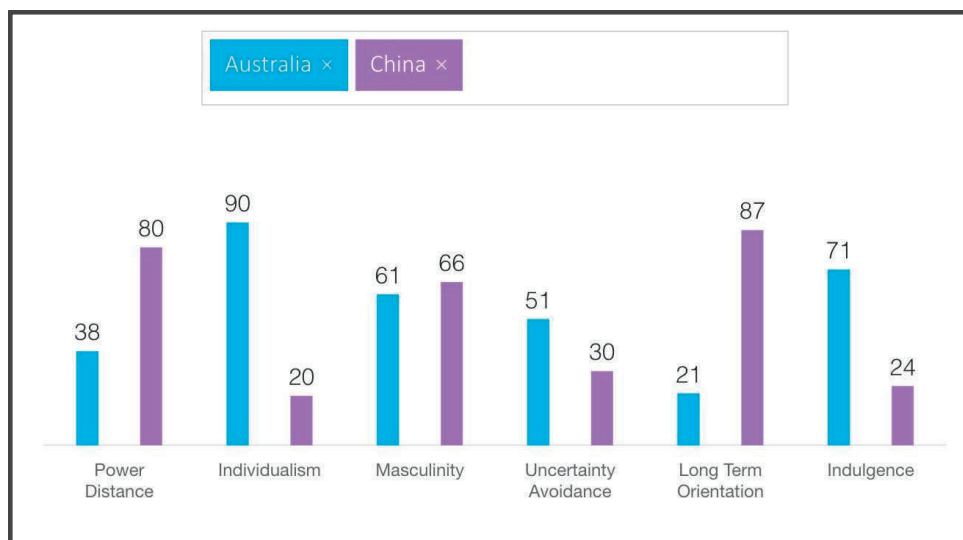
Study 4 - Keeping your footing while exploring differences

1. Discerning our differences

So far, we've concentrated our comparisons between worldviews mostly on differences in more abstract beliefs about God, creation, and the nature of humanity. It may be, however, that most of the observable differences between people are seen in their habits and moral decision making. Before we wrap up these studies, let's take a look at two clear worldview impacts on how people decide what is right and what is wrong.

A) Culture

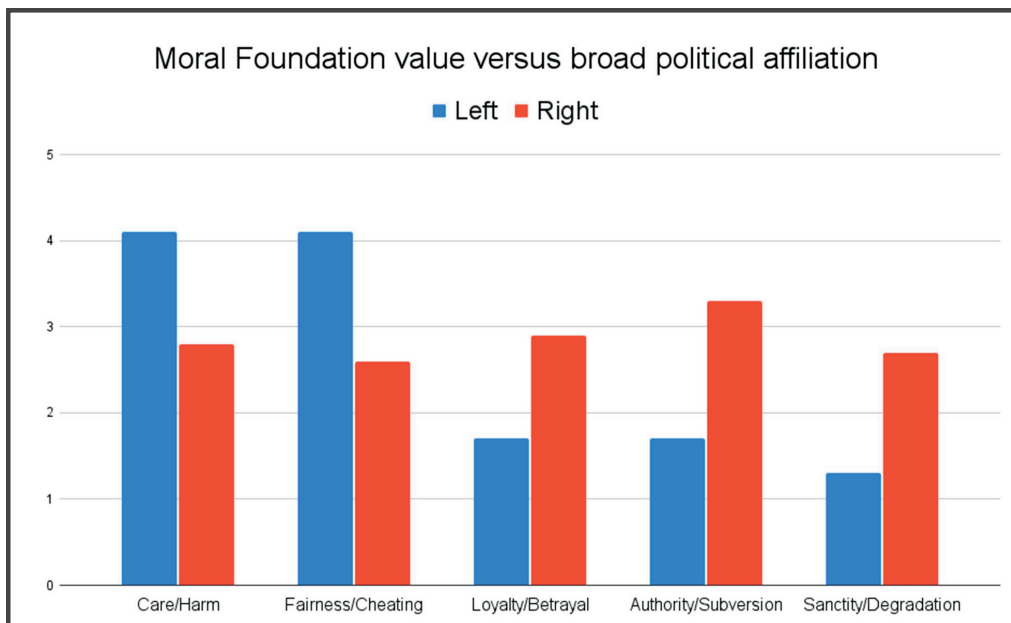
Here is a comparison between Australian and Chinese cultural values and beliefs. You can see some similarities, some small differences, and some 6 massive differences in the two cultures. ⁶



- What are the implications for misunderstanding and disagreement of some of the more contrasted results?
- Share stories of times that you have encountered these kind of cultural differences?

B) Political perspective

The chart below shows five distinct moral axes on which people operate, according to their political perspective.⁷ The strength of each bar is determined by the degree to which that axis plays a role in a person's moral decision making.



(Source: Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*).

- The obvious implication from this graph is that lefties and righties inhabit very different moral universes. What kinds of things do you notice about the differences?
- What are some implications for discussions between people on the left and people on the right of the political spectrum?
- Share stories of times where you have seen the impact of political differences?

C) Let's take it back to our friends.

Consider relationships where political or cultural differences may have an impact, especially in regards to your ability to share the gospel winsomely. Discuss with the group how you might navigate these differences.

2. Anchor yourself in the Bible

a. We hope you've seen the usefulness of discussing differences in worldview with our friends. This is fruitful conversational ground for the Gospel! However, these conversations can be challenging. That's why the Bible must be our anchor. With this tool in hand, we can dive courageously into conversation and genuine curiosity about others.

As we've already discussed, the Bible is the only publicly available, perfectly objective view of the world in which we live. While still imperfectly understood because of our own limitations, no other source of knowledge can make any such claim. The Bible is simply the proper authority on the nature of God, his world, his creatures, and the relationships between them.

There's another reason to keep your anchor in the Bible. That is: your worldview impacts your interpretation of evidence. Worldviews act to filter our evidence that cannot fit within someone's existing framework.

For example, Dawkins, as a believer in philosophical naturalism, always interprets observations as if they were purely natural occurrences. This is because of his pre-existing commitment that there are no supernatural forces at work in the world. His worldview defines all observations as natural phenomena irrespective of the available evidence.

b. Jesus drives home this point beautifully in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Read Luke 16:19-31.

Why is the rich man in Hades? Do we know?

What insight might be provided by the rich man's family into why he is in Hades?

What might Jesus say to Richard Dawkins in response to the following claim?

"God's existence or non-existence is a scientific fact about the universe, discoverable in principle if not in practice. If he existed and chose to reveal it, God himself could clinch the argument, noisily and unequivocally, in his favour."

(Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p.50).

c. Given what we've just discussed, why is it important to keep your anchor in the Bible?

2. Pray for your friends

Let's conclude this series of studies by spending time in prayer for our neighbours and friends. Ask God to provide opportunities for rich conversations. Make reasonable and prayerful goals to pursue these opportunities.

WORLDVIEW SUMMARY

How you view the world you live in has profound effects on the way you live your life in the world. The following is a short summary of the major worldviews in the social sciences, and how they relate to the relationship between the world and God (if any). The legend for the three main elements of each worldview diagram is as follows:



AGNOSTICISM

This is a term generally used for the view that we can not know whether God exists or not. The term "which comes from the Greek word "gnosis" meaning "knowledge". It was first coined by T. H. Huxley in the 19th century to signify religious skepticism. On a continuum of belief in God, agnosticism generally sits in the middle point between theism and atheism. Agnosticism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Agnosticism is considered a more respectable and their position than atheism since it admits less of the social stigma that atheism carries. Agnosticism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of ignorance.

APATHETISM

The term "apathetism" is a blending of the words "apathy" and "theism". This term is used to describe a person who is indifferent to the existence of God. Apathetism is a term that was first used by Mark Twain in his novel "The Gilded Age". Apathetism is also known as "pragmatic atheism" and is characterized by an apathetic view of God and a complete lack of interest in the existence of God. Apathetism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Apathetism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of indifference.

ATHEISM

The term "atheism" comes from the Greek word "atheos" meaning "without God". The term has been used from as early as the 5th century BC. Atheism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Atheism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of disbelief.

CHRISTIAN THEISM

Christian theism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God and the Christian faith. Christian theism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Christian theism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

DEISM

Originating during the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, Deism from the Latin "deus" meaning "god" is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Deism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Deism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in the 19th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Existentialism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Existentialism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

HUMANISM

Humanism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam in the 15th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Humanism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Humanism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

NATURALISM

Naturalism is a term that was first used by the philosopher David Hume in the 18th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Naturalism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Naturalism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

NIHILISM

Nihilism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Friedrich Schopenhauer in the 19th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Nihilism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Nihilism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

PANENTHEISM

Panentheism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Baruch Spinoza in the 17th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Panentheism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Panentheism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

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POLYTHEISM

Polytheism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Plato in the 4th century BC. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Polytheism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Polytheism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

RELATIVISM

Relativism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God but denies the Christian faith. Relativism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Relativism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

THEISM

Theism is a term that was first used by the philosopher Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. It is a position that affirms the existence of God and the Christian faith. Theism is a position that neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. It is a more moderate claim. Theism is said to not carry the burden of proof of atheism and therefore, doesn't need to give reasons for its position of belief.

1. The cow is from
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Standee-SC163-StarCut-A-Lifesize-Cardboard-Cutout/dp/B004RZS1JG>.
The milk is from
<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/glass-and-pitcher-filled-with-milk-gm469246100-62320800>.
The grass is from
<https://pikwizard.com/photo/green-grass/9275bb752739475adbbd0898d0908544>.
2. Sire, James W. The Universe Next Door. Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.
3. The Worldview Chart is used with permission of Outreach Media (<https://www.outreachmedia.org.au/>).
4. Sherwood, S. (2011) "Science controversies past and present," Physics Today, 64(10), pp. 39–44.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1063/pt.3.1295>.
5. Moving to the Right diagram is from Payne, Tony. "Has the Personal Evangelism Ship Sailed?" The Briefing, 5 Nov. 2012,
<http://thebriefing.com.au/2012/11/has-the-personal-evangelism-ship-sailed/>
and the milestones are based on a tool developed by Craig Josling for City Bible Forum (<https://citybibleforum.org/>).
6. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool>
7. This graphic was created from data presented in Haidt, Jonathan. The Righteous Mind. Penguin Books, 2013.
8. The Worldview Summary is used with permission of Outreach Media (<https://www.outreachmedia.org.au/>).

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