



# The Prodigal Scientist

Tim Nordgren



In the past century, atheistic modernism finally achieved a prime objective—the marginalization of Biblical creation. Ironically this is now a post-modern culture that rejects all truth claims, whatever the source, be it Bible or science. But truth has a way of breaking through. Moderns, post-moderns, and really all people relate to stories. Jesus showed that people actually need stories—or parables—to translate first-principles-teachings into real living. The great story of the ages is that the sovereign Creator of the universe has a “very good” plan that includes freedom to choose, anticipates rebellion, and uses all of it to liberate His creation from death and decay. Here finally, is a representative true story about how scientists, when guided by current views on origins, impact our hope of facing the problem of pain.

*Dedication*

I dedicate this work to my dear wife Dorothy. I love her *so* much.

I also want to commend all scientists who faithfully yield to the results of the scientific method.

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## Chapter 1: Why Me?



The flight attendant just moved to close the cabin door when a man lugging far too many carry-ons burst into the plane. After turning around and adjusting his glasses he focused down the center aisle to find rows of eyes turning away. Haltingly, he pressed down to the last row to find his window-seat blocked by travelers settled in for the flight. It seemed like it took him forever to reshuffle the puzzle pieces, sink into the seat, and the buckle to snap.

After the plane pulled onto the tarmac the man on the aisle broke the silence, “Are you with the group headed to the NAS Symposium on *Teaching Evolution*?”

“No... no, I’m not,” responded the man who was visibly unsettled, “but I am a molecular biologist at the University of Alabama. The name is William Elder. My friends call me Bill.” Quickly he reached over to shake hands.

“Oh, excuse me. I’ve organized this group traveling to Seattle for a symposium sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences. I’m with the philosophy department at Glendale College. The name is Michael Rigidson.” Then with hesitation he added, “Some call me Mike.”

“Nice to meet you, Mike” said Bill but his eyes soon turned away.

“I’m sorry, I should have given you time to get settled.”

“No, no. Please pardon me,” said Bill, “I really do appreciate the conversation. I guess I’m still in shock about some news I received this morning about my son. His college roommate called and said that Andrew suffered a stroke. I’m flying there to be with him. He has struggled with a congenital heart defect since childhood.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I don’t have any children, so I can’t imagine how hard this must be as a father.” Then, with tactful precision, he added, “Is his mother able to be there with him?”

“No she’s not, but I really wish she was. She died two years ago from liver cancer. She was wonderful at giving comfort and her joyful heart was so encouraging. It was clear to everyone that Jesus was with her in life *and* death. We miss her deeply.”

Now it was Mike who appeared uncomfortable, simply responding with a nod and a smile, and then silence.

After the flight was well underway, Bill noticed Mike furiously scrawling across a student essay.

“Looks like you felt that there was room for improvement in that paper,” remarked Bill.

“That’s an understatement!” said Mike with disgust. “This student doesn’t seem to understand that science requires a naturalistic explanation. She insists that scientific evidence does not support ‘evolutionism’ and that she prefers ‘intelligent design theory.’”

“Now, Mike,” said Bill, “as a philosopher, I am sure that you realize that the scientific method deals only with naturally recurring processes that occur in the present. Problems arise when historical theories are set forth as though they were scientific theories—or even scientific facts.”

“Well, actually, *Bill*, I subscribe to a modern view of science as described by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal work *‘The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.’* I am sure that *you* realize that practicing scientists are guided by scientific paradigms.”

Recognizing Mike’s concern about his peer group all around, Bill continued carefully, “I wonder if we can agree that academic freedom is at risk when we allow science to be dictated by powerful paradigm groups.”

Mike shot back, “Well actually, when the group is operating by the rules of science, the peer-review process is self-correcting.”

After taking a deep breath, Bill responded even more carefully, “Have you ever experienced academic censorship?”

“No,” said Mike with a cool tone, “my administration affords me full academic freedom to set forth the truth as I see it.”

“The truth as you see it...” mused Bill, “and I suppose that if I were to say that a naturalistic presupposition for science was unreasonable and unprovable, they would allow me to set forth the truth as *I* see it?”

“No they would not,” answered Mike.

“And why is that?”

“As I said before, the rules of science only allow explanations with natural causes.”

“Well now, it appears that we have come full circle,” said Bill with a smile, “and I am sure that you are quite right about my chances of academic freedom at Glendale, since that’s been my experience at the UA as well. Still, I find it interesting that as a practicing scientist, in the last twenty years I have yet to conduct an experiment in the past and I don’t expect I will in the future. If either creation or evolution is true, they occurred in the past, and therefore they are both outside the domain of experimental science.”

Now Mike was smiling, “And I suppose that you are unaware of the evolutionary changes that occur every day in the laboratories of scientists throughout the world?”

With raised eyebrow Bill clarified, “If by ‘evolution’ you mean those changes that occur through the reshuffling of preexisting information in the DNA, then yes I am aware

of such changes and in great detail. Those who propose intelligent design as an alternative to naturalism do not dispute that sort of change. What is disputed is a chance origin for irreducibly complex systems. Be that as it may, everyone should be able to acknowledge that scientists have never observed the macro-evolutionary changes that were supposed to have occurred in the past according to the *historical* theory called evolution.”

“Now, Bill,” said Mike, “we do seem to be going around in circles and I for one get weary of such debates, especially when it’s old news. So, here I wonder if I could take the discussion in a more interesting direction?”

The letdown of seeing a philosopher so casually dismiss crucial points as well as the nature of science caught Bill off guard, “Okay...”

Mike began, “I really don’t want to be unkind, but how can you reconcile your belief in a creator God with the experience of your family? How is it possible for you to believe in a God who has allowed you to experience so much pain? Now, I am not looking for a Sunday School lesson here, just your own thoughts.”

Bill was stunned by Mike’s question, since it was so relevant to his present situation and he appeared much too direct to be insincere. His pen was actually poised to take notes. Slowly, Bill began to explain, “Mike, the Bible teaches that the love of God was expressed when he gave the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, in order to pay for the sins of this fallen world. Our need is due to our first ancestor, Adam, who was created in the image of God, and yet abused his freedom and so fell from grace in relationship to God. I have inherited a ‘sin nature’ from him and have likewise fallen from innocence into a life of sin. Because Jesus offered his life for mine, by faith I may receive the gift of his eternal life. And when I allow my life to be guided by God, He promises, ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’”

Putting his pen down, Mike leaned over and said, “Bill, I just said that I was not interested in a Sunday School lesson. I attended a religious school as a youth, tried hard to believe it, and was even something of an evangelist right up until I arrived at Glendale. What I really want to know is how you can believe it, when you know that what God has done in your life is *not* good. Again, I don’t mean to be unkind, but how could a loving God allow your wife and son to suffer so much? Are you really satisfied that the explanation for all the bad things in the world is ‘sin’?”

Bill did not hesitate for a moment, “Mike, when I speak of a ‘fallen world,’ I mean a once-good world that is now fallen, not just fallen people. It was not the sin of my wife that caused her cancer. It was not the sin of my son that caused his heart defect. The effects of sin are all around us, whether seen in the pain of the innocent, or the pain of the guilty. In the end, the only important question for those who realize that they are guilty is this, ‘Will I receive God’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life?’”

Mike stiffened in his seat, “Personally, I find it *extremely difficult* to imagine asking the God of this world for forgiveness when I see so many innocent people suffering.”

Bill’s tone softened, “Personally, I find it *impossible* to call out to God for forgiveness and at the same time blame Him.”

“But Bill,” said Mike looking him straight in the eyes, “haven’t you ever asked, ‘Why me?’”

Bill turned away for a moment to look out the window and then back again to say,  
“Why *not* me?”

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## Chapter 2: Priorities



“Paging William Elder. Paging William Elder. Please call airport security.” Bill’s heart jumped in his chest as he imagined what might have happened to Andrew, but he swallowed hard and picked up the yellow phone.

“This is William Elder. I was just paged.” The security officer answered, “Oh yes Mr. Elder, please wait a moment and I will connect your call.”

The instant he heard the click he let go of the breath that starved his pounding heart.

“Hello?”

“Bill, is that you?”

“Yes. Who is this?”

“It’s Tom Johnson. Bill, I am sorry to run you down like this, but something came up that I thought you would want to know.”

“Is Andrew okay?”

“Oh Bill, I am so sorry for scaring you at this time. No, it’s nothing like that. Well, I guess I should just say it straight out. Bill, your research has been nominated for a Nobel prize in Medicine.”

“A Noble prize?” Bill paused to get his bearings.

“But Tom, I thought the names of nominees were strictly held in secret.”

“Yes, normally no one learns their names unless they are selected, but the word it that there’s a problem.”

“A problem? What do you mean by a ‘problem’?”

“I really don’t know very much, but from what I can gather, an anonymous source claims that the Prize will be awarded to one member of your research team and two from the team at Johns Hopkins.”

“Oh, I see. Well, there is usually some controversy about which three of the chief contributors will receive the Prize. So what’s unusual about this case?”

“*Bill*, from what I understand, your name is not among the three!”

Bill’s silence revealed his shock. He had been the architect and chief scientist of the original research team and only later did the team at Johns Hopkins begin their collaborative research effort.

“Tom, thanks for calling, but I really have to catch a ride to the hospital. I want to get to Andrew as soon as possible.”

“Sure, I understand Bill. I will let you know if I learn anything more. Oh, and Mary and I are praying for Andrew and you.”

“Thanks, Tom. I really appreciate that. Bye.”

With that Bill, hung up the phone, spun around to find a sign for ground transportation, and charged to the exit to catch a taxi.

After what seemed like an eternity, Bill finally stepped into Andrew’s room in the ICU. His eyes opened slowly. “Andrew, I got here as quick as I could.”

“Thanks Dad, I knew you would.”

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m pretty tired, but I am feeling much better.”

“Well that’s wonderful Andrew. Is there anything I can do for you now that I’m here?”

“No, not really,” said Andrew with his words trailing off. Then his voice rose in a tone familiar to his father, “Dad?”

“Yes, Andrew?”

“Do you remember how hard it was on Mom and you when I started high school and began to fight every rule that I had ever known?”

“Well, Andrew, I remember praying for our family like never before.”

“And Mom got so upset when I decided to drop all my science classes.”

“She always believed that science was one of your greatest strengths, but she determined to support whatever choice you made.”

“Back then it was a strength, but I guess I just lost interest.”

“Andrew, your Mom always believed that you were created for some great purpose and so do I.”

“You know, I never really had a chance to tell Mom I was sorry for all that. I guess I was just so worried about her being sick that I couldn’t quite open myself up to all the feelings.”

“Andrew, your mother loved you with all her heart and she never wavered in that love for a moment.”

After some reflection, Andrew said, “Do you remember how Mom could make us laugh even when we felt like crying?”

In a moment Bill was back in another hospital at the bedside of his beloved Emily.

“Yes, I remember well. Her girlish joy was contagious and we felt like we ‘caught our breath’ in those beautiful moments.”

After they looked away to gather their thoughts, Andrew asked, “Dad?”

“Yes, Andrew.”

“You really loved her, didn’t you?”

After a long pause, Bill spoke each word carefully and with tender care, “I loved her *so* much.”

“Me too, Dad. Me too.”

Bill bent over the hospital bed to share a long embrace with his son.

Just as they were finally able to compose themselves, a doctor stepped into the room.

“Hello, I’m Dr. Hanson.”

Bill reached out to shake hands, “I’m William Elder. Glad to meet you doctor.”

“I believe that I have some good news for Andrew. The test results indicate that the placement of the PFO closure device was a success. We will need to monitor Andrew closely over a couple of days for the effects of the stroke, but assuming all goes well, he should be back to normal activities in a week.”

Bill responded with some reserve. “Well, that is good news. But is it really reasonable to assume that Andrew can just go back to college?”

“Dr. Elder, I know this PFO has been a concern for many years, but because of this new catheterized placement procedure Andrew’s recovery should be excellent and nearly immediate. As I said, we were most concerned about the stroke, but he appears to have recovered from all the residual effects.”

“Even so, I will stay with Andrew as long as it takes to ensure everything is okay.”

“But Dad, what about your research? And isn’t the press conference in two weeks?”

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## Chapter 3: The Future of Science



“When am I going to get in to see the Secretary?”

The executive assistant stared down the brash intruder and said, “As I said before Dr. Rigidson, the Secretary of Health and Human Services is in conference with a private guest. Next, he is scheduled for a videoconference with the President. You will have to wait.”

Rigidson leaned forward, “If you don’t give my message to Secretary Reed, there *will* be consequences.”

Threats rarely moved her, but her finger remained hovering over the intercom-button. With a glare and an intentionally long hesitation, she finally punched through, “Mr. Secretary, Dr. Rigidson is here looming over my desk and insists on seeing you right now. I told him you were busy.”

After a muted pause, the Secretary said, “Show him in.”

With that Rigidson grabbed his briefcase, pressed toward the door and pushed through, closing it with a slam. The Secretary stood at the side door alone.

“Mr. Secretary, I have some breaking news that I am certain you will want to know before the President’s news conference tomorrow. Early tomorrow morning a research team at the University of Alabama is planning a news conference to report their claim of conclusive evidence for the so-called ‘intelligent design’ theory.”

“‘Claim’ and ‘so-called’? The only way that such news could be important is if there were scientific evidence that supports the theory.”

“Mr. Secretary, genuine science does not allow for the religious dogma that motivates these claims. Until now, all scientists have rejected intelligent design theory out-of-hand, because it has been exposed as ‘creationism.’ Coincidentally—really amazingly—I just met the Director of the UA research team on a flight to Seattle where he openly shared his underlying religious motivations. Though I can honestly say I found him sincere and likeable, from my experience this sort is all the more dangerous. That is why I am gratified to say that over the last six months I have been working with the UA

administration on a strategy to guard against this mixing of science with religion. The only problem is that there is not enough time to debunk the claims of this character who somehow managed to infiltrate this otherwise legitimate Genetics research lab.”

“Again, I do not understand what’s the problem. These things come up all the time and when the scientific evidence is found to be missing, the claims die on the vine.”

Rigidson’s eyes turned down and switched back and forth as if he were scanning the floorboards for a response and then he said, “That’s the problem, Mr. Secretary. Another top research institute—Johns Hopkins—is planning to report strong confirming evidence the next week.”

“I see. And how does all this relate to the President’s conference?”

“Mr. Secretary, as you know the NAS has a great deal of influence these days on how certain discoveries are rolled out to the public. In times like these, someone has to make a decision about what research best serves the public interest. What if the President were to push up her planned announcement of support for stem cell research including the plan for international collaboration. That should grab the full attention of the public. I will contact our key representatives in the major news outlets to push this story up to the front page. In fact, we could ensure that it dominates the news for weeks to come. That might buy us enough time to put together a counter-strategy.”

“Are you sure that the politics will play well with the scientific community?”

“Mr. Secretary, the scientific community recognizes this sort of thing as a threat to the very future of science. It’s only the undereducated American public that entertains creationism. Europe and Asia don’t have this problem at all. If we don’t manage this story well, it could threaten public support for stem cell research and political momentum for the President as well.”

Reaching into his brief case, Rigidson pulled out a one-page document. “Mr. Secretary, here is a briefing I have prepared with some key talking points. I suggest you share it with the President.”

The Secretary quickly scanned the document from top to bottom and then looked Rigidson in the eyes, “Very well. Do what you have to do. I will make an introductory contact for you with Dr. Cooperson, Director of the National Institutes of Health. Right now I need to prepare for a videoconference with the President... in two minutes! Please, I will have to ask you to leave quickly so that I can collect my thoughts.”

As Rigidson moved to grab his briefcase he noticed a bound proposal with a cover letter lying on the secretary’s desk; ‘Marketing Darwin Day: The Reconciliation of Religion and Science.’ He noted the letterhead, *InterCon: An intercontinental network of public relations firms*, and a key signatory, *The Very Reverend Lawrence Page, Cannon of Westminster Abbey*. Hastily the Secretary placed the briefing over the proposal as though to hide it from view and then ushered Rigidson out the side door.

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## Chapter 4: News Wars



Precisely 24-hours later, in the brand new media center of the University of Alabama, reporters sat poised for a news offensive, cameras flashing like artillery at a single target behind the podium.

“Dr. Elder! Dr. Elder!”

Pointing, he said, “Yes, the CNN journalist in the front.”

“How can you be so certain of these results? Have they been repeated by other scientists?”

Bill’s countenance revealed a balance of confidence and humility, “They have indeed. The McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins has just completed a study that confirmed our results. Other groups plan to collaborate in what are now called ‘genetic reconstructions’.”

“Dr. Elder!”

“Yes,” he pointed, “the New York Times journalist in the back.”

“What about the metaphysical implications. This ‘intelligent design program’ seems ‘designed’ to justify creationism.”

Dr. Elder smiled. “Well, science must go where the evidence leads. Obviously, this discovery can be seen as strong evidence for an intelligent designer. But I have to ask, ‘What’s the problem?’ When you look at the evidence objectively, without ruling out intelligent design in advance, you find that design is far-and-away the best explanation. And if the evidence leads to a super intelligence—one we would naturally call God—then so be it.”

“Dr. Elder, why do you feel that we must resort to God as an explanation when evolution has such explanatory power for so many other cases. Doesn’t this ideology work as a disincentive for those who might otherwise seek a naturalistic explanation?”

“Not at all. Take for example my own area of research. Evolutionists call it ‘Junk DNA’, which reveals how low they value this field of research. Now, since the discovery of DNA, evolutionists keep trying to deny the implications of its unparalleled complexity that codes for the finely tuned proteins required for life. Francis Crick went so far as to say, ‘Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see is *not*

designed, but rather evolved.’ So when scientists first discovered that only about 5% of human DNA coded for proteins they assigned ‘junk status’ to the other 95% because evolutionists concluded that it had lost its function over vast stretches of time. Now certainly there is evidence of a mutational loss of information in the code; however, scientists have since discovered many functions for this class of DNA. Examples include transcription regulation, origin of replication sites, spacers for alternative gene splicing, leader sequences, trailing sequences, and also as an aide in DNA repair. Like many scientists of the past, I was motivated to discover God’s purposeful design in what others called meaningless junk.”

“Dr. Elder, all you have told us thus far is that science is self-correcting. And yet you seem to imply that ‘creationism’ was required to make these discoveries.”

“No, scientists of all stripes were involved in these discoveries, but they were not motivated by evolutionary thinking. Let me offer the comparable example of ‘vestigial organs’. Evolutionary scientists once ranked hundreds of organs in human anatomy as vestigial because they reasoned that if functional organs could evolve into existence, they could also devolve into dysfunction as ‘vestiges’ of a past stage. However, since good science seeks to discover how things function—not dysfunction—the evolutionary list of vestigial organs has essentially shrunk to zero.”

Another journalist interjected, “Dr. Elder, how does any of this relate to the findings of your research?”

“Please pardon me; sometimes we research scientists forget the bottom line. What our team has discovered is a biological algorithm that once functioned with an error detection-correction mechanism in the DNA code. It appears to be a previously unknown form of redundant data coding. We believe this explains something on the order of 60% of the non-protein-coding DNA.”

“Dr Elder, you already mentioned DNA error correction mechanisms. What’s new here?”

“This redundant data coding mechanism was once used to ensure that when mutations occurred—and there are many causes for mutation—they were repaired before further replication.”

“Dr Elder, what do you mean, ‘Once used’? Do you mean that some organisms have experienced detrimental mutations in their error correction mechanisms?”

“No, that is not what I mean. As a scientist I can’t say how this error-detection-correction mechanism stopped functioning, since it happened some time in the past. But it does not exhibit one of the key characteristics observed in all mutations.”

“What characteristic are you referring to?”

“Randomness. The loss of this biological mechanism was not random.”

“Dr Elder, how do you know that it wasn’t random?”

“This algorithmically-encoded information is found in all five kingdoms of life, yet the error-detection-correction mechanism did not cease to function over time, but suddenly and universally—you might say, catastrophically for all life.”

The effect of this final disclosure could only be gauged by the delayed reaction that seemed to wait on words to meet the rising concerns. Instead, another question filled the gap.

“Dr Elder, what evidence do you have for the validity of this supposed biological algorithm?”

“Using this algorithm, we have now reconstructed the genetic code for certain ‘pseudogenes.’ Now pseudogenes fall into three classes: 1) genes that are disabled copies of protein-coding genes, 2) genes serving unconventional functions, and 3) genes that are not yet understood. Since evolutionists once assumed all pseudogenes were in the first class, and because they assumed common descent for certain organisms (monkeys and men), sharing pseudogenes was taken as evidence of an evolutionary line of descent. Now we know that pseudogenes are shared by unrelated organisms (hamsters and humans), and so they cannot be taken as evidence of ‘shared mistakes’ in a line of descent. So in our research we found that functional genes could be used as a template for comparison to the reconstruction of the disabled pseudogenes. So far, the match has been perfect. The probability of stumbling on such a match is vanishingly small. The existence of this error-detection-correction algorithm is almost certainly a confirmation of intelligent design.”

“Dr Elder! Your interpretation of these discoveries seems to be right off a script from the leading voice for intelligent design—the Finding Institute. Is it possible that other scientists could interpret the facts in another way?”

“I am aware of the work of the Finding Institute and I respect their accomplishments, but there has been no contact with them whatsoever. Please let me remind you of the science. The McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins has just completed a study yielding the same results as our research team.”

With this the nervous decorum finally broke down. As reporters left the room to make calls a security official stepped forward and whispered something to Dr Elder. With a startled look, he scanned the back of the room for an exit, grabbed his notes, and pressed toward the door. Those remaining tried to engage him for more questions, but he managed to shake them off to run out the door, into the street, and hail a cab.

With all the chaos only a few seemed to notice a bank of TV monitors in the lobby snapping to attention for another news conference. Flanked by scientists in white lab coats, the President stood at a podium with the presidential seal. Behind was a brilliant projected image of the now-familiar stem cell experiment. She began with measured enthusiasm, “Today is a historic day...”

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## Chapter 5: What Matters



Dr Elder carefully laid down his travel bag outside the door of the ICU. Marshaling all his resources to slow his racing heart and to force calm onto his face, he stepped into the room.

“Andrew, I’m here.”

Andrew’s eyes rolled and his ashen face flinched before he woke with a start.

“Dad.” he said with a shallow breath.

Dr Elder tried to moderate his tone with optimism.

“Andrew, the doctor tells me that this powerful new antibiotic has promise.”

“I hope so. They have tried so many.”

“Why didn’t you call me Andrew? I just don’t understand.”

“I hoped that we could beat this blood infection so I wouldn’t have to explain.”

Dr Elder paused for a quite some time and then pushed the question forward, “Explain what?”

“Dad... I have AIDS.”

Dr Elder could not even begin to grasp what he had just heard. Not nearly so much because of the terrifying specter of this consuming disease, but because his son thought he had to keep it a secret.

“AIDS? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Dad, you don’t have to worry; I’m not gay.”

Dr Elder swallowed hard and pushed out a response, “Okay.”

“Remember when I went off to college and started to experiment with my new found freedom? Well, I slept around a few times at some frat-parties. I really didn’t do it very much or very long, because I soon realized that it wasn’t what I wanted. After all those years of being careful to not over-stress my heart, I felt like I had to do something dangerous in order to feel alive. It didn’t quite work out like I thought.”

“Andrew, I am so sorry that you felt like you couldn’t share this with me. It’s my fault. After your mother’s death I just threw myself into my work without thinking about how it would affect you. I am so sorry.”

“No, Dad. It’s all *my* fault. I knew what I was doing and I went ahead and did it anyway. I guess God is punishing me now for what I have done.” Andrew was exhausted.

“Oh Andrew, I am so sorry that you have been alone in this. We could have talked through some of this together. Please hear me when I say that I have always, and will always love you. Though I will always be your Dad, it’s time for our relationship to change to that of peers.”

Andrew seemed ready to consider the offer, “Sure, Dad, I guess we can try.”

“And Andrew, this idea that God is punishing you for something is not quite right. There are natural consequences, but God has not sent this to punish you. But he has sent his Son to restore us.”

“I know all that Dad. But I shouldn’t have been so stupid! I’ve ruined my life.” With this Andrew had spent his remaining resources.

Slowly and gently, Dr Elder spoke again.

“Andrew, for now I want you to know that I love you and will do everything I can to help you. Let’s talk again when you have your strength. In the mean-time I will just be here with you.”

Andrew closed his eyes and a hush fell on the room. Dr Elder lowered his head in prayer.

After hours of trying to fight off sleep in jerks and spasms, a nurse brought Dr. Elder to consciousness with a tap on the shoulder. Like a robot, he rose from the chair he sank into hours before. When they stepped into the hallway, the nurse explained that there was a visitor for him in the waiting room. Mechanically, he walked down the hallway and through a door with a wire-meshed window to find a stranger in a soaked trench coat.

“Hello?”

“Yes, Dr. Elder. How is your son doing?”

Without thinking he asked, “Who told you that?” Then as if to recover he said, “Why don’t you tell me what you’re doing here?”

“Dr. Elder, I am with the Huffington Post. Can I ask for your reaction to the terrorist attack on the Space Shuttle at Cape Kennedy?”

Bill was stunned, “Oh Lord...a terrorist attack...on the Space shuttle? What happened?”

“Well, Dr. Elder, at 1:05 PM Eastern Standard Time, while the Space Shuttle Atlantis was lifting off, a SAM-7 ground-to-air missile hit one of the booster rockets which exploded killing everyone aboard. Millions watched on television around the world.”

Dr. Elder’s knees gave way as he sank into a chair, “God have mercy. Do they know who did this and why?”

“An Al-Qaeda splinter group has taken responsibility for the attack and says it wanted to make an example of the ‘atheistic’ space program.”

“This is just horrible! Beyond comprehension. I am so very sorry. But why do you come to me with this news?”

“Dr. Elder, precisely at that same time the Council on American-Islamic Relations—that is CAIR—sponsored a conference in Washington D.C. on the science of Creation versus Evolution.”

“Yes?”

“According to CAIR, your research can now serve as the centerpiece of an Islamic revival of creationism.”

There was a momentary pause, Dr. Elder shot to his feet, and then exploded, “You’ve got to be kidding me! So now intelligent design is responsible for terrorism?”

“Dr. Elder, for the record. What do you think of the way your research is being used?”

“I don’t have anything to say to you. Please... leave... me... alone!”

With that he wheeled around and crashed through the waiting room door. As he pounded down the hall and into a side hallway, each step jolted his aching heart. His eyes moved in a desperate search for some way of escape, but all he could find was an empty restroom. He slipped in. With the door bolted behind, he sank into the corner and finally released the pain in his gut with an agonized, silent roar. In time he finally caught his breath, but then a familiar grief took hold of his thoughts: *If only Emily were here, I could share this burden with her. I miss her so much!*

When the knock at the restroom door brought him back to the present, the heart of this hurting father awoke to the pain of his son. He got up and washed his hands and face. Discretely, he stepped out and down the hall to Andrew’s room to find him motionless in deep sleep. Dr. Elder moved toward the nearly closed window blinds and gently pulled them open to look out and up into a black sky that poured rain into half lit streets below. His unspoken prayer as he felt his own pain and that of his son, “Oh God, please help Andrew.”

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## Chapter 6: Breaking News



With just half-a-ring Dr. Elder had the hotel phone to his ear, “Hello?”

“Yes Bill, this is Tom Johnson.”

“Oh Tom. I thought you might be the discharge nurse. The hospital said Andrew might be discharged tonight. I was just going over there.”

“Well that is really great news! How is Andrew’s recovery going?”

“Amazingly well. That last course of antibiotics finally turned the corner. And Andrew’s spirit has lifted since he learned that his immune system is recovering so well.”

“Such good news.”

“Yeah, I finally feel like I can breathe again. Tom, I must admit that my faith was staggered by the prospect of losing Andrew. He came so close.”

“I am so sorry, Bill. I want you to know that Mary and I have been praying ‘without ceasing’ during these last two weeks. And all our friends from the faculty Bible Study contacted me to get updates on Andrew’s condition. A lot of people have been praying for you during this time.”

Bill paused to clear a lump in his throat, “Tom, I can’t thank you enough. I don’t know what I would do without friends like you and Mary.”

“Bill, you were there for me when I really needed you. I will never forget. I love you, my brother.”

They both paused for a few moments.

Tom began again with a changed tone, “Bill, the other reason I called was to share some news with you.”

“Yes, please do bring me up-to-date. I have been in a virtual news blackout with all that has been going on with Andrew.”

“Well Bill, there is some really good news, but I will let you decide about the rest.”

“I think I am ready. Shoot.”

“First an observation. The impact of the release of your research, and especially of the press conference has been felt all around the world. For example, within a week the Council of Europe drafted a resolution on the ‘Future of Science and Technology’ that argues for the economic benefits of collaborative scientific research within the European Union, but also with Southeast Asian nations, and potentially communist China. But here’s the rub. It seems that the prime focus of this resolution is not so much on scientific collaboration—which already exists—but on stamping out intelligent design in favor of evolution. Since the announcement, virtually all the nations mentioned have indicated positive interest in the recommendations offered. And The EU itself was poised to roll out a public relations campaign that they say ‘sets the quality standards and direction for scientific research for the next twenty-five years’.”

“Wow, Tom. I guess I will take that as a ‘negative.’ Got any more?”

“Last week in a press release from Johns Hopkins, The McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine disavowed what they called ‘metaphysical ruminations’ about the results of the collaborative research project. The statement also asserted that they were not aware of ‘the interpretative framework of Dr. Elder’.”

“Well, those statements are not entirely true. I actually did share what motivated my original plan for research with the Director, Dr. Jack Abrams. At the time he seemed more interested in the preliminary results of our research. It appears he has forgotten our discussion. Even so, I must admit that the reporters drew me out in ways that I had not planned for. Some could have taken my statements to suggest that the McKusick-Nathans Institute agreed with my views on intelligent design. I guess I was not as prepared for the press as I thought. Now Tom, you said there was some good news.”

“Yes I believe there is some very good news, but you will have to decide for yourself. Senator Paul Field, the Chairman for the Senate Commerce Subcommittee plans to convene a senate hearing about funding priorities for the National Institutes of Health. His aide seems to think that the President’s proposal for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research will leave little or nothing in the budget to investigate the merits of your research. He has asked for you to be available for testimony. I understand there is a formal letter in the mail.”

“Oh no, not a ‘science trial’! Tom, if this research gets politicized, our accomplishments could be in jeopardy.”

“Bill, I hear what you are saying, but Senator Field’s reputation for objectivity is generally acknowledged on both sides of the aisle. It may be possible to get the word out through this open forum in a way that couldn’t otherwise be achieved. Don’t you think we should give it a try?”

“I don’t know. The prospect of senators shooting hostile questions at me, or expert witnesses ‘refuting’ me doesn’t sound very promising. No matter what happens in the hearings, the press has proved that it can, and will, misuse my every word. I don’t know that I have the time or interest for public relations.”

“Bill, the Senator’s aide explained that the Director of the NIH intends to characterize your research as a distraction from the President’s plan to fund stem cell research. Now, I have to agree that there’s some real risk with such a hearing, but what about the risk of a no-show? That might put it in still greater jeopardy.”

“I suppose you are right. But truth-be-known, I would rather go back to the research lab and be left alone. I just don’t think I am well-suited for this sort of thing.”

“I know this is foreign territory for you Bill, but I seem to recall how many times you have told your students, ‘Science is not decided by authority, or a popular vote, but only by evidence. In the end, it’s the experimentally acquired evidence that guides the progress of science’.”

“Okay Tom, I will think and pray about this ‘opportunity’ and I will let you know tomorrow. Thanks for the update.”

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## Chapter 7: Passing Over



“Coffee? Oh, yes please fill it up.” Bill pushed his cup toward the waitress and then turned back to the man at the counter.

“As I was saying, I’m waiting for my son to be discharged this afternoon. My name is Bill.” He reached over and shook hands.

“Nice to meet you, my name is Don. My wife is here for another dose of radiation-therapy. She has a brain tumor. What is your son here for... if you don’t mind my asking?”

Bill hesitated but then said, “Andrew had a catheter procedure for his heart that originally went very well, but afterward he contracted a blood infection. Good news is that he has finally beaten it, and now he is doing much better. But I am very sorry to hear about your wife. How is she doing, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“No, I don’t mind. It helps to talk about it. They call the tumor a *glioblastoma multiforme*. We have been told that she will live for another four to nine months.”

Bill sat silent for a few moments and then turned back to the man, “My Emily only lived for four months after contracting liver cancer.”

Don looked down and shook his head. “Joan is already fading from me. There is no cure. We have to decide today if we want to go ahead with a brain surgery. You see, it’s more like an infection than a tumor. At best the surgery might buy us another year. At worst I could lose her right now if the tumor is entwined in the essential parts of her brain.”

“Oh that’s such a hard decision.” Bill reached over to place his hand on the Don’s arm. “I will pray for you and your wife.”

“Thank you very much,” said Don as his voice choked up. Nervously the men moved silverware and coffee cups as a means of diversion.

Finally Don said, “How did you get through that difficult time?” He seemed frustrated with his choice of words.

“Well, I am still working through it, but God was—and still is—with me helping me to live in hope. It really helped to know that Emily never doubted Jesus was with her.”

Don’s lips tightened and then he took a deep breath, “I have never been big on church. Joan has always taken care of that sort of thing for the family. Now I guess she is going to ‘her reward’.”

Again Bill sipped his coffee as a distraction since he was concerned that he had spoken out of turn.

Don continued, “As a businessman, I could never make sense out of faith. It always seemed like I was being asked to ‘take a leap.’ I guess I’m not much of a gambler.”

“My training is in the sciences, so I can relate. My concern was always with ‘proving’ things one way or another.”

“Yeah. That’s what I was looking for. A reason to invest myself... So how did you make the ‘leap.’?”

Bill took pause, and then looked straight ahead, “I guess I have to admit it all started with fear. At a time in my life when I was experiencing pain for some really bad choices, I was driving on an overpass in deep thought—not paying attention to the traffic ahead. All of a sudden the car in front of me locked up its brakes at 65 mph and I had to make a choice. Either throw on my brakes when I knew I would slam into that car, or swerve with only time to look and jerk the wheel. I chose to swerve. I can still recall the taste of fear on the tip of my tongue. After I drove around the pile-up I remember thinking, ‘I wonder if there is a God.’ And down the road a little more these words came to mind, ‘Call to me and I will answer you.’ I didn’t know it at the time, but that promise is right out of the book of Jeremiah.”

Don jumped in, “I guess I have to make a decision too—probably more than one. Still I wish there was some way to make sure that I’m not making a snap decision.”

“I’m sorry if it sounds like I am comparing your decision today with mine back then. I’m really not. The fact is that I didn’t choose faith in that moment, but I did start looking for answers.”

“Oh I know, but it does seem relevant to me. For me it seems there’s never enough time to search out all the possible options.”

“I have to tell you that I did not do an exhaustive study of all the options before I decided to put my faith in Christ. Since then I have done a great deal of research, but before any of that I had to admit that I would never have exhaustive knowledge of the universe to make my decision for *or* against God.”

“I guess you are right, but it doesn’t make it any easier.”

“I know what you mean, but the turning point for me finally came when I visited a church and heard about the life of Christ. It was then that I came to appreciate God’s power to speak into my life in a way that I knew was from Him. The rest of that promise in Jeremiah 33:3 says, ‘Call to me and I will answer you *and* tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’ God revealed to me that the holy and loving life of Jesus was not something made up by any kind of men that I knew, and especially not me. You see, Jesus wasn’t just a teacher of great truths; he actually lived these truths. He never once sinned. And since I had come to love Him and I didn’t want my sin to

separate me from Him, I called out to God for His forgiveness and He gave assurance of His grace in Christ's death on the cross."

"Bill, you said you were trained in the sciences. What do you do for a living?"

Bill wondered about this new line of question, but he obliged, "I am a molecular biologist. I teach at the University of Alabama."

"Oh. Well I was going to ask how you got past evolution. Doesn't that present a problem for you? I know it did for me when I was in college. Something about an increasing resistance to malaria through mutation proving the point of evolution. In fact it may have been the turning point for me."

Bill was not surprised by the question; he'd been asked this many times before. Then he said, "I know; with all the advances in science and mathematics and all the discoveries in the natural world—not to mention technology—it's hard to understand how anyone could still believe in... evolution."

Don was a little surprised, but chuckled; "Okay Bill, good one. But still, what about the case of increased resistance to malaria?"

"Well that case relates to a genetic defect called sickle cell anemia which affects the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen. Now, when both parents pass on the defect, the child rarely survives adolescence. However, when only one parent passes on the defect, 75% survive as carriers with an increased resistance to malaria. Of course this defective gene must be considered a very special case of 'positive' mutation since it is not an increase in complexity or an improvement in function, and having more carriers in the population results in more people suffering from sickle cell anemia. I think it's interesting that this defect is cited as *the* example of a positive mutation that proves macroevolution."

"Well that *is* interesting Bill, but what about the evidence for evolution in the fossils and in DNA?"

Bill smiled and said, "The lack of evidence for evolution in the fossil record was first acknowledged by Darwin and still is by leading evolutionists. For instance Jay Gould at Harvard referred to it as the 'trade secret of paleontology.' As for DNA, it confirms Darwin's other concern about the evidence. Since we now know life is 'irreducibly complex' this means it is not possible for random mutations to generate functional intermediates for natural selection to favor. And the variation within the existing categories of life, say varieties of dogs, is not relevant to amoeba-to-man evolution and best fits with conservative design rather than common descent."

"Bill, you have explained the evidence from your own perspective, but as we both know, the majority of scientists believe in evolution."

"You said it well. They *believe* in evolution. It is a belief system. Atheists believe in evolution because they must, but worldwide religious evolutionism preceded the theory of evolution, and its adoption was independent of evidence. In any case, I have long ago realized that science does not depend on 'appeals to authority' and neither should I. Years ago a mentor taught me that 'real faith' is 'testable faith.' I must be willing to examine the evidence wherever it may be, fearlessly expecting faith in the truth to be confirmed by observed facts. Honestly I don't claim to have answers for everything I have observed, but there have been so many faith confirmations that I am willing to trust God with the rest."

Just then Don looked at his watch and said, “The time has gotten away from me. Bill, what you explained was very helpful. And thank you for listening to me. I guess it takes hard times to consider what’s behind hard things. Joan and I have an appointment to meet with the surgeon. Thanks again, and I wish you and your son all the best.”

“It was helpful for me as well. Thanks, for listening, Don. I will be praying for wisdom for you and Joan.”

Bill sat and watched Don as he walked away. Then he leaned forward with hand to brow and began to pray, “Dear Lord, please help Don and Joan to know your will. Show them that you love them and will be with them as they walk through this dark valley. Reveal yourself to them, and touch them in a way that they know is from you. Lord Jesus, I ask your grace...”

Bill continued there for some time, discreetly covering a steady stream of tears.

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## Chapter 8: A Call for Reason



“Hey Dad, come in here quick! There’s some guy on TV being interviewed on *Larry King Live* and they’re talking about you!”

Bill stepped in from the adjoining hotel room just a moment before a *Quiznos* commercial flashed on the screen.

“What? Oh. That was Samuel Hawkins. He’s the chair of the neuroscience department at Cambridge. So what were they talking about?”

“I only caught a little bit of it. They mentioned your name, and then Larry King just said he wanted to know why this guy wrote his book and would he consider a debate with one of the ID theorists.”

“Oh. Well I can give you an answer right now about the debate question...” Just then Larry King was back. “Again, Dr. Hawkins, what motivated your book (he held it up high), *Twilight: The End of the Scientific Age*.”

“Well most people realize that these are trying times and the very future of science and indeed of civilization itself depends on our response. The long war of religion against science may have finally brought us to the twilight of this age.”

“And how does that relate to the latest news about support for the intelligent design theory?”

“First of all, the so-called ‘intelligent design’ myth bears no resemblance to a scientific theory. It is motivated by and based on untestable ‘revelation’ contained in the Bible. There is no experiment that can ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ its claims and as such it cannot be scientific. In fact, ‘intelligent design’ is nothing more than old creationism dressed up in a new suit.”

“All right, I suppose this is what we would expect from an atheist. Or is this what’s called the ‘new atheism’?”

“Yes, but there’s more. The new atheists don’t make any distinction between the Islamic suicide bomber, the snake-handling fundamentalist, or even the liberal theologian who rejects the Bible. We hold them all responsible for the crimes and wars throughout all of history. Either they are directly responsible for specific crimes, or part-of-the-problem as unwitting enablers.”

“OK, that about covers it. But still, what’s new about your book that might convince someone to follow your ‘new way’?”

“Well just let me say at the onset, mine is an optimistic view that some actually say borders on ‘faith.’ I believe that many people today recognize the danger of the rise of religious fundamentalism and are more ready than ever to consider the only reasonable alternative—evolutionary naturalism. Science has proved the theory of evolution to such a degree that it is rightly called a scientific fact—like gravity, electricity, or the laws of motion. Further, the so-called proofs for special creation, or any form of creation, have long been discredited. Thus we can say today that there are no credentialed scientists who believe in creation of any stripe.”

“Now Dr. Hawkins is your last statement strictly true? After all, Dr. Elder, the molecular biologist who recently set forth a new theory for the DNA code, seems to be saying he believes in creation.”

“This species of scientist is extremely rare and will soon become extinct. I was making a generalization that holds true for every discipline of science.”

“*Very well.* But what about this new discovery that seems to ‘prove’ the claims of creationists?”

“I don’t spend a lot of time looking into every claim made by these creationist clowns, but I have it on good authority that there is nothing new here. What I can tell you is that the ‘design’ argument—intelligent or otherwise—was refuted by the Scottish philosopher David Hume over two centuries ago. ‘Proof’ for design is, and always has been, based on bad reasoning.”

“Well, there you have it folks, although I suspect that those of the ‘religious persuasion’ may not be entirely satisfied. Anything else Dr. Hawkins?”

Turning toward the camera, his detached expression turned to concern, “Yes I do want to leave one last message with your listeners. It should be obvious to all reasonable people that our freedoms are eroding every day. However there is an even greater danger before us. Because of the proliferation of WWDs—that is, weapons of *world* destruction—and the rise of religious fundamentalism, we face ‘apocalyptic’ dangers without precedent in all of history. However, today the only people hardheaded enough to fight the religious lunatics of the Muslim world are the religious lunatics of the West. This must stop and reason must finally prevail! Our children, and indeed the whole of civilization, depends on our determination to shake off ‘religious delusions’ lest we be destroyed by a ‘god’ made in our own image.”

“Well thank you very much Dr. Hawkins. You have given us all something to think about.” Turning toward the camera and shifting to a light-hearted tone he said, “Please stand by for our next guest, the entertaining and always controversial Rosie O’Donnell!”

Andrew faded down the sound just as the *Vonage* commercial theme-music began.

“Wow, Dad. That guy takes no prisoners.”

“Yeah, it’s kind of scary to hear a prophecy of your own ‘extinction.’ Even so, Samuel Hawkins seems to be unaware that virtually all the disciplines of science were founded by Christians motivated by faith in a Creator God who not only established moral laws for man, but also physical laws for nature.”

“I know he was really over the top, but what about that religious wars and crimes business. I hear that all the time at the university.”

“Well Andrew, you may not be surprised to hear me say that it’s simply not true. The fact is that atheism had its chance in the twentieth century, which finally proved that a ‘war against God’ is far worse than all the religious wars combined. When you account for all the deaths associated with any kind of religious war in *all of history* and compare this to the number of deaths associated with the atheistic movements of the last century *alone*—that would include Nazism, Fascism, Communism—there were ten to twenty times more millions of deaths that must be accounted for when ‘reason prevailed.’ Then there is the embarrassing little matter of *Social Darwinism*, and its bitter fruit—eugenics. Yes the Nazis carried this to a monstrous end, but in America thousands were sterilized for unjustifiable reasons including racism in order to ‘advance’ human evolution. All of this was undeniably mainstream evolutionary ‘theory’ in the first half of the twentieth century. For my part, I don’t take responsibility for those who attempt to use the name of Christ to murder and abuse innocent people.”

“Again, I think this guy went too far. I believe there is a God, but the concern about the loss of freedom seems to be valid.”

“Andrew, I expect you aware that every time in history that atheism was in power it likewise ‘took no prisoners.’ And I mean that literally. It was always ‘off with their heads!’ There was no freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of ownership, or freedom of any kind guaranteed under any of those atheistic regimes. That is what happens when people don’t recognize that ‘all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’”

“Oh yeah, Dad, I learned all that stuff in school, but it does seem like there is more danger of religious people imposing their morality on others these days.”

“Well Andrew, let me ask you a question. When you are at the university, is it more likely that you will be censored for religious speech, or *anti*-religious speech?”

“Okay, I get your point. I guess that public universities have turned things upside down.”

“And don’t forget the question that Samuel Hawkins tried to ignore: Would he consider a debate with one of the ID theorists. The answer is ‘No!’ Hawkins and his cadre of new atheists have actually counseled against accepting invitations to refereed debates. The reason they give is that the public is ‘too ignorant’ which is supposed to explain why they almost always lose the support of the audience—even at public universities. I have seen it happen many times.”

“But what about that Scottish guy who supposedly ‘refuted’ design. Is that true?”

“I expect that Dr. Hawkins knows that Hume’s debate with the design analogy is disputed. But, I wonder if he realizes that intelligent design theory is actually based on an ‘inference to best explanation.’ You see, modern Darwinism is based on the assumption that chance mutations can create new biological features that will be favored by natural selection.”

“Dad, are you questioning the reality of natural selection?”

“No, I am not. Natural selection is an accepted fact, but it only operates to select from a pre-existing set of features already coded into the DNA. What is disputed is the notion that mutations can create new biological features. Eyes, hearts, livers, kidneys, brains, etc.”

“Well sure Dad, those organs are way too complicated for chance, but what about all the little steps that could add up to a brand new organ?”

“Andrew, you have just hit on one of the decisive problems for evolution. Scientists now know that the smallest biological features are likewise too complex to have originated by chance. For example within the most basic unit of life—the cell—are tiny organelles. These sub-cellular organs likewise possess complex biological features with countless interdependent parts that could not possibly originate by chance. In fact, the same argument applies at every step, so in the end there is nothing new for natural selection to select. And don’t forget the complexity of the DNA that codes for these features. In short, evolution can not explain either the irreducibly complex features of life or the coded design message.”

“Well, okay, I may not understand why Hawkins and so many other scientists say evolution is the best explanation, but they seem to be consistent in their rejection of intelligent design.”

With a smile, Dr. Elder said, “I really don’t think so. Does anyone doubt for a moment that if an irreducibly complex message were picked up from outer space, evolutionists would call it ‘reasonable’ that the source was *intelligent* extraterrestrial life?”

“Hey Dad, maybe *you* should take this guy on.”

“No way! Forgive me if I come off as having all the answers—I do not. There are those who are well equipped for public debates and I am not one of them.”

“Sounds to me like you’re chicken, Dad.”

“Okay, I think I have said enough.” With that Dr. Elder grabbed the remote control and flipped channels until it landed on a rerun of *Gilligan’s Island*.

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## Chapter 9: A Reasonable Proposal



“The Undersecretary of Education is now ready to see you Dr. Cross,” said the aide, “I will show you in.”

A man in a dark blue suit greeted the visitor, “Please come in, I’m Dewey Pullman and this is Dr. Jesse Pawl and Dr. Karl Davidson. Gentlemen, this is Dr. William Cross, president of the ‘Reasoned Belief’ ministry.” They each shook hands.

“Dr. Cross, we have been discussing your proposal.”

“Thank you Mr. Undersecretary. But please call me Will.”

“If you prefer. As you know this meeting was agreed to primarily because of your chance meeting with the President in the political rally held at Lincoln Road Baptist Church. The President generally respects people of faith, but she is concerned about the political fundamentalists in your following.”

“Well, most in my sphere of influence call me ‘fundamental’ when it comes to the Bible, but I actually prefer to think of it as ‘faithful’ to the language of the Bible. Many Christians in America today have some education about the nature of language, history, and science. As you may know, my ministry is dedicated to encouraging a ‘reasonable faith’ consistent with all the latest and best knowledge available and especially from science. This began with my undergraduate training in physics and culminated with a PhD in astrophysics at the University of Colorado.”

“I see. Well, you also seem to have a good sense of timing. The President has come to appreciate the importance of science as it relates to matters of faith. She has rightly pointed out that no one party “owns the faith issue.” In fact, many of her most dedicated supporters are people of faith. So let’s discuss your proposal.”

“Gladly. Now, you should know that I believe that there will always be differences between Christianity and the various religious philosophies of the world; however there is one thing on which we should all agree. Certain realms of science have matured to the point that they are beyond dispute. One of those areas involves astronomy. In particular, the age of the universe has been established through many lines of evidence so that it’s rightly called a scientific fact. It is inexcusable that some Christians still hold onto to the old notion of a literal-six-day creation in spite of the scientific evidence and modern insight into the languages of the Bible. I believe this has slowed progress in space exploration, technology, and really brings shame to the name of evangelical Christianity. Again, I don’t think we will agree on all points, but surely we can agree in this one thing in order to advance science.”

With that the Undersecretary leaned forward, raised his eyebrow, and lowered his voice, “And so you are *willing* to add your endorsement for public high school and college astronomy text books just so long we distinguish between biological and physical evolution.”

Before Dr. Cross could discern if they had taken him seriously, Dr. Pawl spoke up, “For my part, I have no problem with intelligent design in astronomy *or* biology. And clearly a huge majority of the world accepts an ancient universe, which is self-guided by some universal intelligence. At the base of these religions and philosophies is belief in an eternal universe. It seems that science is finally bringing the world together.”

Dr. Davidson started slowly, “Clearly, there is a qualitative difference between biological and astrophysical evolution. However, in a recent *Parade Magazine* poll, 85% of my readers agreed that space exploration is vital to the future of the human species. I am also very concerned about declining support for the SETI project. The search for extraterrestrial intelligence has almost certainly been thwarted by creationist concerns about UFOs. Nonetheless, my chief motivation for unity relates to the state of the environment. With the peril of global warming and the environmental disasters it entails, we must seek unity at every turn. The truth is, we need to come together at a much higher level, but this is a start. I am willing to offer my endorsement for this plan.”

The Undersecretary appeared surprised and unsatisfied, “Now, how does all this relate to the recent discovery that is alleged to support intelligent design?”

Again, Dr. Pawl was first, “Everything and nothing ...depending on how you interpret things. As I already said, many religious people have no problem with the idea of evolution guided by intelligent design and yet they would reject the notion of an old man with a long white beard reaching out to create man and the universe in six days.”

Dr. Davidson followed, “Einstein said, ‘God does not play dice with the universe.’ That’s as far as I’m willing to go.”

Dr. Cross chimed in, “I am willing to acknowledge this aspect of the God of Einstein, just so long we make it clear that the processes of evolution for the universe are not the same as those for the evolution of life. I maintain that God created life.” He then paused briefly. “So...it appears that we are agreed that the scientific evidence only supports a universe that is billions of years old. We can respectfully agree to disagree about creation versus evolution of life. In so doing, I believe we have been respectful to the well-informed Christians that I represent, but also the balance of American sentiment that these distinguished scientists represent.”

The Undersecretary looked across the table and back, stopping to study each face for dissent. Then he turned away as though he needed to adjust his thinking. Turning back again he said, “Okay, I guess we can put this before the President in her next cabinet meeting. Again, your timing is perfect. Her proposed education reform bill could use the support of her conservative constituents. In the meantime, prepare your endorsements and email them back to me.”

Dr. Cross added with apparent satisfaction, “What are arguably the most significant conservative political leaders in America have also thrown in their full support for this proposal and have even offered their publishing company for the project.”

“Well, we will definitely give that some consideration,” said the Undersecretary.

Dr. Cross thanked them for their time in discussing his proposal and then said, “Once people see the benefits of unity in this matter of established science, religious people everywhere will enjoy new freedom to exercise their faith.”

Just as the meeting came to a close, the Undersecretary turned away to view a new email on his BlackBerry. The subject line read: “Education Reform and Private School Curriculum.”

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## Chapter 10: When?



Bill sat at his lab desk engrossed in the latest edition of the scientific journal *Nature* that appeared to swim over piles of cascading paperwork. One particular pile extended out into space like a pylon for an unfinished suspension bridge. Bill was in a comparable state of suspension as he bent forward, scanning slowly down the page.

Just then Tom stepped into Bill's office with an open letter in hand extended, "Bill, I just received this letter from an old college roommate who now works as Director of Communication at the Finding Institute in Miami. He asked if you might be interested in joining an informal planning meeting for a conference in Miami."

Bill took the letter but looked at Tom, "An old roommate? The Finding Institute?"

"Yes, Don Franklin. I haven't kept up with him, but I understand that they sponsor research for intelligent design and promote a strategy to free science from naturalism. Could you give him a call as a favor to me?"

"I am familiar with and respect the scientific accomplishments of many of the fellows of the Finding Institute. I was actually thinking of contacting them myself."

"Thanks. His name and number are there in his letter."

Bill finally looked down, scanned to the bottom, and then looked up to Tom, "I really need to pray about this."

Tom responded with a nod and raised eyebrows, "Sure, Bill, please do."

Bill began out loud, "Dear Lord, please help me to have the right attitude in communicating with this man. Help me to learn what I should do through this potentially important contact. In Jesus name, Amen." Bill dialed the number.

"Hello, my name is Bill Elder. May I speak with Don Franklin?"

"Yes, this is Don Franklin. Thanks for calling Dr. Elder. I expect that Tom mentioned that I am planning a conference here in Miami for international leaders in various fields of science."

“Yes. What can I do for you?”

“As a representative of the Finding Institute let me congratulate you on the results of your research. As we understand it, your research may be very helpful to the intelligent design movement.”

“Well, thank you very much. However I have to say that I am conflicted about what it may ‘help.’ You see, I have tried to carefully distinguish between ‘intelligent design’ and the ‘intelligent design movement.’ I believe they are quite different. I support the former and not the latter.”

“I see. May I ask why?”

“In my view the major contributions to intelligent design theory came about when naturalistic assumptions in biology were set aside. Progress in astronomy is now being achieved as naturalistic assumptions in astrophysics are set aside. I see this as a return to what motivated Biblical Christians in science throughout history. Now some ID theorists have become associated with the ID movement. Distinct from ID theory, the ID movement actively seeks to argue for intelligent design without any reference to the Bible or the God of the Bible. In my view, the one does not follow or depend on the other.”

“Our strategy is motivated by the fact that scientific establishment has rejected Biblical Creationism. As long as atheistic naturalism controls the scientific establishment, we will never gain a hearing, but when it loses its grip then people may draw their own conclusions—including creation—for the origin of life and of the universe.”

“Well, that may be partly true, but unless we offer an alternative that is fully true, then we end up favoring one form of naturalism over the other; that is, religious naturalism over atheistic naturalism. Would it really be better to have atheistic naturalism replaced by religious naturalism? Many eastern mystics are more than happy to embrace intelligent design.”

“That is a risk we may have to take. However, there is also the possibility that we will advance one of the most basic of Biblical doctrines—creation. I wonder if you’ve heard of the new strategy set forth by the Finding Institute. We call it “simple creation.”

“I am aware of that strategy, but let me suggest that Einstein had something to say about it.”

“*Oh really?*”

“Yes, he said, ‘Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.’ Just as Biblical Christianity is as simple as true Christianity gets, so Biblical creation is as simple as true creation gets.”

“Dr. Elder, there are Christians from a broad range of traditions who have joined with the intelligent design movement. Many that share your view are comfortable with the strategies advanced by the Finding Institute.”

“I’m curious, what view are you referring to?”

“Well, I assume you hold a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis.”

“Very good. When I said that I hold to Biblical creation, you assumed that I meant a literal interpretation of Genesis. I see that as an affirmation they are synonymous. Now, Don, what view do *you* hold?”

“Personally? Well I am flexible, but I can’t see how to get around the age of the universe. The facts of science have settled that for me.”

“Now what do you mean by science?”

“Well clearly there are scientific paradigms, but ultimately science is defined by experimental observation.”

“Good. Now, who observed the origin of the universe? Who observed the laying down of the fossils beds? Who observed the evolution *or* creation of amoeba and man? And for that matter, why can't scientists conduct experiments for each of these processes?”

“I understand where you are going with this, but just let me say that scientists are always making observations in the present that they extrapolate into the past.”

“Indeed they do and then they construct a ‘story’ to explain how the slow and gradual processes observed in the present could shape the world of the past. The problem is that there have always been rapid and discontinuous events in history, which can easily explain the current form of the earth, and indeed the universe. These include floods, volcanoes, meteors, supernovas, sunspots, etc.”

“Well scientific theories are the most powerful explanatory tools we have for origins questions and the facts of science speak for themselves.”

“And this is where I part with so many. What some call scientific theories, I call historical theories. The power of science is found in scientific experiments conducted in the present. When we deal with events in the past, we are dealing with historical theories. In the case of origins, the role of science is to provide forensic evidence that is used to infer a particular story of history. I have yet to see my faith in God's Word contradicted by the facts of science, but there are many contradictions between Biblical history and ‘speculative historical theories.’ By definition, there can only be one observer for the origin of ‘all things’ as recorded in God's Word.”

“But Dr. Elder, is it really wise to treat the Bible as though it were a science textbook?”

“No, it is not. If it were, it wouldn't it need to be re-written every five years?” Bill's smile didn't translate well over the phone. Don responded with silence.

Bill clarified, “I believe that whenever the Bible addresses a subject—history, origins, science, and yes, the things of the spirit—it accurately provides the necessary facts in a way that endures.”

“Dr. Elder, I understand your position, but you have to admit that literal six-day creation is in trouble because of the light-distance problem. When I realized we were observing light from stars that are billions of light-years away, that settled it for me.”

“Really? Are you aware that the Big Bang theory has its own light-distance problem? It is called the horizon-problem.”

“The horizon-problem?”

“Yes, this form of the light-distance problem relates to the uniform temperature of the background radiation—the supposed ‘echo’ of the Big Bang.”

“I've never heard it put that way. Okay, so what's the problem?”

“Well, imagine a bunch of kids with can-and-string-phones fanning out for a game of hide and seek. But no matter where they go, each pair knows exactly where the other is hiding. So, how would you say they came to know this?”

“They communicate on their ‘phones’?”

“Good, but here’s the problem: as the kids keep fanning out beyond the horizon, the strings break. By analogy, that’s the problem with claiming space beyond a certain time and distance shares energy.”

“So you’re saying evolutionists don’t have an answer for this?”

“Oh, they have an answer. It’s called ‘inflation’ which claims that a fraction of a second after the beginning a ‘temperature message’ was locked into space for all time. You might call it ‘thermal predestination.’ This ad-hoc proposal was employed to salvage the Big Bang from the horizon-problem. And there are many other substantial problems as well. These include the lumpiness-problem (in radical contradiction to the uniform background radiation, matter is clumped into stars, galaxies, and much larger formations), the entropy problem (the initial ‘cosmic egg’ must start in a highly ordered state), and quantized background radiation (spherical shells of uniform temperature). In any case, using one form of the light-distance problem to argue against another form is self-refuting.”

“Fair enough, Dr. Elder, but there are many who hold your view and yet seek to advance this international movement. You may want to consider how they have worked through these issues.”

“As you may realize by now, I *am* aware of some of the ideas that flow out of this movement, but I was wondering how someone might address my concerns. Intelligent design offers some answers for the origin of the information in life. But let me ask again. How *do you* explain the origin of the fossil beds, the mountains, the oceans, the earth, and indeed the entire universe?”

“I believe we have several options. One is to say, ‘God created it that way.’ Another is, ‘I don’t know.’ Finally, we could say that the majority view of scientists is acceptable. In the first case, the discussion is over. In the latter cases, we may have built a bridge for further discussion of intelligent design.”

“And you have found this to be effective?”

“When we get past the mistaken idea that we’re ‘all creationists,’ it works fairly well.”

“How often are you accused of being creationists?”

“That has happened from the beginning. Just because you repeat something doesn’t make it true.”

“Indeed, but is it possible that atheistic naturalism and pantheistic naturalism are thought to be more honest in offering an answer to such questions while ID advocates are not? Perhaps they suspect that ‘intelligent design’ is nothing but old creationism dressed up in a new suit. As you keep reminding me, ‘there are many who hold this view’.”

“Dr. Elder, would it be safe to say that you are not at this time interested in attending our planning meeting?”

“Not at this time.”

“Well, even so, let me just say that I have been authorized by the Finding Institute to offer our legal resources to you for the upcoming Senate hearings.”

“Word gets out fast. Please pardon my driving home these questions, but from what I hear, certain politicians—and especially the media—will soon be coming after me on these very issues.”

“Sure, I understand, but please consider our offer open if you reconsider. The stakes are very high and you’re right about the political media; some now call it the ‘feral beast’.”

“Thanks for the offer. I will definitely keep it in mind. In the mean-time, please know that I watch the work of the Finding Institute closely and with positive expectation.”

“As we do you, Dr. Elder. As we do you.”

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## Chapter 11: Shell Game



“Professor Sherman, did you have a chance to read any of the book I gave you last week?”

“Young Rigidson, our model Glendale student. Yes I did and I have quite a few notes for your consideration. By the way, I thought it was interesting that you thought that because I am an atheist, I needed a book on Christian theology,” said Dr. Sherman with a smile.

“Well, I thought that if you could promote your reasons for atheism in class, I could promote my reasons for faith after class.”

“Now Michael, as it turns out, I am quite familiar with Christian theology and its sole basis for ‘believing,’ which is unsubstantiated ‘faith.’ However, because I am a scientist, faith is irrelevant.”

“Well I just thought you might have an open mind on the subjects covered in this book.”

“Please Michael, I don’t want to be unkind, but *really*, how can you put faith in an outdated book that has been proven false beyond any shadow of a doubt.”

“That book is really not all that old. I think it was published just few years ago.”

“No Michael, I am talking about the Bible. Science has proven the story of creation false beyond any reasonable doubt. You seem to be a bright young man, but I find it amazing that you have gotten this far in your education without appreciating the facts of science. Where *did* you go to school?”

“I attended Classical Christian Academy in southern California. And for your information, I graduated with a 4.0.”

“More proof that ‘Christian’ education has no place in a modern society. But really, Michael, I am sure you are a perfectly good student, but any form of education that leaves it’s students ignorant of the facts of science is unpardonable.”

“So, because I believe God created the universe, I am ignorant?”

“Michael, you are enrolled in Biology 101 and you need to know that there is hardly a single scientist in the world that does not support the theory of evolution. In fact, it is now universally recognized that nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution.”

Michael snapped back, “Evolution is just a theory! And how do you know that God is not directing all the evolutionary processes in the universe? That could explain a lot. In any case my belief rests on my faith in God. And that settles it for me.”

“*Michael*, saying that ‘God did it’ doesn’t explain anything! I am afraid you do not understand the nature of scientific theories. Do you really believe that the theory of gravity is in doubt? Or how about the theory of electricity? Or the atomic theory of matter? These are all facts based on real-world observations just like the theory of evolution.”

“I may not be able to refute a PhD scientist, but I believe there is a difference between those examples and evolution. And besides, many of the best students in this class have expressed doubts about the credibility of atheistic evolution.”

“Okay, but something you may not know is that once any of them enters a graduate program, the majority converts to scientific naturalism.”

“I don’t know why that would be. But it doesn’t matter, I don’t put my faith in science.”

“Okay, Michael. Since you don’t seem to be interested in the facts of science let’s talk about the Bible. Like many atheists I am aware of the teachings of the Bible and I don’t feel challenged at all by this self-contradictory book of myths.”

“You may call it a myth, but many scholars find deep spiritual truth in its teachings.”

“Well then, Michael, let me ask you a few basic questions, for which I assume you will have good ‘biblical’ answers. Let’s start in Genesis.”

“Sure, I have read some in that book.”

“Very well, I expect you know that the Bible says Adam and Eve were the first man and woman. So now, what were the names of their children?”

“Well, Cain and Abel, of course.”

“Good, you must have been paying attention in Sunday School. So, now you must also know that Cain killed his brother Abel because God said his sacrifice wasn’t good enough.”

“Well no, I mean yes. In any case, the descendants of Cain were a rebellious people who later proved that the family of Cain didn’t learn faith in God from their father.”

“Not so fast Michael. You mentioned ‘descendants.’ Now if Cain and Abel were the only children of Adam and Eve, where did Cain get his wife?”

“Oh I have heard that one before and I’m sure there is a good answer for it.”

“So what is it?”

“I don’t think I have a complete answer, but it must have been his sister.”

“His sister? I thought that God didn’t allow incest. And are you aware of the problems with birth defects from inbreeding?”

“Well, I am not a scientist, but I am sure that some scholar has a more complete answer.”

“Okay Michael, I will leave it with you to find a good ‘scholarly’ answer to this obvious error in the Bible. So let’s consider another little problem. Do you remember the battle of Joshua against the Amorites when Joshua prayed for God to make the sun stand still for a full day?”

“Sure I guess I remember that story. So what’s the question?”

“I assume that you realize that the sun does not rotate around the earth and therefore it doesn’t need to be ‘stopped.’ How can you believe in a book that assumes a geocentric universe?”

“No one knows how God does a miracle. And I don’t know that we have to take that passage literally anyway. But again, I am sure that some scholar has an answer to these kinds of challenges.”

“Michael, do you really? Think about it, this is not a question for a ‘Bible scholar.’ This is a question for a scientist. Scientists, and now most other people, realize that the sun does not rotate around the earth. Geocentrism died in spite of the Church’s efforts to silence Galileo. Such a ‘miracle’ is not only impossible, it’s meaningless.”

“I have to admit that I don’t have answers to these types of technical questions, but still, my faith is not built on the shifting sand of scientific theories. It is built on my faith in a God who loves me.”

“A God that loves you. Well that sort of sentiment is understandable, but I wonder if you think that this ‘God of love’ cares about you any more than he cares about the suffering masses of the world?”

“I don’t understand your question. God loves all people.”

“Michael, we live in a world where on any given day, a quarter million people die of disease, disasters, war, and all sorts of terrors. And all of this goes on for millions of years at the hands of a ‘God of love’.”

“Professor Sherman, we live in a world that suffers because of the many sins of man. God offers us forgiveness for sin.”

“Forgiveness? Are you saying that all the suffering in the world is caused by man’s sin? Earthquakes, hurricanes, drought, disease? How could these be caused by sin? If you ask me, it’s God who needs forgiveness. It’s his indiscriminate judgment of the innocent people of the world that is ‘unforgivable.’ I don’t know if you think that you will fare any better than the rest of this suffering world. But personally, I find it *extremely difficult* to imagine asking the God of this world for forgiveness when I see so many innocent people suffering.”

“Dr. Sherman, I have an older brother named James. He proves your attitude toward God’s love is false. James is the most loving, caring person I have ever known. He is right now traveling with the *Peace Corps* to the Congo to work with a health education project. He would tell you that he is motivated by his faith in God, not science. I see God’s love in the actions of my brother, not in the many pains we have to suffer in this life.”

“Very well, Michael. As I said, I have written out quite a few notes for your further consideration. Please consult some of your ‘Bible scholars’ and get back to me after class next week. We can talk some more about the facts of science and how this relates to the real world.”

“Sure. I’ll think about your comments and write out my own answers. As I said, I see more reason for faith in the lives of loving people than in science any day.”

“Okay Michael, see you next week.”

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## Chapter 12: Education Reform



“Welcome Senator Wressler and Senator Bruemmer. Secretary Shinn will join you for lunch in just a few minutes. He’s returning from a historic keynote speech he delivered at the NEA Representative Assembly.”

“Thank you. We will wait for him right here.” The aide left them alone in the waiting room.

Senator Bruemmer smiled broadly, “Can you imagine such a thing? Harold Shinn, the Secretary of Education. There was a time when powerful voices in Washington pronounced him the most dangerous man teaching American History. Now he is the Secretary of Education and NEA keynote speaker in Washington DC.”

With a knowing expression Senator Wressler intoned, “There exists, in the first hundred days, the possibility to change anything. The presidential campaign slogan that seemed to resonate most with people was, ‘A Time for Change.’ She believes this is finally the time for real and lasting change.”

Just then the Secretary burst into the room with a smile and extended hand. “Senator Wressler, Senator Bruemmer, good to see you.” He shook each of their hands vigorously. “I have to tell you, the experience of speaking to the National Education Association was exhilarating!” Then he paused, “If it weren’t for the booth full of creationists passing out their propaganda on the exhibition floor, it would have been a perfect day.” Visibly shaking it off, he continued, “Be that as it may, please join me in my office for lunch so we can discuss better things to come. Hope you are hungry, I am famished!”

After the meal was served and they had moved beyond the customary genialities, Senator Wressler spoke up, “Mr. Secretary, what do believe are the first steps toward true change in America?”

“A multi-cultural mandate has been conferred on us in this election. In order to bring about the kind of change required for a truly multi-cultural society, we must impart a new vision to the children of America.”

Senator Bruemmer seemed puzzled, “Mr. Secretary, it seems like public schools have had the opportunity to do this for over sixty years. What will be different this time to effect the needed change?”

“We must bring private schools into the fold.”

“Pardon me?”

“Private schools are the last barrier to multi-culturalism. Children educated in these moral equivalents of the Sharia Schools are the least open to multi-cultural values.”

Senator Bruemmer was having difficulty following the train of thought. “Are you saying that all private schools are like Muslim fundamentalist schools? Aren’t there many secular private schools?”

“Virtually all private schools teach what are properly labeled ‘conservative values.’ Until we have a liberal respect for the many cultural traditions of the world, we will continue to have cultures in conflict. That is the reason the world is at war.”

Senator Wressler was getting impatient with the private seminar on multiculturalism. “Mr. Secretary, what do you believe is the first step we should take towards realizing the President’s vision for education reform?”

“We need a unified foundation for science curriculum.”

Senator Bruemmer was taken aback, “Science? I thought your academic focus was on American History. Why science?”

“By definition, with American History, you deal with the history of America. With science you deal with the history of the world, and indeed the universe. Clearly the question of origins is the single most foundational concept of any culture. Most scientists now recognize that the previous administration had—among other wars—conducted a war on science. It is now time to reverse the damage. Until we purge the polarizing notion that ‘men are created in the image of God’ we will never realize a truly multicultural world at peace.”

Senator Bruemmer was still not satisfied, “Sounds like religion to me. How does this relate to science?”

The Secretary’s smile broadened as his eyes narrowed, “The authority of science is virtually unquestioned. The evolutionary paradigm has unified the rest of the world but because America has rejected it, we are at risk of losing our leadership role in higher education. Still, because of the increasing power of science in the public mind there should be very little resistance to a new academic standard in the form of science graduation requirements. This standard should include a graded-mastery requirement in evolutionary principles at every level, primary through secondary, public and private.”

“Okay, do you have a plan to achieve such a goal?” asked Senator Bruemmer.

“Clearly the influence of ‘creationism’ in America has been long and deep. A recent *Newsweek* poll indicated that 90% of Americans believe in a Creator, and 60% still believe the Biblical account of creation happened a few thousand years ago. Yet there is evidence that we are on the threshold of a metaphysical sea change. Significant fundamentalist leaders are indicating a readiness to embrace the modern scientific age. Specifically, they are ready to accept an evolutionary origin for the universe including billions of years.”

Again Senator Bruemmer was concerned, “Does the time-frame really matter to them? I thought that creationists were flexible on this matter. Isn’t the real issue biological evolution?”

The Secretary was quick to respond, “That’s a common misunderstanding of the history of modern science. Many imagine Charles Darwin came out of nowhere, published the *Origin of the Species*, and the rest was history. The fact is that the first cracks in the creationist foundation were formed when a new history of the earth replaced the Bible’s account. While on voyage to the Galapagos Islands, Darwin’s theory was actually inspired by reading Charles Lyell’s book *Principles of Geology*. You see, Lyell’s strategy was to overthrow the Genesis account of history by arguing for an earth that was millions of years older than the Bible allowed. Darwin merely formulated evolution as the logical implication of an ancient universe haunted by suffering, pain, and death. That is what finally led to the principle of ‘survival of the fittest.’”

Senator Bruemmer asked, “So what evidence do you have that fundamentalists are embracing the evolution of the universe?”

Again the Secretary was enthused, “Undersecretary Dewey Pullman just brokered a textbook deal that assumes full acceptance of the Big Bang and all the evolutionary implications for the origin of the universe. A leading fundamentalist spokesperson has not only offered his endorsement, but actually proposed the plan. Conservative publishers have offered to implement the proposal. The original plan was to have a religious endorsement sell these ideas in the public schools. Now with a new academic standard we can effectively require this new series of textbooks for all schools, both public and private, and this with the full support of the most conservative religious and political leaders in America. This is a very significant step forward.”

Senator Wressler was ready for the next step, “This is excellent news Mr. Secretary. Now we need to address the remaining issue—biological evolution. Any thoughts on this matter?”

“Yes, this is clearly needed, but it is also very challenging. The so-called ‘intelligent design theory’ has breathed new life into old creationism. Now those in this movement try to distance themselves from creationism, but everyone knows where they are going with this. In fact, the very conservative religious leaders we just mentioned have retreated from a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis only because they believe this is a more defensible position. However I believe that intelligent design may well be their ‘Alamo.’”

The eyes of Senator Bruemmer widened, “What do you have in mind?”

“What we need is another Scopes Monkey Trial, but this time in reverse.”

“Oh yeah, my son just did a school report on the movie *Inherit the Wind*. Spencer Tracy was brilliant as the defense attorney for Scopes. I thought the movie was fascinating and informative, but a classmate later told him that it was a fictional version of the trial. Is that true?”

“They never claimed the movie was a documentary. What matters were the results. America began its retreat from creationism during that time by means of a little poetic license.”

“Oh. Sure, I understand.”

“Now, I assume you have heard of the new advocate of intelligent design and his theory of ‘coded junk DNA.’ This *Elder* from the Bible belt of the University of Alabama seems to be the last fundamentalist holdout in southern academia.”

“Mr. Secretary,” said Senator Wressler, “I believe that I have a useful contact for you. Dr. Michael Rigidson does consulting work for the NAS to advance the teaching of

evolution in both secondary and post-secondary education. He is a philosopher of science with a particular interest and experience with religious schools. He actually attended a noted religious school in southern California. He was a celebrated graduate of that school and was expected to go into the ministry. He then went on to Glendale College where it appears that he finally learned some science. He soon became an ardent evolutionist and anti-creationist. One of my aides made me aware of his recent work consulting for the University of Alabama. You see the UA had a legal battle with a couple of professors, Dr. Tom Johnson, and his close friend *Dr. William Elder*. After this Rigidson worked with the UA to institute a set of policy standards now used to ensure professors don't undermine the reputation of their institution. With the politics surrounding research funding—fifty-eight percent from the federal government—creationism is seen as a real black-eye for southern schools trying to shake off old stereotypes.”

“He does sound interesting and his background could be very useful.”

“There is one problem. From his writings it is clear that Rigidson has traded one notion of absolute truth—Christianity—for another—Science. I am not sure that your postmodern approach will set well with this particular modernist.”

“Absolutism is always a concern, but in this case it shouldn't present a problem. By definition, modernism is the precursor to any postmodern culture and, really, the majority ends up there anyway. That said, I would suggest you contact him rather than I.”

Senator Bruemmer looked like a child at the deep end of the pool, “How does any of this relate to science?”

Secretary Shinn appeared amused, “One of my favorite philosophers of science, Paul Feyerabend, carried the current interest in ‘paradigms’ to its logical end. He compared modern science to an aging boxer obsessed with his own press-clippings, making claims far beyond his ability to deliver. According to Feyerabend science has become an oppressive ideology, even though it started as a liberation movement. He maintained that a multi-cultural society should be protected from the control of science, just as it is protected from any oppressor. People should be free to choose any means of reaching ‘truth’ however they choose to define it.”

Senator Wressler picked up the conversation before Bruemmer could question further, “Mr. Secretary, as you know, we are on the Commerce Committee chaired by Senator Paul Field who has called a Senate hearing on potential NIH funding for Dr. Elder's research. It also appears that Field has an axe to grind with the President's plan to fully fund stem cell research.”

“Yes, I am very aware of this situation, and this may be just the opportunity we are looking for. There is a great deal of public support for stem cell research. All we have to do is show how opposition to stem cell research is really a lack of compassion for suffering people. It shouldn't be hard to show that the only thing standing in the way is creationism.”

Senator Bruemmer jumped in again before he could get cut off, “Yes, compassion, just like in *Inherit the Wind*. That fundamentalist pastor was so heartless to his daughter. But what exactly does creationism have to do with stem cell research?”

Senator Wressler was peeved. “It has to do with the pro-life love affair with the fetus!”

The Secretary feigned a tone of understanding, “They actually believe that life begins at conception and so embryonic stem cell research is a form of abortion. They also believe that God is opposed to changing the original created kind embodied in human DNA. For them, all such work will end with mutants and chimeras.”

“Chimeras?”

“Yes, in Greek mythology, the Chimera was a creature made of the parts of multiple animals—like the Hydra that Hercules defeated.”

Senator Bruemmer still did not seem to be following. The Secretary tried to coax him along, “Do you remember *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, by HG Wells?”

“Oh yes, I saw the movie back when I was in high school. Burt Lancaster was perfect as the cold, logical scientist.”

“Okay then, in modern biology, the DNA of plants, animals, and even humans can actually be combined. One way is to physically mix cells from two independent zygotes—that is, fertilized cells—and let them grow into cell cultures for stem cell research and other purposes.”

“Isn’t this all just science fiction? No one is actually doing this with humans, are they?”

“Well actually, chimeras are not uncommon in genetic research. And as for human chimeras, there have been a number of little-known experiments completed successfully. These include the combination of human DNA with cow eggs, sheep eggs, and even rabbit eggs for stem cell research.”

“Surely there are legal limits to this sort of thing?”

“Surely. That is why the President has prompted a select Senate subcommittee to study what it really means to be a human being. They hope is to create a new value system for life that is more flexible than Biblical literalism allows. The result of this effort should guide bio-ethicists well into the future. Someday creationist fears about genetic engineering will be seen as the moral equivalent of their discredited notion of ‘the fixity of the species.’”

Senator Wressler summarized their meeting, “In a meeting I had with the President last week, she said this is finally time to turn back the anti-science policies of the previous administration. As you know she now expresses faith in the power of progressive human spirituality and so she has been working to enlist religious and scientific leaders to achieve her vision for worldwide unity through the coming Bicentennial Darwin Day Celebration. To that end she has employed the resources of *InterCon*, an intercontinental network of public relations firms. She asked that I ensure the minister who organized this event and who has written extensively on the compassion of government funded stem cell research, be included in our plans. As she said, ‘One clergyman with a backward collar is worth dozens of scientists any day.’ The President summarized her hope for the future, “We will finally see change we can believe in when we unite America with the world through a synthesis of science and spirituality.”

Secretary Shinn concluded, “Through evolution we may finally rewrite the oppressed people’s history of the world.”

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## Chapter 13: This Sunday Morning



The pleasant hostess of this very exclusive English drinks party was conscientiously making the rounds. Her staff fanned out with *InterCon* blazers like worker bees directed by the queen. The naturally forming affinity groups could be classified into two distinct species, those belonging behind a pulpit and those belonging behind a microscope. The hostess had a great deal of cross-fertilization left to accomplish at this posh venue, the Museum of Garden History across the Thames from Westminster Abbey.

With an air of gravity she began, “Please let me introduce you gentlemen: Dr. Franz Nicholas, Director of the Max Plank Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology; this is The Very Reverend Lawrence Page, Canon of Westminster Abbey.”

“I am honored to meet you Reverend... that is Very Reverend...”

“Please, call me Lawrence this evening. Really, it is so good to finally meet you Dr. Nicholas. I have a feeling we will soon become fast friends.”

“Well thank you very much. And you may call me Franz. Please let me thank you for the honor of an invitation to speak at this important, coming occasion.”

“You are quite welcome. As the Director of the Clergy Letter Project, I am likewise honored to have a scientist of your international standing participate in the Bicentennial Darwin Day celebration. As I am sure you recognize, science has a real marketing problem. With the slate of speakers now assembled, we may finally dispel the ‘Frankenstein Factor’ in the public mind. Now please, can I get you a cocktail?”

“Oh thank you, but just some *Limo*—I guess you would call it lemonade—will be fine for me.”

“A German teetotaler?”

“Yah sure, I suppose I am. But like every good German, I once drank with the crowd, but it was best for me to give it up.”

“Very well. I am sure we can find you some tonic.”

“Thank you very much. Now, Lawrence, I was wondering about the other speakers for the celebration. What are their backgrounds?”

“Well, as you might hope, there will be spokespersons from many disciplines of science, but especially the biological sciences—human biology, plant biology, zoology, population biology, astrobiology; and also your own field—anthropology. Other disciplines include astronomy and geology. The religious leaders likewise come from

various backgrounds—Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Judaism, Catholicism, and several Protestant denominations, including your own—isn't it Lutheran?"

"Well, I did grow up as a member of the state Evangelical Lutheran Church, but I now attend Munich All Nations Baptist Church."

"*Indeed.* It appears I assumed too much when I read in your bio you are a German evangelical Christian."

"Ah...yes. Now as a scientist I am thoroughly committed to the theory of evolution, but some might assume this means I can't be a Christian. The fact is that I am very involved in Christian ministry at the Institute. Too many people get hung up on the whole evolution versus creation argument. One of the great tragedies of the last 100 years is the way in which this has been polarized. The idea of asking people to disbelieve the scientific data in order to prove that they believe in God is so unnecessary. I look forward to dispelling that myth from the pulpit of Westminster Abbey on Darwin Day."

"I see, Dr. Nicholas. We can talk about the details of the speaking program later this evening. But please, as I understand it, many now place your accomplishments in sequencing the Neanderthal DNA on the same level as the Human Genome Project. In comparing the two, it seems you finally proved that Neanderthal was genetically outside the range of human variation. Is it possible that this will be the last nail in the creationist coffin?"

"Thank you for your generosity, but that may be going farther than the evidence allows."

"Oh you scientists are such modest fellows. But really, why shouldn't we conclude that Neanderthal is the intermediate link between modern humans and our prehistoric ancestors?"

"Well, first of all, scientists don't view Neanderthal as a link to modern humans, but only as a separate branch."

"I'm not sure I understand the distinction."

"Well, our research team concluded that Neanderthal diverged from a common ancestor some 465,000 years ago. We also believe that the divergent point mutations we quantified define a genetic barrier for a distinct species."

"Oh, so they were not able to interbreed with humans?"

"Well yes, that's what our research team concluded, but the debate still goes on. After all, it's not possible to prove that interbreeding was impossible. Other researchers have conducted a statistical analysis from a different perspective. There are those who claim they have fossil evidence of interbreeding while others claim physical evidence for co-existence."

"I see. I suppose that's always the way with science."

"Yah sure."

At this point Reverend Page appeared to be framing a question, "Now Franz, I wonder if you could help my understanding of what is supposed to be a controversial discovery—something about an empirical rate of mutation. As I understand it, scientists finally measured the rate of mutation for mitochondrial DNA over three generations and found it was an order of magnitude greater than it should have been. To what are they comparing this measured value?"

“Well, scientists first came up with a mutation rate by estimating the number of differences in point mutations between chimpanzees and humans and then dividing the result by time—that is, 4 million years ago.”

“That sounds straightforward. So they’re saying the estimate disagreed with the measured value, but why the controversy? It seems as though a greater rate would support a greater degree of evolutionary change.”

“Well, that’s not quite how it works. The controversy arose when these researchers used their empirical mutation rate to calibrate the molecular clock for mitochondrial DNA and the result came out at approximately 6,500 years. That was clearly incompatible with the known age of modern humans.”

Reverend Page raised a distinguished eyebrow, “Sounds like an effort to justify a Biblical timescale—a literal interpretation I mean. Are creationists now tolerated in the ranks of legitimate science?”

“Oh these were no creationists. In fact, they were the ones that concluded that their results were incompatible with what is already known to be true. There must be another explanation.”

“Yes indeed. I suppose that new research will soon prove these results are incorrect.”

“Yah sure, that’s what we expect at the Institute. However, more recent research on the mutational rate for mice has confirmed the results for humans. But just let me say—confidentially—that my research team is working on a plan to address these issues.”

“I see Dr. Nicholas. I have to say I was not aware of how this reflected on your research.”

“Please do not misunderstand. I believe there is other strong evidence for human evolution but this may not be the best example to cite for macroevolution.”

“What other evidence are you referring to?”

“Well, for myself, I would have to say the most compelling would be the ‘shared mistakes’ in pseudogenes in a line of descent.”

“So is this the focus of your new research?”

“No, no, that’s not one of the options under consideration, but...”

Just then the hostess joined them to make another introduction. “Gentlemen, please let me introduce Dr. Samuel Hawkins, chairman of the Neuroscience department at Cambridge. This is Dr. Franz...”

“No need for introductions here! Franz and I already know each other. We met recently in a debate interview conducted by *Die Welt* magazine. And Lawrence and I have been working together for quite some time now.”

The hostess recovered well from the interruption and offered, “Well then, can I get you gentlemen another cocktail or...?”

Without so much as a glance, Dr. Hawkins cut-in again, “Please no. I have already had enough!” The hostess appeared to have had enough also and dismissed herself quietly.

“Well Franz, you decided to join the winning team and recognize Westminster Abbey’s most honored resident on his birthday. Finally, a holiday to rival Christmas!”

Dr. Nicholas sighed and adopted a parental tone, “Now Dr. Hawkins, as you know, I have always said the evidence for evolution is more than satisfactory.”

Dr. Hawkins snapped back, “Oh I know that Franz, but another question still remains, is there satisfactory evidence for God?”

Reverend Page intervened, “Now please Samuel, this is a social affair, not a debate. Can we focus on our shared agreements?”

“Now you, Lawrence, better be nice or I might ‘share’ some of your beliefs about God with this sincere believer.” Reverend Page was noticeably uneasy with the attention of the guests all around.

Dr. Hawkins picked up where he left off, “Franz, I still don’t see how you can reconcile your belief in a good-God with a ‘Nature red in tooth and claw,’ to quote Tennyson”?

“Dr. Hawkins, as I said for the interview in *Die Welt* I don’t see these realms as polarized as you do. I believe there is ample evidence that God works through the evolutionary process. Regarding the supposed problem you mentioned, C.S. Lewis offered an excellent defense in his book *The Problem of Pain*. In any event, I believe that a faith in God and science are perfectly compatible.”

“I read Lewis’s book several times. What I finally decided was his most painful ‘trial’ was trying to explain how Christianity and evolution were compatible!”

“Dr. Hawkins, perhaps the missing ingredient is faith.”

Dr. Hawkins sneered, “Faith? I don’t think so. And as for Lewis, in the end he blinked.”

“Blinked? What do you mean by that?” said Dr. Nicholas.

“He lost faith!”

“Now Dr. Hawkins, C.S. Lewis certainly did suffer a devastating loss in the death of his wife, but there is absolutely no evidence that he ever lost faith in God.”

Now Dr. Hawkins smiled, “Not faith in God. Lewis lost faith in science. When he first got religion he was resigned to the fact of evolution. But in the end he shared in private letters that he had lost faith in evolution. He even admitted to regrets because he realized too late in life that evolution was a formidable threat to the Christian faith. Sooner or later you will too!”

Reverend Page finally jumped in, “Please gentlemen, I just heard the butler calling. Dinner is served. I understand that our host has laid out a sumptuous feast for us to enjoy with entertainment.”

With that Dr. Hawkins turned and sauntered off without even excusing himself, leaving Dr. Nicholas and Reverend Page standing alone.

“Please let me apologize for Samuel’s intemperance. As he said, he had too many cocktails.”

Dr. Nicholas appeared very unsettled, but he pulled himself together. “No, there is no problem. In the end, I will have my say. On Darwin Day, I have planned to share my personal testimony about the compatibility of my Christian faith with my confidence in modern science.”

Reverend Page appeared uneasy, “Now Dr. Nicholas I meant to talk with you later. Because of the limited time allotted for the many speakers, your comments will have to be confined to two minutes. No more. There are so many representative speakers that must give a short greeting and affirmation of the compatibility of religion with modern science. And please do understand that I am not at liberty to share about a

very prestigious, surprise guest speaker. In fact, Imam Achmad Cassiem and I will share only seven minutes for a homily on tolerance in order to allow time for her remarks.”

Dr. Nicholas was stunned, but he managed another question, “How long will Dr. Hawkins be speaking that day?”

Reverend Page swallowed deeply, “This will be a first for Samuel. In the pulpit of Westminster Abbey he will be on foreign territory. So in the interest of showing religious tolerance we have accorded him thirty minutes as the central speaker to honor the memory of Charles Darwin.”

“I think I see things more clearly now. I will have to consider this further. I will let you know tomorrow what I plan to do this Sunday morning.”

“Please do get back to me early tomorrow. With only four days remaining, the public relations firm will need time to reprint the program. And please understand that the letter of invitation explained that your honorarium was contingent on your speaking.”

“Yes, I will certainly keep that important little item in mind. At this point I think I will excuse myself. I seem to have lost my appetite. I will call your office first thing in the morning. Good evening Reverend Page.”

“Very well, Dr. Nicholas. In the morning.”

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## Chapter 14: Revelation



“Professor Powell! How can you hike up this trail so fast without getting winded? I am at least twenty-five years younger than you and I can hardly keep up.”

“Please Bill, you can call me Andrew. But now listen to the voice of experience. When Emily finally has your baby, you too will get in shape chasing after him.”

“So that’s your secret—chasing after those three children of yours. Well okay, now that we’ve finally made it to the peak of Mt. Neahkahnne, how about some help with another parenting secret?”

“Sure, what is it, Bill?”

“Professor... that is Andrew, this may sound strange at this point in the game, but I often wonder about being up to the task—of being a father, I mean. Although I know my dad loved me, our relationship was pretty rocky. I sometimes worry about how well it will go for my son and I.”

“Well let me tell you that I felt the very same way, but for some different reasons. I actually had a great relationship with my Dad, who was a pastor, but the concern I had was if I could measure up to his standard. He was always there for me. But because my wife and I got married while we were still in college, and had children early, it was extremely difficult to juggle all the priorities.”

“I guess I can relate. Emily and I got married at the end of our junior year and here in our senior year we’re already parents. I have to admit that I am scared stiff about being a father.”

“Bill, let me tell you something else from experience. Once your son is born, everything will change. There is something miraculous about holding this perfectly beautiful creation of God in your arms. The love that fuels the heart of a parent and which reflects God’s love for us, is so powerful that your fears will melt away. You will want to love him with everything you have and when that is combined with the loving wisdom of God, your motives will be transformed. I know this will happen for you too, Bill.”

“Thank you very much Andrew. I really do appreciate that. And I really respect you and your wife for the great parents you are. I have full confidence in my Emily. She

has such a wonderful heart. I really trust her natural abilities and her genuine faith in Jesus. But it just seems like my own faith needs to grow.”

“Bill, is there something in particular troubling you?”

“Well I really seem to sense a ‘calling to ministry’, but though my love for God’s Word has grown in leaps and bounds in your College Bible Study Group, I can’t quite see myself going into seminary when I graduate. Emily seems to believe this is the right thing, but I just can’t see it.”

“You know what I think. I think that Emily believes in you, Bill. But now tell me, what have you loved the most in your studies at the University of Washington?”

“Well I have always loved the classes I took in the biological sciences. I also find the history and philosophy of science courses enlightening. But I can’t see how these relate to God’s calling in my life. And further, I feel uncomfortable when professors challenge the Biblical account of creation in order to promote the theory of evolution. They actually appear to be pressing for a conversion to their point of view. Some of my friends entering graduate programs say it’s a ‘prerequisite’. If you know of some sort of absolute proof for creation, or even against evolution, I would be very interested.”

“Bill, I think you may not be aware of the dignity that God can accord to work done outside the church.”

“What do you mean?”

“According to the Bible, God works through anyone who recognizes that their gifts and abilities come from Him and that the Holy Spirit can empower them to give Him the glory.” Andrew pulled out a pocket Bible and opened it near the beginning. “Right here in Exodus chapter 31, it says,

‘See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship...’

“Now in context, this is describing the creative skills given to this man Bezaleel to build the tabernacle, however, by extension we may correctly apply the principle to all sorts of workmanship—from artistic to scientific. You see, when we dedicate our God-given wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to God, He is glorified in our Spirit-led ‘workmanship.’”

“Are you suggesting that I can fulfill God’s calling on my life by working in the sciences?”

“Well, you need to pray about this with your dear wife Emily and see how God leads you as a couple. But just let me say that this is precisely what I did some twenty-five years ago before I entered a graduate program in physiology.”

“You know I sensed that this was the case when I learned that you were a committed Christian working in a secular university. I really appreciate your example to Emily and I.”

“Thank you very much Bill. But let me say that it hasn’t always been easy. However, one thing that helped me tremendously was when I learned the nature of a Biblical epistemology. I wonder if I could share some of what that means to me?”

“A Biblical theory of knowledge? I thought it just boiled down to revelation. Please do go ahead.”

“Well, in fact it does come down to revelation, but we need to recognize that there are two kinds of revelation—special and general.”

“Okay.”

Andrew held up three fingers to enumerate the principle, “Now, special revelation communicates God’s will through miracles, the incarnation of Christ, and God’s Word. On the other hand, general revelation communicates God’s ways through nature, the conscience and reason, and in history.”

“It sounds like you are saying they are analogous to each other.”

“Yes, I am. However there is one key difference.”

“What’s that?”

“General revelation comes through man’s reaching out to *get* knowledge of God’s creation and is limited by his own abilities. Special revelation, on the other hand, comes as a result of God reaching out to *give* knowledge of Himself and is not limited by man at all.”

“I *see*. I never thought of it that way. It sounds like it’s really easy to mix up the apples with the oranges.”

“Indeed it is. Too many people think we ought to be able to do an experiment to ‘prove’ that God created the universe, or that He exists, or for the resurrection. There is indeed a great deal of confirming evidence for these in the natural world, in the conscience and reason, and in history, but by definition there can be no ‘proof.’ I would be glad to share this evidence with you, but first we need to recognize that science doesn’t deal with any sort of ‘proof’ at all.”

“What do you mean? I thought that was what science was all about.”

“Well, actually the concept of a ‘proof’ is only relevant to mathematics and logic where certain things may be shown to be equivalent through definitions. In that case, when a single valid proof is found, no other is required. Science on the other hand, deals with observational evidence acquired in the present that can only increase or decrease the probability of a theory being true, but never prove it being so. And let me add quickly that all too often people confound the scientific method with the historical-evidential method when dealing with the questions of origins. So when people say they ‘know’ a certain thing we must always ask the question, ‘how do they know?’”

Bill paused for a minute to let things sink in. Then he said slowly, “I do believe that I’ve fallen for a philosophical ‘shell game.’”

“Bill this is very common. Most of my academic peers have fallen prey to this as well. But years ago my Dad shared a relevant principle about the relationship between faith and understanding from Hebrews 11:3 which says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command...” The key words are, “By faith... we understand.”

“I think I am beginning to see.”

“Bill, please let me offer this word of encouragement. Always trusts God’s Word for its clear statements. Then have a positive expectation that the scriptures will be confirmed by real observations. Genuine faith is tested faith. Always be willing to look under every rock. If you do, you will soon enjoy the confirmation of such faith.”

Again, Bill paused, “You were right. That really does help. I am going to have to think through some of this in order to sort out the implications. Even so, I believe this will help a lot. Andrew, I don’t know how I can thank you enough for inviting me on this

hike up Mt Neahkahnie. It is so beautiful up here looking out over the Pacific Ocean and back into the Nehalem Bay.” Then Bill’s mouth dropped open as he pointed back to where they had hiked up, “Andrew, look at that rainbow! It is *so* incredibly beautiful. You know, the heavens really do declare the glory of God.”

“Bill, I think you have already gotten a hold of what matters. When God gives you a revelation, you give Him the glory.”

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## Chapter 15: Faith on Trial



Tom and Mary alternated looking at the clock and at the doorknob in this classic, but dated Washington DC hotel room. They seemed more like anxious parents than the close friends they had become with Bill and Emily. But then, Mary had promised her dearest friend she would look after Bill. Tom talked with Bill hours before and he sounded troubled, explaining he needed to go for a “walk to clear his head.” Now the senate hearing was an hour away. Just then, they perceived a barely audible knock. Mary ran to open the door, and found Bill standing there ruffled and eyes downcast. She pulled him in by the arm and launched into a motherly interrogation.

“Bill,” said Mary, “you didn’t wear your new suit!”

“I forgot to pack it. Besides, the senators don’t care about that sort of thing.”

“Don’t you kid yourself,” said Mary, “They’ll all be wearing thousand-dollar suits and looking in the cameras to make sure their hair is combed.”

Bill looked at the mirror and ran his fingers through a shock of graying hair that immediately fell back over his eyes as if to cover his troubled countenance.

“It doesn’t really matter. I am not feeling very good about this anyway.”

“I’m sorry Bill, what’s going on for you? Is Andrew okay?” said Mary.

“Oh he’s fine, everything’s fine, except for the fact that I have a really bad feeling about the senate hearing.”

“What kind of feeling,” said Tom?

“Well, every so often I have these ‘delusions of adequacy.’ This is not one of those times.”

“Oh Bill, you ‘got to have faith’,” said Tom. Mary glanced at her husband with a look of uncertainty.

“You know me Tom, I am a competent research scientist. But as a philosopher of science, I am a rank amateur. Too few people care about science anyway. All they care about is technology—computers, cell phones, hybrid cars, and entertainment systems. I feel like I should have left all of this alone. What was I thinking of?”

Tom began with a heightened sensitivity; “Bill, I can understand why all this would make you nervous, but remember that you have prayed about this, and many others have prayed for you. Now is the time to let go of all the things we can’t control and let God take control.”

“Oh, I know that God is in control, but what I’m concerned about is the possibility that I have been presumptuous about His way of guiding this whole thing as though I were the only one He could talk to.”

“Now you listen to me Bill. I am not going to stand by while you second guess your motives and beat yourself up. You didn’t ask for any of this and all along you have avoided the limelight. We have been with you as you poured out your heart before God and asked for the Spirit of Christ to lead you in your work and motives. God can lead a humble servant. And I believe that is what you are.”

“I don’t know. What made me think that I should do this when there are others who are gifted debaters? And you were there when the Finding Institute offered its experience and legal counsel, and I turned them down flat.”

“Well Bill, I have to admit that it was hard for me to hear you turn down such an offer, but I can honestly say that I think it was done on principle.”

“But Tom, there have been so many good spokesmen for the design argument in the last century and yet the results have always come out the same. We lose in the courts and in politics and only retain a toehold through public opinion. Now even that seems in danger. What makes me think I will do any better than those that have gone before me? I am haunted by questions of motive, competency, and timing. And why should I be the one who is here, at this place, and this time? I just don’t know...” With unrest rising and moving over him, Bill looked hard and away to a distant horizon.

“Why not you?”

The question seemed to come out of nowhere and hung in the air for some time before Bill became aware and turned back disturbed, “What did you say, Tom?”

“Well...you seem to be asking, ‘Why me?’ I asked, ‘Why not you?’”

The agitation on Bill’s face seemed to melt away. He looked down for some time and then up again with tears.

“Please forgive me, Tom and Mary. The feeling that has been gripping me has nothing to do with what is going on today. I know this feeling. It has to do with my grief in losing Emily. It’s that same sinking feeling of the death of hope when I felt so helpless and afraid that I was losing her. I tried to appear brave for Mary and Andrew, but I was living in quiet desperation for weeks before her death.”

Mary groaned, “I’m so sorry, Bill.”

Bill acknowledged Mary’s concern and then picked up his recollection, “I remember asking, ‘Why are you doing this Lord? I don’t understand. Why me!’ Then in my grief it came to me—an image of Christ on the cross calling out, ‘My God, my God, *why* have you forsaken me!’” He chose to experience this agony with us and cried out to His Father, ‘Why!’ Why this, why now, why me? Then as I considered the kind of love that moved him to die in agony for me, I felt him restoring my hope and these words came to me, ‘Why *not* me?’”

Tom responded, “Bill, I did not mean to bring up those hard times again, I just meant...”

“No, Tom, it’s okay. Don’t you see? This is the other side of the same question. If God can choose to allow something so painful to enter my life, He can also choose to allow something that brings joy and peace. The only question is, will I allow faith to carry me there? I know Jesus did. And because of what he did, so can I. Just like then, this is a time for faith.”

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## Chapter 16: To the Lions



Just as Tom and Bill walked out of the Hyatt Regency, a taxi cued up. Tom asked the driver, “Can you take us to The Dirksen Senate Office Building?”

“Yes sir, it’s about three miles from here.”

“Great. That’s our destination.”

After they settled in, Tom opened the complimentary *Washington Post* provided by the hotel. At first he casually scanned the newspaper, but then his eyes stopped and widened. Immediately, he closed the paper and put it aside. Bill could not help but notice.

“What’s going on Tom?”

He gave Bill a glance and quickly turned away. “Oh nothing. I don’t think my breakfast set very well with me.”

“What did you see in the paper? Here, let me see it.”

Tom moved in slow motion and only released the paper when it was tugged away. Bill opened it quickly, looked from top to bottom, and immediately saw the last headline. “*Son of ID Advocate Has AIDS.*”

“Oh Tom, not Andrew!”

“I am so sorry, Bill.”

Bill drove his finger into the paper as if to expose the source—*The Huffington Post*. Then he crumpled it and cast it down to the floor.

“I should have known it would come to this!”

“Bill, it should have never come to this. There are laws against this sort of thing. These types take pleasure in the pain of others, and everybody will know how wrong this is.”

“That doesn’t help Andrew!”

After some hesitation, Tom said, “I’m so sorry Bill. I just don’t know what to say.”

Bill sat silently for some time and then looked over to his friend, “No, Tom, I’m sorry. This is just what they want—me lashing out. It’s just that every time I feel like I’ve got my feet under me I get hit again. Tom, will you please pray for me.”

“Yes I will Bill. Let’s pray.” The two friends grasped hands and bowed their heads. Tom prayed a brief, but powerful prayer for the protection of Andrew and God’s blessing of peace and strength for Bill.

Just then the taxi came to a halt and the driver apologetically announced, “The Dirksen Building.”

Tom paid the cab fare and then Bill looked at him and said, “There’s no turning back now.” With that, they stepped out of the cab.

They found themselves at the side of the building looking for an entrance. As they rounded the corner they saw a crowd with reporters and television crews gathering.

“Tom, I wonder what’s going on? Maybe there is some big event going on here today.” As they walked forward, a couple of men in dark suits with senate badges walked briskly toward them.

“Dr. Elder, we are aides of Senator Paul Field. He has asked us to accompany you to a meeting room.”

“Sure, please do,” said Bill. As they approached the gathering crowd, they were shocked by the picket signs, which had just come into view:

“Defend Science, Reject I.D.!”

“Just Say NO to the Dark Ages!”

“I.D. = Ignorant Design”

“Look Behind the Curtain: It’s the Great Wizard of I.D.”

“Back to the Bible Belt Billy-Bob.”

When the reporters noticed the aides leading Bill and Tom to the entrance they moved to cut them off. Holding microphones extended they yelled out questions,

“Dr. Elder, for CNN, is it true that you have cured cancer?”

“Dr. Elder, for the BBC, do you hope to make this hearing into a Scopes Monkey Trial II?”

“Dr. Elder, for the Huffington Post, how can ‘intelligent design’ explain the origin of AIDS?”

Until this Bill tried to escape attention, but now he stopped dead in his tracks to search the mob. Tom saw what was happening, grabbed Bill’s arm, and spoke into his ear, “Bill, don’t give them the satisfaction.”

Then Tom and the aides pulled Bill forward and past the crowd, up the stairs, and through the door.

After they had finally made it beyond security, Tom turned to the aides, “Why is the media so interested in this hearing? These Senate Appropriations hearings are usually bone-dry-boring.”

“Our sources tell us that the word got out this morning that this was a ‘red meat opportunity’ for the press. Tonight’s headlines have already gone out round the world.”

“How can that be?” objected Bill, “we haven’t spoken a word!”

“That is how the news works today. Haven’t you noticed how the international news outlets are all running the same headlines? Many now speculate about a potential common source or even a conspiracy.”

“More like a common conspiracy of spirit,” said Tom under his breath. The aides gave each other a puzzled glance as they stepped into the conference room.

“We will leave you here to meet with Senator Field.”

A few moments later, the senator entered from the opposite end of the room. Recognizing both his guests, he offered each man a handshake with a smile, “Dr. Elder, Dr. Johnson, my name is Paul Field. Let me welcome you to these Senate proceedings.

Now, some already call me the ‘vacating’ Commerce Committee Chair. I had really hoped that I had presided over my last Senate hearing before leaving office, but I felt this matter called for immediate action. That said; please let me make it clear that it is not my intention to have a ‘private hearing’ with you apart from the public hearings themselves. However I do feel that I have a responsibility to inform you about some things that have just come to my attention. As your formal letter of invitation stated, our original purpose in calling this hearing was to learn about the funding priorities of the NIH related to the most promising lines of medical research. Your part was to offer expert testimony on the future of your research. I now have it on good authority that the NIH is working with the NAS in an attempt to scuttle these proceedings so that a discussion about your research does not occur in the public news media. It appears that they are not pleased with the ‘interpretive revelations’ offered by Dr. Elder at his press conference. We now have evidence that some senators have arranged for counter-testimony—possibly hostile testimony—to be brought before the committee as well. So with that update, let me ask if you are still willing to offer your testimony?”

Bill and Tom looked at each other with what bordered on resignation, but which turned to resolve as they faced the senator.

“We are also aware of the hostility,” said Bill, “yet we feel that it is our responsibility to follow through with this process which is almost certainly pushed forward with providential force.”

“Well, I won’t say I fully understand your kind of faith, but I do believe that I have new reason to appreciate the faith of the fathers of this nation—lives, fortunes and honor—if you know what I mean. So I’ll take your response as a ‘yes?’”

They hesitated and together said, “Yes.”

“Very well, gentlemen, I will leave you to consider your strategy to explain your research to a bunch of ranchers, businessmen, and stock brokers turned-Senators. I wish you luck.” With that Senator Field shook their hands again, wheeled around, and strode out of the room.

“Bill, I understand that Senator Field has distinguished himself as an objective investigator. He asks tough questions, but is not so much interested in the politics as the truth. Very unusual. We may have a chance to make a difference here.”

“Let’s hope so.”

Then an aide opened the door to announce, “The Senate committee hearing is about to begin. Please let me show you to the gallery.”

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## Chapter 17: Science on Trial



The small hearing room was packed with media representatives in every chair and crowded into standing-room-only against the back walls. Hardwood-paneled walls reflected a cacophony of whispered conversations all around moving to a dissonant crescendo. Finally, a Senate aide called the meeting to order.

“All rise: Senator Paul Field, Commerce Committee Chair, Senator Wynona Wressler, and Senator Buck Bruemmer have entered the chamber.”

Like lapsed Catholics, Bill and Tom rose along with everyone else and waited to be seated along with everyone else.

When the room was finally settled, Senator Field gavelled the hearing to order, “The committee is now prepared to hear a summary testimony from Dr. John Cooperson, the Director of the National Institutes of Health.”

The Director cleared his voice and began to read a prepared statement, “Senator Field, and ranking sub committee members, Senator Bruemmer and Senator Wressler, I thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the research-priorities of the National Institutes of Health foundation. For over seventy-five years, the NIH has been charged with a mission to uncover new knowledge that will lead to better health for all of humanity. Helping lead the way toward important medical discoveries that improve people’s health and save lives, NIH funding supports research into the causes, treatments, and cures for common and rare diseases. This key role has been crucial to the strength of America, her quality of life—and now we understand—her national security. It is hard to imagine a more relevant subject than what comes before us today. The biological research priorities that are determined today will set the course for medical research in America for the next twenty-five years. The consensus of the scientific community is now focused on the wonderful promise offered by stem cell therapy, which may allow replacement of dead cells in damaged tissue and could someday cure what are now incurable genetic disorders. This is the reason that the entire scientific community has hailed the President’s recent proposal to remove all unreasonable federal funding restrictions for this vital research.”

“Dr. Cooperson,” said Senator Field looking at his notes, “in April of last year scientists announced a new treatment of muscular dystrophy in mice using adult stem cells. Days after scientists successfully treated Type 1 diabetes with adult stem cells and 93% of the patients stopped taking insulin because their bodies now produce it naturally. Finally, in November, two studies showed that adult skin cells in humans could be

‘reprogrammed’ to function like embryonic stem cells. This breakthrough technique has all promise you just cited with none of the ethical problems associated with embryonic tissue research. To date, many treatments have been developed using adult stem cells yet not one from embryonic stem cells. Why then does the President insist on funding embryonic stem cell research?”

“These are very important advancements, but we can’t ignore the fact that scientists of other nations are steadily making progress in this field with the aid of their governments.”

“For instance, Dr. Hwang in South Korea? Before it was discovered that he faked key research results, wasn’t he considered the world leader in embryonic stem cell research?”

“That was an unfortunate case that does not represent the vast majority of ethical scientific institutions around the world. In fact, many religious leaders and bio-ethicists are now weighing in on this matter—in favor of compassion—and have cast their support behind the President’s proposal.”

“Are you referring to the piece by Dr. Simon Crooner in yesterday’s New York Times? Isn’t he the one who claims that babies are not ‘persons’ until they are three months old?”

“Well, some would say that Dr. Crooner’s position has been misrepresented. Be that as it may, the vast majority of scientists have rallied behind the President’s proposal.”

With that, Senator Wressler interrupted, “Senator Field, I do believe you are trying to make Dr. Cooperson responsible for every one of the many bioethicists who have joined the scientific community on this matter.”

“Just asking questions, for which I don’t seem to be getting straight answers. The honest truth is that I am still trying to form my own opinion, but it must be based on good information, not ‘science rallies.’”

The mood in the room was increasingly nervous.

“That said, I need to ask about the NIH plans for funding the progress of the research team at the University of Alabama under the direction of Dr. William Elder along with the team at Johns Hopkins.”

“Senator Field, the NIH is well aware of Dr. Elder’s work and it is still under consideration. However, we feel that it is premature to make any recommendation concerning plans for funding.”

“Dr. Cooperson, I am well aware that the NIH has Dr. Elder’s work ‘under consideration’, in fact, my sources tell me that there has been a move to significantly reduce funding for all block grants at the University Alabama and this contingent on UA support of Dr. Elder’s research. Can you explain this situation to me?”

An icy chill moved over Bill and Tom, as they were already riveted to the unfolding testimony. Tom whispered to Bill, “This is what he tried to warn us about.”

“Senator Field, please let me assure you that the NIH is committed to a balanced review of any significant claim for scientific advancement and even now a select committee of key scientists is preparing a summary report. We also have to keep the President’s plan to fully fund stem cell research in view. The NIH must carefully balance its priorities.”

“Indeed. And when will this report be ready?”

“Such an effort will take some time, something on the order of six months.”

“Just in time for my retirement.”

Senator Wressler leaned into the microphone, “Dr. Cooperson, is it true that the NIH is working with the National Academy of Sciences related to concerns about the methodological approach of the UA research team.”

“Well, not quite. Actually the administration of the University of Alabama has raised concerns about possible violations of university policy concerning the timing and approval process for the results of all major research projects. The NAS is simply consulting on these matters.”

One could visibly see the shock to Bill as he did a double-take and then turned to Tom with an expression of distress.

“And is the UA prepared to take action on these concerns?”

“The university administration has called in an NAS consultant who has worked with the NIH in the past. His expertise is in the philosophy of science and analysis of research methodologies.”

Senator Field pulled his microphone briskly toward him to let go of some frustration; “I would very much appreciate it if you would cut through the double talk. Is there some legitimate concern with the quality of Dr. Elder’s research or are you trying to discredit the man?”

Senator Bruemmer finally made his presence known in the proceedings; “Senator Field; Senator Wressler and I have arranged to hear testimony from the consultant just mentioned to learn about the research standards developed by the NAS and how these relate to the research team at the University of Alabama.”

“Very well. Perhaps he will address my questions directly.”

Senator Bruemmer motioned to an aide at the door, “Please call Dr. Michael Rigidson to enter the hearing room.”

Bill’s thoughts were in a spin. He wondered if he had ever shared with Tom about his chance encounter on the flight with Michael Rigidson. And now he was going to be giving testimony concerning his research. *But how could this be a coincidence?*

Tom looked at Bill’s strained expression wondering what was going on. “Are you okay, Bill?”

“I will explain later,” he whispered.

Senator Field looked down at his notes and began with a restored measure of reserve, “Dr. Rigidson, can you explain the concerns about the research of the team under the direction of Dr. Elder at the University of Alabama?”

Dr. Rigidson turned over at Bill and then back, never to look again, “The concerns are related to violations of standard policies now in place at the majority of public universities in the United States and indeed the world. That coupled with questions about non-scientific research methodologies.”

“Please do go on.” Senator Field’s patience was already running thin.

“First, to the point about standard policies at public universities. In the press conference where the results of the research were briefed to the media, Dr. Elder attempted to advance his own religious convictions about these matters in a way that is explicitly disallowed by a standard written policy that is now in place at the University of Alabama.”

“You seem to be saying that the university has a policy that professors can’t have ‘religious convictions.’ What about academic freedom and freedom of speech?”

“Well, these concerns come up all the time, so in the interest of maintaining academic excellence in public universities the NAS has drafted a set of policies that ensure that individuals don’t usurp the good reputation of their respective institutions.”

“So the answer is, ‘Yes.’ The NAS is trying to force out anyone who attempts to maintain their ‘religious convictions’ while working at a public university.”

“Senator Field, these policies have come before the courts in a number of cases. In an opinion by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, the Court held that public university professors have no constitutional right of academic freedom and that their right of free speech in the lecture hall is subject to approval by the University administration. In an appeal to the Supreme Court, the decision was upheld—5 to 4.”

“How in the world have we come to this when American universities are now in the business of student indoctrination? It appears to me that the NAS and the NIH have collaborated to pressure the UA administration to accept a ‘deal’ for continued funding at the expense of one of its leading researchers.”

“The fact is that the administration of the University of Alabama has tried to work with Dr. Elder and his associates in this case and another in the recent past.”

“Go on.”

“The University of Alabama was actually forced to address the teaching methods of Dr. Elder in the courts for a similar case.”

Now Tom looked at Bill with dismay.

Senator Field’s eyes narrowed, “I see. And I suppose you have some withering testimony to share with us.”

“Well, you can decide for yourself. In a previous case of policy misconduct at the University of Alabama involving Dr. Tom Johnson, the court upheld a university demand that he not mention his religious beliefs in class. In that case, Dr. Elder gave public testimony about the acceptability of Dr. Johnson offering a study unit titled, *Evidence of God in Human Biology*. The court ordered Dr. Johnson—and by extension—Dr. Elder, to stop this practice immediately.”

Senator Field was visibly perturbed, “So it appears that you have successfully banished God from the public university.”

“As stated before, a key concern raised by the University of Alabama relates to methodological naturalism. The university has a policy that science is the pursuit of natural causes and effects. An assumption that ‘God did it’ does not lead to scientific conclusions.”

“Since we will soon be hearing testimony from Dr. Elder, I will wait till then for further inquiry on this matter, but such policies are clearly founded on an anti-religious bias. Senators Bruemmer and Wressler, do you have a question for your witness?”

Senator Wressler looked over with apparent satisfaction, “I would say your questions covered things pretty well.” Senator Bruemmer simply said, “No.”

Without further hesitation, Senator Field said, “I move that we take a 5-minute break,” and he struck the gavel.

A senate aide motioned Bill and Tom to the exit and then led them to the conference room.

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## Chapter 18: Inheriting the Wind



Before Bill or Tom could speak, Senator Field entered the conference room. “Gentlemen! Things were getting pretty interesting in there.”

Bill turned to Tom and then the senator, “I know this guy—Rigidson. We met on a flight to Seattle. We had a short, tense, and very personal dialog. I pretty much laid out my entire life to him.”

The friends looked to each other and then Tom jumped in, “Senator, I apologize for not telling you in advance about the court case. I guess I have not yet accepted that the court ruling was final. By the way, the study unit on *Evidence of God in Human Biology* was optional and on my own time. It is still hard for me to believe courts rule in favor of universities that claim they “endorse everything they don’t censor.”

“Gentlemen don’t worry about it. I already knew about the court case. I expected something like this. The honest truth is that there is a lot of theater that goes on in these hearings and I felt like the cameras had to record a sincere response from Dr. Elder. I tried to forewarn you, but now you need to know that this may get even uglier.”

“What do you mean?” asked Bill with some alarm.

“I don’t think they have laid all their cards on the table. I suspect there is something else they could pull out depending on the next phase of testimony from you, Dr. Elder.”

“What do you want from me?”

“I know these characters and I just want to forewarn you that there is some real danger in moving forward. Dr Elder, I have to tell you that I believe what's going on here is not ultimately about ideology except to the degree that it threatens the funding of 'Big Science'. Even so, there does remain the possibility that such a public hearing will allow people to see the politics of this sort of ‘science.’ Again I ask, in view of the risks, are you willing to go forward?”

Bill swallowed deeply, looked to Tom and then to the Senator, “We must go forward.”

“Very good, gentlemen. Let’s take it to’um.” The senator turned again and left the room.

Just then Bill seemed startled. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out his cell phone vibrating. He could see Andrew's number on the preview display. Bill looked down and away as though he didn't have the strength to deal with his concerns about how Andrew was being affected by the news.

"Bill, we will call Andrew very soon. Right now you need to focus on this one thing. Can I pray for Andrew and you now?"

"Please do, Tom."

Tom took a deep breath and began, "Dear Father, I want to thank you for my friend Bill. You know his heart, the integrity of his life example, and his faith in your Son Jesus Christ. I am so thankful for his faithful support for me in my time of need. I ask that you lift him up so that he may honor you, as I know he desires. And now, Lord, we ask that you guard Andrew's heart and that your Spirit would be with him in a way that no one else can. In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

Just as they were finishing, the aide opened the door and urgently motioned to them, "They're ready."

They seated Bill at the center of the witness table before the Senate bench with Tom at his right hand.

Senator Field began. "Dr. Elder, can you explain the nature of your research and the implications for medical science?"

Bill began with a faltering voice, "My research—Senator—*Senators*—as a molecular biologist is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the genetic code. My particular area of research is related to what is called 'junk DNA.' The research team at the University of Alabama has discovered what appears to be a biological algorithm that was once used for error detection and correction in the DNA code. It is a previously unknown form of redundant data coding. We now believe this explains something on the order of 60% of the non-protein-coding DNA in the human Genome."

"And what are the implications for medical science?"

"Well, with such an algorithm we could, in principle, 're-map' portions of the human Genome, but this time 'reconstructing' what the DNA code was before the degenerative point mutations."

This statement finally raised the noise level to an intolerable level. Senator Field gave a brisk rap to the gavel, "Order! Hold the side-discussions for after the hearing!"

"Now, what is the basis for your confidence in these results?"

"Using this algorithm, we have now reconstructed the genetic code for certain 'pseudogenes.' We found that functional genes could be used as a template for comparison to the reconstruction of disabled pseudogenes. So far, the match has been perfect. The probability of stumbling on such a match is vanishingly small. Finally, these reconstructions have been repeated by the research team with the McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins."

"Now Dr. Elder, what about the concerns raised about your use of the scientific method?"

"Yes, Dr. Rigidson referred to 'methodological naturalism.' Philosophers do use that term, but to describe a particular worldview. According to this view one is required to assume everything has a natural cause, none intelligent, and certainly none supernatural. Yet the intelligent design criterion is used to detect the action of intelligence all the time—in archeology, anthropology, cryptography, and in all aspects of

forensic science. Another example is the NASA search for extraterrestrial intelligence known as SETI, where an irreducibly complex message would be taken as confirmation of extraterrestrial *intelligent* life. And archaeology has long used this criterion to distinguish the different effects of natural and intelligent causes. The fact is that philosophers define ‘methodological naturalism’ as one of the foundational tenets of atheism. In effect, the National Academy of Sciences has mandated atheism.” Bill took a breath and let the facts sink in.

Senator Wressler seized on the pause in momentum, “Dr. Elder, do you believe that your research has ‘proved’ that God created man as written in the Bible?”

“Please let me respectfully submit that the concept of a ‘proof’ is only relevant to mathematics or logic. Observational science knows nothing of proofs, only evidence—confirming or disconfirming. The original discovery of the structure of DNA provided overwhelming scientific confirmation of intelligent design. The new discovery of this DNA error-detection-correction mechanism provides yet another confirmation of what was already known about the irreducible complexity of life. And as for the Bible, yes, I do believe it is the Word of God. Any more questions?”

Interpersonal sparks seemed to form spontaneously in the space between the Senate bench and witness table.

Senator Field jumped back in, “Now Dr. Elder, what are some potential medical applications for this discovery?”

“Genetic engineering has captured the popular imagination, however, the molecular biologist has the daunting task of choosing a worthy target. What changes will yield the desired result and what will be the long-term effects? Those most informed of the risks are often the most hesitant about altering genes in any way, lest we ‘create a Frankenstein.’ On the other hand, with the prospect of reconstructing portions of the genetic code to the state before they suffered degenerative mutations, we may finally restore key aspects of optimal human physiology.”

Senator Bruemmer seemed troubled, “What about the beneficial mutations that result in improvements in the genetic code? Wouldn’t this ‘reconstruct’ these benefits out of existence?”

Dr. Elder looked down as if to restrain himself, and then looking up he began slowly, “Senator, in all the years that scientists have sought to find a ‘positive mutation’ they are yet to find anything but a loss of information. All evolutionists acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of mutations are either lethal or neutral. No scientist of any stripe is concerned about a shortage of mutations.”

“But what about the frightening news about increasing bacterial resistance to antibiotics through mutation.”

“What they don’t tell you is that antibiotic resistance due to mutation always comes at a cost. For instance, one such mutation has impaired a transport protein so the cell membrane no longer allows the antibiotic to pass. Another example is a loss of control over production of an enzyme that breaks down antibiotics, which increases the amount of the enzyme and therefore the resistance. But in each of these cases the bacteria are actually *less fit* for survival in competition with the unmutated varieties in the wild. This is because of a loss of genetic information. Non-mutational cases include what is called ‘plasmid transfer’ of pre-existing genetic information. In no case do we observe the net gain in genetic information required for amoeba-to-man evolution.

Senator Wressler began with a changed tone, “Now, Dr. Elder, isn’t it true that the vast majority of scientists support and defend standard evolutionary theory but strongly oppose your new ‘intelligent design’ paradigm?”

“The number of credentialed scientists opposed to Darwinian evolution and advocating intelligent design is growing everyday, however, it is still true what you say.”

The Senator snapped back, “Dissenting numbers are always debatable, but do you believe that you have a ‘calling’ to correct an unjust majority?”

“As a scientist, my calling is to make scientific observations and let the evidence lead where it may. Since the rise of modern science this was the optimistic outlook held by scientists who founded nearly every scientific discipline, and who were in the vast majority Christians that believed in the Biblical account of origins. Since then, science has changed to a program bent on advancing paradigms. When philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn diagnosed this situation—popularizing the term paradigm—some interpreted it as justification for suppressing scientific dissent.”

“Dr. Elder, surely you recognize the benefits of a ‘science as consensus’ view where the checks and balances of the peer-review process guarantees objectivity. On the other hand, it seems that intelligent design is bent on justifying creationism.”

“Most scientists know and privately acknowledge that the peer review process is sometimes subjective but always political. However, when a paradigm community reigns as exclusive arbiter of what is deemed worthy of scientific truth status, then this view of science falls so short of objectivity that it actually invites institutional tyranny. True science is determined by observational evidence and not a majority vote.”

The body language and gasps for breath by both Senators collided as though in competition to deliver a punch-line. With a piercing glance, Senator Wressler prevailed, “Dr. Elder, the fact that you are outside the scientific mainstream does not constitute persecution and I have to inform you that this is no Scopes Monkey Trial!”

With raised eyebrow, Dr. Elder said, “The Scopes trial was no Scopes trial. The news stories and movie were based on a fictionalized version of what actually happened. Furthermore, all the court evidence that was cited in support of evolution has since been acknowledged as open fraud or gross misinterpretation.”

Senator Field interjected with a smile, “I don’t know, it does seem like we have today, ‘inherited the wind.’”

Senator Wressler fumed at what appeared to be a bungled opportunity to put Dr. Elder in his place.

Senator Field finally took charge again, “Senators, I think your chance to ‘interrogate’ the witness has passed. Now, Dr. Elder do you have anything further you would like to say?”

“Yes,” said Bill, taking a deep breath, and looking to his friend Tom, “I have one more thing... The Christian world view has left the world with a rich inheritance, one aspect of which is the Biblical doctrine that humanity was created in the Image of God and therefore, we may think the thoughts of God after Him. The hope of an intelligible universe was the stimulus that inspired the rise of what we call modern science. Scientists and philosophers, by demanding their intellectual and personal autonomy from the God of Creation, have become like the Prodigal Son who demanded his inheritance and left for a far away country. Now that scientists and philosophers have squandered the inheritance left them by the fathers of modern science they have found themselves

intellectually and spiritually destitute. This may well be the time for them to return to the Father's house and humbly ask to again become a servant.”

Senator Field was visibly surprised by Bill’s bold summary and said, “Well, with that I believe we have concluded these proceedings.”

Looking quickly around he reached for the gavel, but Senator Bruemmer interrupted his stride, “Senator Field. Senator! We have a short, open letter from the University of Alabama to Dr. Cooperson that we would like to enter into the testimony at this time.”

“Are you quite sure it will add substantially to his previous testimony?” snapped Senator Field.

Senator Bruemmer looked to Senator Wressler as though seeking affirmation, but couldn’t engage her eyes. Even so he said, “We believe so.”

“Very well, but please make it quick.”

With that concession, Senator Bruemmer pulled out the letter and began to read, “‘Dear Dr. Cooperson, Director of the National Institutes of Health ...’ er, um, let me skip down a little. ‘...In view of the shifting research priorities at the University of Alabama, the Regents have decided to allow the McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins to take over leadership of the genetic algorithm research project.’ And it goes on. We thought this would be relevant to the question of NIH funding priorities.”

Bill’s head dropped, and then immediately he looked up with resolution, “Senator Field, I think I am done here wouldn’t you say?”

Senator Field glared at Senator Bruemmer who in turn looked at Senator Wressler’s detached gaze set on the back wall. Shaking his head, Senator Field picked up the gavel and rapped it in disgust, “This hearing is now adjourned!” The room erupted in a media free-for-all.

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## Chapter 19: Headlines



In moments Bill was surrounded by reporters with questions. Tom grabbed Bill's arm and pulled him out of the hearing room into the hall and then began to accelerate toward the conference room. As they turned the corner a television reporter appeared and thrust a microphone toward him and asked, "Dr. Elder, how are you taking the news about the Nobel Prize awarded to Johns Hopkins for what they call the 'evolutionary history algorithm'?"

Bill was stunned. He stood dumfounded while the cameraman zoomed in on his hurt expression. The reporter prodded further, "They say that it can be used to calibrate the evolutionary 'molecular clock.' Do you have any comments?"

Tom pushed them aside as the Senate aides finally joined them to usher Bill into the conference room. The door was finally pulled closed and locked behind them to shut off the noise of the reporters amassing outside. Bill sank into a chair and just stared down at the table for quite some time. Finally, he looked up to the aides to ask, "Can we have some privacy?" The aides excused themselves and slipped out the door at the opposite end of the room.

"Tom, I need to call Andrew."

"Sure, Bill. That's what we said we would do. But do you want to talk about this for a minute before you call Andrew?"

"We can talk later. Right now I need to talk to Andrew."

"Sure, Bill." Tom waited looking to Bill for further direction.

Finally, Bill realized that all he had to do was pull out his cell phone and push the "send" button.

Tom could hear the first ring, and then he heard Andrew's voice. Bill braced himself.

"Dad! Is that you?"

"Yes, Andrew, I'm here. You called?"

"Dad, have you seen the headlines? They are all about you *and* me. What are you doing? What have you done? Why am I involved! Why... Did you tell them that I have AIDS!"

"Andrew no. No! I would never tell anyone about something like that. I called as soon as I could. I am so sorry, Andrew. I'm so sorry." Bill's voice began to break up.

“So you knew. Well, it doesn’t matter anymore. My life is ruined! I hope you are happy! Where are you?”

“I am at the Senate Building. The hearing just got over.”

“Well, this should be a really great day for you. But you know, I really don’t care! I’ve got to go now.” The phone went dead.

Bill just held the phone to his ear until his arm finally dropped and he slumped in his chair. There was silence as Bill’s chest heaved slow, deep breaths until finally he let go, “What have I done!” Slowly he began to weep. Tom stood by him uncertain what to do. He reached out to touch his shoulder, but then pulled back. Bill’s efforts to contain his weeping only led to sobs. Tom could only stand by as he watched his friend suffer. He looked up as if to heaven and cried out for help for Bill, for Andrew, and for himself.

After quite some time Bill finally managed to pull himself together. He looked up to Tom and said. “I’m so sorry, Tom, for pulling you into all of this. I guess things didn’t go as I had hoped for.”

“You’re right. This is not what *we* hoped for. But remember, I was a part of this every step of the way. I don’t know why things went so badly except to say that we were naïve. It seems that a lot of things have changed for us. Even so, I believe that something good will still come out of this. I have no idea what, but something good.”

“Tom, let’s get out of here.” Both men wiped their eyes and straightened themselves out as best they could.

Tom reached for the doorknob and hesitated. Looking to Bill, he said, “Are you ready?”

Bill responded, “Ready.”

They opened the door and stepped into the hallway. In the lobby, reporters were engaged with Senators Wressler and Bruemmer with Rigidson—standing ill at ease—next to a minister with a backward collar.

As they moved by unnoticed they paused to hear the senators reading from a scripted list of sound-bites about advancements in scientific research, quenching of creationism, and a European alliance for science and technology. The *InterCon* logo was apparent on the script and on a prefabricated television stage setup in the lobby.

When they had heard enough, Bill and Tom began to turn away. At just that moment the eyes of Dr. Elder and Dr. Rigidson met. Bill who appeared wounded and Mike who appeared uneasy engaged in some sort of exchange until Rigidson’s eyes finally turned away. Without being further recognized, Bill and Tom quietly slipped out the lobby exit.

Just then a reporter raised a question, “Senators, now with the attacks on New York and Cape Kennedy and the rising religious tensions in America, many fear we may soon see terrorism in the heartland.”

Senator Bruemmer looked to a script and responded eagerly, “We believe there is reason for optimism in this regard. We have just become aware of an alliance with a group of influential conservative religious leaders that is a first step toward bringing private school curriculum into alignment with public schools in America. There is work yet to be done regarding fundamentalist home schooling, but we believe the momentum is with us. Right here with us today is The Reverend Lawrence Page, Canon of Westminster Abbey. As the Director of the Clergy Letter Project he organized the recent

worldwide Bicentennial Celebration of Darwin Day. As the President said in her address, “This historical event marks the long awaited reconciliation of religion to science. *Yes we can... finally*, see the specter of American religious extremism—and perhaps of the world—fallen into twilight.”

Rigidson seemed to grow increasingly uncomfortable with the political slogans and gestured cues directed by PR operatives just outside the view of cameras and so he moved slowly back and away, eventually slipping unnoticed down a hall, and finally out of sight.

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## Chapter 20: One Last Thing



Bill stepped into the critical care unit with the cares of the world all over his face, “Emily, I’m so sorry that I’m late. Andrew never showed up. He promised that he would come to visit tonight. I am so frustrated with him! These days he just doesn’t seem to think about anyone but himself.”

“Bill, it’s okay. I’m *not* going anywhere. Any way, something probably came up for Andrew. He was here just last Sunday and with all of us together we had a wonderful time.”

“I know, honey, but none of us knows how much time before this cancer...” Bill paused to look away. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to put it that way.”

“Bill, you don’t have to worry so much and we really should talk about it. The truth is that unless God does a miracle, it’s just a matter weeks before I go on to be with Him.”

“Emily, I am so sorry that I’m not being stronger for you, but I’m just not ready, and I don’t know how to get ready for losing you. I guess I had hoped that my research would someday help people with cancer, and now I feel so utterly helpless.”

“Bill, all of this is in God’s hands. Only He knows the plans He has for us, but we do know that His plan is to help us and not to harm us. Even now, He plans to give us a hope and a future.”

“Emily, for years your faith in God has been a pillar of our family. I just...”

“Bill, your faith in Christ is just as important to me. Please, you don’t have to carry this burden for me. Jesus will carry both of us. I love you Bill.”

Bill moved up to Emily’s bedside and embraced her with tender care so that he wouldn’t cause her any discomfort, “Emily, I love you *so* much.” They held this embrace as long as they could with Bill so out of balance.”

Finally, Emily said, “Bill I need your help with something.”

“Sure, honey, what is it?”

“I was talking with my roommate earlier and she began to open up to matters of faith. But it wasn’t long before her husband came in and took over the entire discussion. Eventually he began explaining his reasons for unbelief. A few things were hard to answer and I thought you would be able to help me.”

“Oh sure. So what did he say?”

“Well, first he said that he had once visited a Bible Study where they were discussing the jealousy between Cain and Abel. He said he asked that old question about

where Cain got his wife and the leader told him that the story was just a metaphor for human conflict. He thought this was a ‘lame way’ of explaining away a mythological story.”

“So what did you tell him?”

“Well I told him that the story of Cain and Abel was just much a part of the historical record as any other part of the Bible and that he might consider reading at least to the next chapter where it explains that Adam and Eve had many other children. So that made Cain’s wife a sister or a cousin.”

“Great Emily. So how did he respond to that?”

“Oh then he asked how Cain could have a sister as a wife if God was against incest. So I just explained that the laws against incest were not given until much later to Moses; and that Abraham had earlier married his half-sister Sarah.”

“Sounds to me like you explained things pretty well. So what else is there?”

“Well then he revealed that he was a technician in a bio-engineering company. He seemed to take pleasure in explaining how ‘recessive genetic defects’ made it impossible for siblings and near-cousins to intermarry because of harmful birth defects. So, Bill, how would *you* answer something like that?”

Bill reflected and then said, “Well, Emily, as you know, every child inherits two sets of genes—one from each parent. Now since the origin of man, the human genome has slowly accumulated degenerative birth defects. Today, siblings are very likely to inherit the same defects since they share the same parents. On the other hand, those without a close relationship are far less likely to inherit the same defects. Now when common defects are paired up, a person is at great risk of suffering such harmful things as retardation, sickle cell anemia, or even a heart defect like Andrew.”

“Sure, I guess I knew all that, but how does that relate to the challenge offered by this ‘bio-technician?’” Emily raised a half smile.

“Oh well, when God created Man in the beginning everything was ‘very good’—Genesis 1:31—so there were no genetic mistakes in the human DNA. Only after the ‘curse’ and then much later would birth defects accumulate to put humans at risk for marriage to a close relative.”

“So only later did God command against marriage with a close relative.” Emily’s smile brightened warmly, “Bill, I knew you would have an answer.”

“Oh, it’s just biology, Emily.”

“And faith that God’s Word is true, Bill.”

Now Bill was smiling with deep affection for his beloved Emily.

Emily took another breath, “Next he listed a bunch of complaints against the Church like anti-scientific ‘blind faith,’ the ‘war of religion against science,’ the persecution of Galileo, and more.”

“Sounds like he was reciting a litany of woes.”

“Litany of woes?”

“Yes, he was reciting the standard liturgy of modern atheism.”

“Okay. So how would you answer him?”

“Well, I guess I would point out that the so-called ‘war of religion against science’ is an real example of a metaphor, which was invented by evolutionists in the late nineteenth century as a means to an end. Before that time it was unfathomable to think of

science and Christianity as opposed to each other since historians generally acknowledge Christianity as the mother of science.”

“He also claimed that the Bible describes a flat earth, an earth-centered universe, and again the complaint about Galileo.”

“Well, again these are all evolutionary myths. The Bible does not say the earth is flat. In fact, Isaiah and Job say, God ‘sits enthroned above the circle of the earth’ *and* ‘he suspends the earth over nothing’. The Bible does not require an earth-centered universe, but it often uses the ‘language of appearance’ just like NASA when it announces a Shuttle-launch at ‘sunrise.’ Finally, the church did not suppress Galileo for an anti-Biblical theory of a heliocentric universe, since it’s geocentric view originated with Aristotelian philosophy, not the Bible.”

“Just as I thought. Thanks for the answers and for your faith. You know, Bill I really believe some people are *so* smart, they’re stupid.”

Bill laughed out loud at Emily’s innocent and timely reminder to him and all other ‘intellectuals.’ After he had finally composed himself he asked, “Emily, did he ever say what he does believe in?”

“Oh yes, he said he believes in UFOs. He started to explain why he believes we will soon make contact with extraterrestrial life, but his wife interrupted and asked him to take her on a walk in the wheelchair.”

“Oh my goodness. He doesn’t believe in the Bible, but he does believe in aliens! Okay, now, so what were their names so I can pray for them?”

“Oh, I believe it was Jody and Carla Forester. Carla’s liver cancer is at an earlier stage than mine, which means she may have time for a transplant.”

“I will pray especially for Carla and that they are both given ears to hear you, Emily.”

“Thanks, Bill. Hopefully I will be given another opportunity, but I know that I won’t be able to share as well as you.”

“Oh Emily, you are far-and-away the best witness for Christ that I know.”

Emily paused to consider something, “Bill, I have another kind of question for you.”

“Sure Emily, what is it?”

“Bill, is it possible that the application of your research would someday mean that all birth defects—you call them mutations—could be repaired and that human life would be restored to the way it was in the beginning?”

Bill looked into the eyes of his dear wife and sensed a genuine concern. “Well, Emily, I really don’t think so. The best analogy I have heard is that of a weathering automobile. You see, defective or worn-out car parts can be replaced with new ones; generators, tires, and even engines can all be replaced. But when a car is continuously exposed to weather it gets so rusted out that it’s impossible to repair. So it is with degenerative mutations in the human genome. Darwinism has never given answers for how all the information got into the human genome; but now we know that it doesn’t even have answers for how it could remain. The universe, and now we see that the life in it, all experience increasing entropy.”

“You mean that everything is wearing out?”

“Yes and we now know this principle applies to the information in DNA for all life and of course this includes the human genome.”

“So neither physical man, nor mankind is eternal?”

“That’s right.”

“I’m not surprised, or even disappointed. Life as we know it can get pretty weary. I guess that’s one more reason that the scriptures say, “The *Lord* is your life.”

Emily took a deep breath, “There is something else that has been troubling me. What about disease? Did God create disease? I have always believed that sickness was not in God’s original good creation, but it seems like many diseases are designed to destroy.”

“Well, Emily, first we need to recognize that the vast majority of microbes are beneficial and even required to sustain life on earth. Bacteria serve in digestion, decomposition, and also as food. I once heard an estimate that the mass of all the plant and animal microbes on earth would be equal to all the other plants and animals combined. Yet only a small fraction of these microbes and viruses cause pathology or disease. This last category may well be one of the most terrifying consequences of the Fall. It appears that some of the organisms that were once beneficial have now turned on the life they once served. And the same principle applies to cancer since in that case the designed reproductive mechanism runs out of control. The fall of nature means that some of the original good purposes for life were broken. So whether we consider microbes or men, the tragedy is that a fallen design *can* destroy.”

“Well, that helps, but it just confirms what I already believed by faith. I hope I get a chance to share this with my roommate. Even though I know I am supposed to be ‘prepared to give an answer’ I have to say for myself that answers don’t seem to matter as much any more. All this week I have been reading through the Book of Job. What I noticed was that as Job suffered he asked all the same questions we do about *why* things are the way they are. But even though he asked, and maybe because he demanded, he didn’t get any answers. In any case, what finally met his need weren’t answers, but only the presence of God. I believe God expects us to ask and He will meet our needs, but what we really need is Him. You know, Bill, when we are together, I sense more than at any other time that Jesus is right here with me, yet I believe that when I go to be in His presence it will be even better. I hope that doesn’t sound selfish.”

“No, Emily, I think it’s me that’s being selfish.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to say that Bill. I love you and Andrew more than anything here on earth, but it’s just that as I come closer to my time of passing, I am really looking forward to being with Jesus.”

“I think I understand what you mean, Emily. At least I will try to understand.”

“Thank you Bill, I love you.”

“Oh Emily, I love you so much.”

“One last thing, Bill.”

“Sure, honey, what is it?”

“Bill, whatever happens, go easy on Andrew. I believe that the Lord has given me good reason for peace that he is going to be okay. I am still praying, but I have stopped worrying.”

“Oh Emily I want to be there too. I am trying to allow God to make me the kind of father and husband He wants me to be.”

“Bill, you already are a great father and husband. And I believe you are a great man of faith and that is why He wants you to remain so He can accomplish some important purpose through you—and through Andrew.”

With that, words were no longer needed. Emily closed her eyes and Bill rested his head at her beside and gently held her hand.

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## Chapter 21: Pain on Trial



Buttoning up his trench coat against the unseasonably cold Seattle weather, Bill sat alone on the bench waiting to meet Andrew for lunch. He had walked from his hotel to Occidental Square in the heart of Pioneer Square, one of Seattle's most colorful districts characterized by an uneasy mix of world-class urban professionals with world-wounded street people. One block north is the business district with trade banks channeling money to and from centers of prosperity from all over the world. One block east is the Gospel Mission with food banks channeling people to and from centers of disparity from all over the world. One block south are two new, and fabulously expensive sports stadiums—Safeco and Quest fields. One block west is the original 'skid road' where turn-of-the-century logs and men once 'skid' into the Puget Sound. On the border of the cobblestone square are ivy-covered brick buildings remodeled for various coffees shops, art galleries, and bookstores. Bill looked forward to spending time in this place with Andrew to work on the first steps to restoring their relationship. Even so, this was a Sunday afternoon and the square was quiet and empty.

While Bill sat deep in thought, he gave thanks for the past weeks of peace to consider the future. Andrew was back at the University of Washington preparing to declare his major, while Bill was weighing his options for future employment. In this stream of thought he hardly noticed the two church vans full of youth that pulled up to the square. They began to unload boxes filled with brown bag lunches and bag-after-bag of clothing. Finally he became aware of their activity when the group spread out tarps on the cobblestone pavement before him and then placed neatly folded stacks of coats, pants, shirts, shoes, and sleeping bags. Most were serviceable but used items, however, many had retail tags still attached. Off to one side they called into service some wintering Café tables for the lunches and a large canister of hot chocolate.

As things were getting setup, two or three of the "residents" recognized the opportunity unfolding before them. The word couldn't have traveled faster if everyone were armed with walkie-talkies. In minutes a couple dozen street people came from all directions and were moving around the tarp politely accepting help from the youth who

were prepared with lunches, hot chocolate, and engaging smiles. The spirit of grace attending every personal exchange humbled Bill. In reflection he thought, "I wonder if Andrew's youth group conducted themselves as well as these youth today?"

Bill felt like a 'fly on the light post' as he listened in on conversations going on all around. There was the young man in his thirties who had just worked enough at *Labor Ready* to earn a ticket on a ship to find work in Alaska. Because of the cold weather he needed good boots to work in construction and possibly a fishing boat. With the boots and a new sweater he gratefully declared that he was "set for the trip." There was what appeared to be a very friendly black man who upon learning the "Mexicans" had arrived became hostile and declared "they are going to steal us blind!" The adult youth leaders walked up to him and gently insisted that there was no threat and that there was more than enough for everyone. Eventually he left grumbling. There was the gentle, but resolute Asian bag lady whose disfigured mouth only allowed certain sounds which were taken as a "yes" or a "no." After being helped by several youth, she signaled which items were to her liking. When satisfied that she had seen all, she disappeared. Three men in their thirties introduced themselves by name: Carl, Jack, and Kunuke. They each offered variations on a story about divorce, child support, and garnisheed wages. It was already evident from their decayed teeth, but Carl mentioned casually that they were meth-addicts. He pointed to a parking garage where they had found a warm stairwell to sleep. All of these men and women were treated with respect and served in every way possible by energetic youth offering blessings in the name of Christ.

It was not long before the bustling activity died down as the selection was noticeably depleted. Then at a distance what appeared to be the last straggling derelict stepped onto the Square. With a wobbly shuffle he painfully dragged one leg behind the other. It was evident that one of his arms was hanging limp under layers of ragged coats, sweaters, and shirts. Yet for all of this the most disturbing feature of the man was his bloodied face with dried wounds all around both eyes from a recent and terrible beating. It was difficult to imagine how he moved through the cold air. When he finally made it to the edge of the tarp, a youth came directly up to him to ask, "Sir, can I help you with anything?" The man's response included mumbled words interspersed with those barely intelligible. The stench of alcohol and soiled clothing was evident to all nearby.

The youth turned to specifics, "Is your arm injured?"

"It's all broke up," he responded as he lifted it just high enough to reveal a horribly bruised and broken hand and arm and then let it drop. The youth didn't seem to know what else to do, so he offered the man a hot chocolate and two brown bag lunches. With only one good hand the man made a wavering choice that finally settled on the lunches.

Another youth asked if he needed a sleeping bag.

"Yes siree, I could," said the man with a broad toothless smile, which set the youth on a mission. When he finally found one, he went about wrapping it in plastic against the weather.

As this was in process the man mumbled again that he was hurt, but it was unclear what he meant. Finally, he said, "I got my head hurt real bad," and he pulled a baseball cap off to reveal an old injury that had left his skull caved in on the entire left side of his head. It was impossible to imagine how anyone could survive such an injury, much less live for all of these years. Mercifully he put his hat back on.

The youth did not flinch. He looked him in the eyes, reached out to touch his good arm, and said, "My name is Chris. What's yours?"

With this the man's eyes cleared, a smile came to his face, and he said plainly enough for all to hear, "My name is Alexander Chase Jones, thank you!"

Bill was moved deeply because his response reminded him of Andrew when he was a child. When asked for his name he would proudly announce to anyone who asked, "My name is Andrew Philip Elder, thank you!" *Surely this man had parents who loved him every bit as much I love Andrew.* Finally the other youth returned with the sleeping bag all wrapped up. However, they now had a dilemma. The one arm was just as lame as before, his good hand was weakly grasping the two brown bag lunches, and now all that remained was one index finger, which he extended as though he just realized it existed. The youth looked down at the extended finger and then up at the man and they smiled.

"Hook her on here," he said. With permission given the youth tested the finger to see if it had the strength to hold. It did. Everyone within eyesight was amazed and humbly gratified. The man now had all that he wanted and began to turn away, but then he stopped short and turned back.

"God bless you," he said with his broad smile. With that, the spirit of God's grace moved over everyone who witnessed what had just happened. Many paused respectfully to watch him shuffle and wobble off again to the edge of the Square.

As Bill sat considering what he had just experienced, he heard a strangely familiar voice from over his shoulder,

"When ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

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## Chapter 22: The Prodigal



As Bill turned around his expression went from surprise to shock. There standing just a few paces away was Dr. Michael Rigidson.

“Mike? That is, Dr. Rigidson.”

“I imagine there is quite some story behind a life like that,” said Dr. Rigidson, “but it is very hard for me to find meaning in the suffering.”

Bill was still trying to recover from the whiplash of a second ‘chance meeting’ with his self-appointed adversary, but he stood to greet him in Christian charity.

“Dr. Rigidson, how is it that you are here in Seattle?”

“NAS business,” said Rigidson curtly as though he just realized the awkward position he had placed himself. He started to turn away.

With that Bill seized the opportunity afforded him.

“It is interesting to me that you say there is no meaning in the suffering of this man, yet it reminded you of the motivating words of Jesus to relieve the suffering of others. Too often people say such suffering is meaningless, yet these wounds are the very same ones that Christ came to bear on the cross.”

“As I said, there is likely a sad story behind this man’s current condition, but neither of us knows what has brought him to this place.”

“Yes, it would be presumptuous to jump to conclusions based on appearance. But let me now ask a question that you first asked me.”

“And what was that?”

“You once challenged me if I had ever asked the question, ‘Why me?’ Now I ask, ‘Have you ever asked... ‘Why me?’”

Rigidson’s countenance dropped and then he stiffened. “No I have not asked ‘why me’ but, I have asked, ‘why *him*.’ And I never got anything close to a meaningful answer.”

Bill’s voice softened, “May I respectfully ask who it was that suffered?”

“My older brother James. He was the most caring and compassionate person I have ever known. He was full of the joy of life and sought every possible opportunity to share that life with others. In his last year of college he decided to take a year off to join the *Peace Corps* to get closer to the people he cared about. He planned to join a health education project in the Congo. While in transit, he stopped at a village to get water.

The villagers were terrified by a fever they did not understand. He decided to stay to help. The fever was Ebola. He fought it, but only lasted two weeks. James never stepped foot into the Congo.”

“I am so sorry. That must have been terrible for you and your family.”

“Terrible? Terrible! Have you ever read the *Hot Zone* by Richard Preston? That terrifying book reveals the truth about what happens to the unlucky souls who contract a hemorrhagic fever. As a biologist I expect you to know what happens: they literally ‘fall apart’ as they bleed from every orifice of their bodies. James almost certainly died a terrifying, painful, and meaningless death. I just can’t believe that a good God would create something so monstrously evil!”

Bill paused and only started after he had checked his motives with his Savior.

“Dr. Rigidson, clearly, we see the world through different sets of lenses. Whereas you see a man suffering without meaning, I see a man to which I should give compassion out of love for Christ. While you see your brother’s suffering as meaningless, I see an amazing picture of the sacrificial suffering of Christ. Christ also went to where he could get closer to the people he cared about. Christ also suffered a terrifying, painful, and apparently meaningless death. He risked and sacrificed everything for those he loved. And when he rose from the dead, his disciples were filled with a fearless faith that transformed the world. I stand in that faith, as do these young people working around us today.”

“All such sentiments may be fine as a means to motivation, but I believe in science. For me, the evidence from this harsh, cruel, world comes down every time in favor of evolution. Again, I ask, are you really satisfied that the explanation for all the bad things in the world is ‘sin’?”

“As I have said before, this is a fallen world, not the original ‘very good’ creation. There are many illustrations that could be offered, but I personally chose the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. In that frightening event, the Soviet government first blamed the plant managers for operational negligence. Later the world community held the government responsible for design negligence. Whatever the case may be, gross irresponsibility is the common sin. The immediate deaths from exposure to radiation were terrifying and painful, but the subsequent suffering through birth defects are heart breaking and even monstrous. The very earth will be polluted for hundreds of years and there is no way of estimating how many future generations will suffer from consequential birth defects. Sin was the cause of all the degenerative suffering that followed. Really terrible things do happen in an otherwise good creation as a natural consequence of sin. And clearly, both the guilty and innocent suffer from sin. In the end, the only important question for those who know that they are guilty is this, ‘Will I receive God’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life?’”

“Bill, just as before, we have come full circle. I regret that we did not come to a reasonable solution when we first met, but it doesn’t appear we will today. I really do wish you well, but I don’t see how I can pursue this any further. Good day.” With that Dr. Rigidson paused to look Bill in the eyes, and then he walked off briskly in the direction he had appeared.

Just then, Andrew approached his father from the edge of the Square. “Dad, who was that?”

“That, my son, is Dr. Michael Rigidson.”

“The guy who hammered you at the Senate hearing?”

“The very,” he said with a shrug.

“What are the chances of that?”

“These days, I am not surprised by any coincidences.”

“Are you ready for some food?”

“Starving.”

“Good, right around the corner is that coffee shop I have been telling you about.”

“Lead away.”

After they had settled at their table and Andrew selected some favorite appetizers, he began with some good news, “Dad, you know I am feeling a whole lot better these days, and the doctor now seems to think the concerns about full-blown AIDS were premature.”

“Well, that’s great Andrew, but what about the problems with the blood infection?”

“The doctor explained that these kinds of infections do occur in some unusual cases, and the recovery of my immune system seems to confirm his optimistic outlook.” Bill’s eyes began to tear up as he choked out his words, “Oh, Andrew, that is such good news. I am so thankful. God is *so* good.”

“Dad, remember how you told me that this Rigidson guy once was an enthusiastic member of some Christian church? Why do you think that people like that choose to turn away from God?”

“Well, Andrew, I don’t really know very much about Dr. Rigidson. Yet he has shared about his struggle with the problem of pain. In fact, he just now shared with me how his older brother—whom he loved deeply—died a very terrible death.”

“Yeah, it seems like a lot of people struggle with that question. I guess I can relate.”

“Well, I can think of another example of that terrible struggle in the life of Charles Darwin. It appears he once considered faith in God a viable option and even studied for the ministry. Now many are quick to point out Darwin’s early bent towards agnosticism and his devotion to naturalism to suggest that his theories were strictly motivated by science. But I believe a better case can be made for a turning point in the tragic death of his beloved daughter Annie. That terrible event was a crushing blow to him. Now any loving parent would grieve the death of a young child, but I believe we can detect an unresolved disappointment in everything that followed. You see, suffering rarely leads to unbelief, but bitterness always does. In fact all mature Christians have suffered in some way, and many have suffered deeply. I believe that Darwin’s failure to reconcile a loving, all-powerful God with the pain, waste, and confusion of what he observed is what finally led to his development of the theory of evolution.”

“But why does God allow all this suffering in a world He Himself created.”

“Well, there are two words that capture the great Biblical truth for me; they are *love* and *freedom*. Because of God’s love, He gave us freedom. Now according to Genesis 1:31, in the beginning, ‘God saw all that He had made and it was very good.’ You see the original creation was inherently different from anything we now know. At that time there was perfect harmony between man and God, man and humanity, and man and nature. But with freedom, there is always the possibility of a rebellious rejection of the love that grants it. As you know, this is just what happened and so man forfeited his

perfect place of purpose. Today, we mistake the beauty we observe in the world—a beautiful sunset, a meandering river, a snow-covered mountain, and even a newborn baby—as the realization of perfection in creation. I believe that all of these are windows to God’s grace, but only as a kind of ‘broken beauty’ in the fallen creation. A beautiful sunset is often the aftermath of a destructive forest fire. A tranquil river valley is usually the result of a catastrophic flood. The fresh snow on a mountain likely covers an explosive volcanic origin. A perfect baby can grow up to be a rebellious youth or adult.”

“Yeah, as I know too well.”

“Oh Andrew, I wasn’t directing my words at you. I was just speaking in principle, and I hope I have been honest about how this worked out in my own life.”

“Yeah, you have, Dad, but once I felt like my rebellion had cost me a good life, I thought ‘why even try?’”

“Precisely, Andrew. Because of life’s many disappointments, we all lose hope of perfection. The truth is that suffering is not the problem at all. We all know that suffering is part of life, yet somehow we imagine that it will pass over us as though we were back in the Garden. I believe the image of God created in each of us yearns for restoration to God’s original perfect plan, but until Jesus returns to restore all things, perfection is only experienced through the sinless life of Christ. The good news is that believers can now rest in his ‘imputed perfection.’”

“You know, Dad, I have heard these things all of my life, but until recently it didn’t seem real to me. The fact is that two weeks ago, my roommate helped me re-dedicate my life to Christ. I still don’t understand it all, but some things are finally falling into place.”

Bill faltered as he tried to catch his breath, “Oh, Andrew, thank you so much for sharing that with me.” He stumbled for words, “I... I’m so thankful. I can’t begin to express what I am feeling right now.”

“I love you, Dad.”

Tears began to stream from Bill’s eyes as he said, “I love you *so* much, Andrew.”

They both paused to take in what had just happened. Then Andrew said, “You know, Dad, I have some other news for you.”

Bill wiped his eyes with a napkin and took a deep breath as though he were bracing himself, “Yes, Andrew?”

“You know how I was planning to declare my major?”

“Yes?”

“Well I finally decided that I want to get back into science. I have sensed God’s directing me to study physics. In fact, I hope to one-day work as a scientist in some research setting. I guess you could call me a ‘prodigal scientist.’”

Bill’s mouth dropped open as though he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You know, Andrew, just a few weeks ago, I felt like I was at rock bottom. I felt like I had failed in representing both my own research and science in general. But most of all, I felt like I had failed you.” Bill choked up for quite some time. Finally, he pressed forward, “Right now I can honestly say that I am at one of the highest peaks of my entire life; nothing else matters. I am so thankful you are my son Andrew. Your mother would be so happy and proud!”

“Dad, I know it’s been really hard for you in the last few weeks, and let me tell you, I have felt it too. But my roommate reminded me that when people take pleasure in

the pain of others, God takes pleasure in lifting up those who are humble. I have been trying hard to learn humility. It must help for you to hear what's been going on in the universities all around the world."

"Going on? What do you mean?"

"You haven't heard? Really?"

"*Really.*"

"Oh yeah, you stopped watching television in the seventies. Well, it seems that because of the media's satirical 'Scopes Trial' tag-line for the Senate hearings, students everywhere planned parties to watch an 'ignorant creationist' get what was coming to him. But everything changed when people saw what was actually happening. It was just not right. The students saw through the whole charade. Then when that group of Nobel Laureates took out a page in the New York Times to protest the politics of the Nobel Prize, things really broke loose. Right now in my dorm there are weekly 'debate parties' dedicated to watching the C-Span recordings and hashing-out the details. And somebody posted a 'reconstruction algorithm calculator' on the Internet so grad-students are now doing 'pseudogene reconstructions' to compare with functional genes. Other students are posting clips on YouTube with debate commentary. Some students at the U-Dub have started the 'Christian Free Speech Movement.' And it spills over into classes throughout the university: science, poli-sci, history, humanities, and more. It seems to have taken on a life of its own. There is no end in sight. The university administration is trying to quash the movement. Of course, you know how that goes over with university students!"

"Andrew, I had no idea. Who would have thought?"

"Well, Dad, of all people, I thought you would have," Andrew said with smile, "Remember how you always used to quote Hebrews 11:1 as saying, "By faith we understand..."

"Yes...?"

"Well, isn't it obvious that your faith has allowed many people to finally understand?"

"Andrew, I am completely overwhelmed by all of this."

Just then Bill's cell phone began a silent ring. Unconsciously, he pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the display.

"It's Tom, I better pick it up. Hello Tom, what's going on?"

Andrew watched his Dad's expression turn from surprise to humor as it was apparent that Tom was trying to inform him of some big news, "Yes Tom, I have heard. In fact, Andrew just told me. I am just as surprised as you are." There was a pause, "Who? Senator Field has founded a new research institute and he wants to meet with us about some speaking engagements and, potentially, some fellowships?"

There was another pause, "You know, Tom, you were right.... About what? Remember how you said, that you believed that 'something good would come out of what happened.' Let me tell you what Andrew just shared with me..."

The End

