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Evangelicals

Magazine | Spring/Summer 2021 | Vol. 7 No. 1

CLINGING TO TRUTH

Biblical & Practical Guidance for Competing Narratives

RICH NATHAN



“By this everyone will know that you are
my disciples, if you love one another.” ^{NIV}

John 13:35



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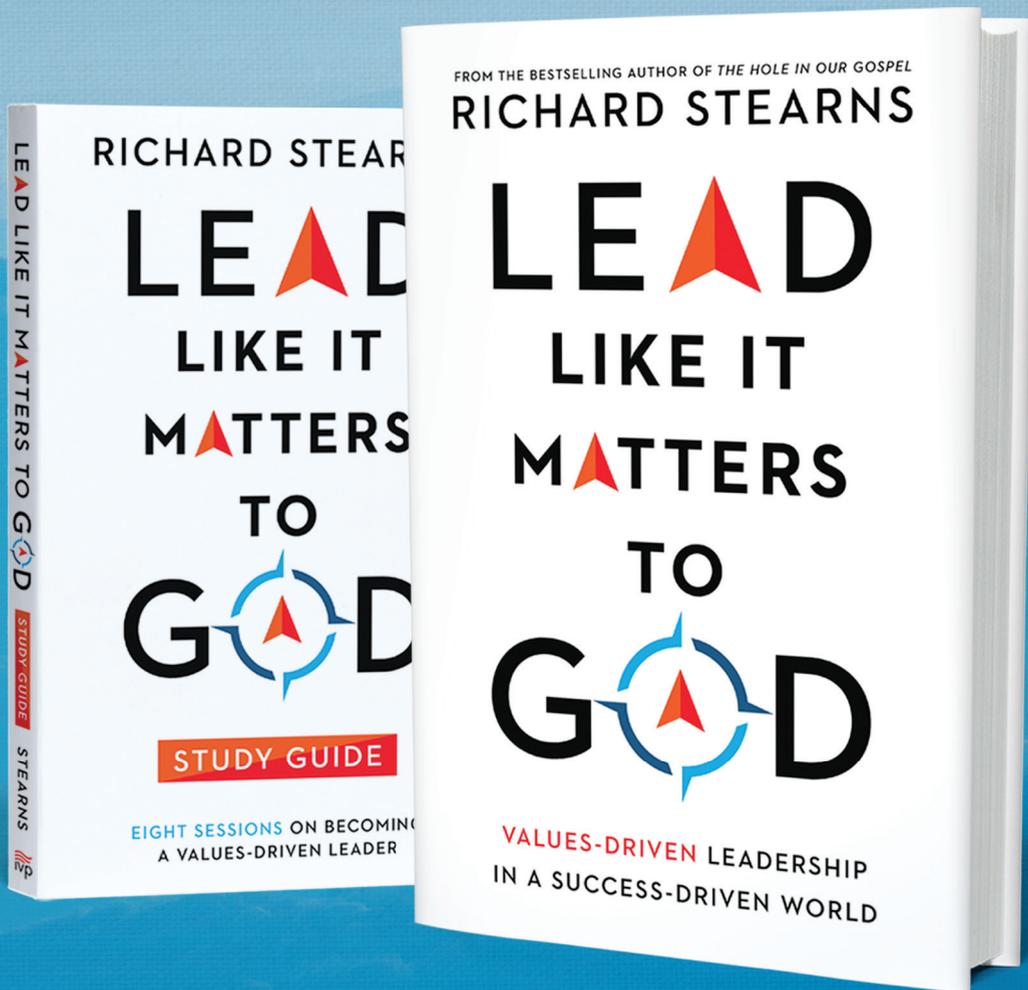


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LET YOUR VALUES DRIVE YOUR LEADERSHIP

*God Is More Concerned with Your
Character Than Your Success*



RICHARD STEARNS is president emeritus of World Vision US, where he served as president for twenty years. Before leading the Christian relief and development organization, he was a corporate

CEO at both Parker Brothers and Lenox. His bestselling book *The Hole in Our Gospel* was named the 2010 Christian Book of the Year.

“Sit down and read Rich Stearns. It’s like a privileged conversation with a wise mentor who really cares about you. . . . In a world full of how books, Rich answers why Christian leadership matters.”

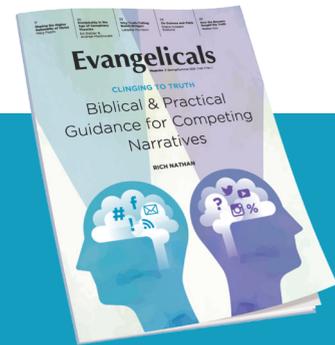
LEITH ANDERSON, president emeritus of NAE



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Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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For more resources and opportunities, visit NAE.net anytime, anywhere — on your phone, tablet or computer.

PODCAST

Today's Conversation provides opportunities for you to hear from leading thinkers, theologians, activists, culture-makers and more.

EVENTS

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Evangelicals magazine comes to you as one of many NAE resources to help leaders and their communities navigate complexity with biblical clarity. NAE member institutions can receive bulk subscriptions for their ministries at no charge. More at NAE.net/membership.

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Scripture continually and consistently tells us to reject falsehood and cling to truth. God uses repetition to underscore important points, and he gives warnings that emphasize the sure consequences of our allegiances. The way of falsehood leads to death. The way of truth leads to life. God himself is truth, and all truth emanates from him. As St. Augustine famously put it: All truth is God's truth.

A key defining characteristic of evangelicals is a commitment to the Bible as the ultimate authority. Evangelicals are historically people who are committed to the truth. Yet we live in a time with a plethora of worldviews, in which “truths” compete against each other with all the fervor and passion that can be explored on cable news and social media. Often times, we operate in silos and hear repeated untruths so frequently they begin to sound like truth. Worldviews seep so slyly into our minds and hearts that we don't recognize the false narratives.

How can we be people of truth? How can we encourage people in our churches to reject falsehoods? As many know from personal experience, it is very difficult to convince someone, even a fellow brother or sister in Christ, that he or she has fallen prey to a conspiracy theory. Why is that?

In the cover article, Rich Nathan, pastor of Vineyard Columbus, outlines seven reasons why people accept conspiracy theories (Page 14), while Ed Stetzer and Andrew MacDonald of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center offer advice specifically for church leaders who seek to nurture

the evangelical mind during this time (Page 20). Mary Poplin, author of “Is Reality Secular?” and professor of education at Claremont Graduate University, describes today's prominent worldviews and how Christianity is superior to each one (Page 17).

We seek to understand prevailing worldviews and susceptibility to conspiracy theories not to get into heated arguments, but to understand, empathize and bring people into the way of truth that leads to life. As Latasha Morrison notes (Page 23), telling the truth doesn't put up barriers, it builds bridges. Throughout this magazine issue, authors offer surprising antidotes to our present moment including Christian community, soft hearts, humble curiosity, and an integration of science and faith, among other things.

Let us follow Paul's admonition to the church in Ephesus: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Ephesians 4:25). 

Vaccines Are an Answer to Prayer

“The vaccine, I believe, is the answer to prayer. Science and faith met, and the world will benefit to mitigate the continued spread of a dangerous, deadly bully — COVID-19.”

Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, leader of African Methodist Episcopal churches in Florida, in a Facebook post after receiving the vaccine

“This is your body, this is your health, these are your children, these are your parents. And as a pastor who has had an exponential increase in burying Black people, we have to change the way we buy into legends in the face of a crisis.”

Bishop T.D. Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter’s House, in an interview with NBC Dallas Fort Worth

“COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, and as such many evangelicals of color are at the forefront of promoting vaccination in our communities. In addition, the historic distrust given adverse experiences with health services needs to be overcome and healed.”

Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, in the Evangelical Leaders Survey

“The pandemic continues to inflict significant harm on our nation and world. The plague has brought illness and death, financial challenge, and emotional distress, and the toll is rising. The arrival of the vaccines has given us reason to be hopeful. However, in order to get maximum participation in the vaccination campaign, this is the moment for government to partner with our faith communities.”

Walter Kim, NAE president, and Rabbi Moshe Hauer, executive vice president of Orthodox Union, in USA Today

Faith Among Black Americans

“If most Black Americans say [Black] congregations should diversify and the race of other attendees isn’t a top priority to them, what leads so many Black Americans to attend predominantly Black congregations? The survey indicates that Black congregations are distinctive in numerous ways beyond just their racial makeup. Sermons are a prime example: Black Americans who attend Black Protestant churches are more likely to say they hear messages from the pulpit about certain topics — such as race relations and criminal justice reform — than are Black Protestant churchgoers who attend multiracial, white or other race churches.”

Pew Research Center in its 2021 study on “Faith Among Black Americans”



“ Since the rise of the COVID pandemic and the heightened attention given to racial injustice, many members of the Black community that previously left the Black church are beginning to come back. I think this is because the balanced preaching of the Black church focusing on biblical truth and justice are an encouraging resource for all members of the Body of Christ.”

Vince Bantu, assistant professor of church history and Black church students at Fuller Seminary, in a Christianity Today article

Highest Allegiance

“ Certainly I love our country, and as the son of immigrant parents I am deeply grateful for the hope this nation represents. But as a Christian, my highest allegiance is to Christ.”

Walter Kim, NAE president, in an interview with the Associated Press

“ Rather than expressing gratitude for the good gifts given to a particular nation and understanding the special connection members of the same nation share, the patriotic gospel requires uncritical allegiance to one’s country. ... Like all of our false gospels, the patriotic gospel slowly but persistently immerses us in a salvific story. We learn that the fundamental problem with the world is that ‘they’ are not like ‘us.’”

Kaitlyn Schiess in her book, “The Liturgy of Politics,” which she describes in Today’s Conversation podcast at [NAE.net/schiesspodcast](https://nae.net/schiesspodcast)

Evangelical Christians may have questions + concerns re: taking #COVID19Vaccine. Evangelical leaders @ERLC @DrMoore & @NAEvangelicals Walter Kim thoughtfully answer those questions and make a powerful, biblical case for taking the vaccine.
Amber Hacker @AmberJHacker



I support the statement our member body in the USA, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in denouncing insurrection at the US Capitol. “Followers of Jesus are peacemakers.”
Efraim Tendero @bishopef



Grateful for the witness of @GalenCarey of the @NAEvangelicals, standing up for refugees in the @washingtonpost (& also grateful for Catherine Rampell, who has kept a big spotlight on this issue when it was getting very little media attention).
Matthew Soerens @MatthewSoerens

GETTING LIFE'S TRANSITIONS RIGHT

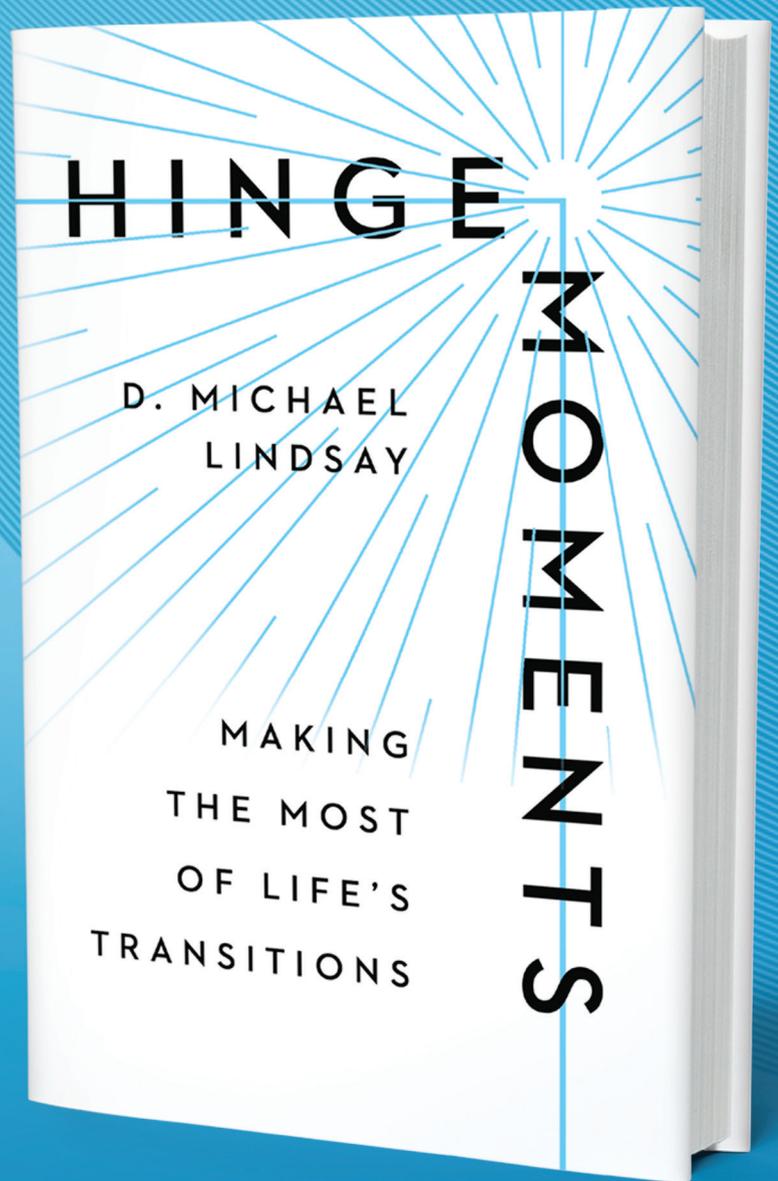


D. Michael Lindsay

on Life's Most Important Choices

“Michael Lindsay is the perfect guide. Through his extensive research and influential work in higher education, Dr. Lindsay knows more about leadership than just about anyone. In this inspiring book he uses stories from his extensive network of fellow leaders—as well as history and the Bible—to help his readers get and stay prepared for whatever comes next.”

—PHILIP RYKEN,
president of Wheaton College



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EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

MAY 31–JUNE 3, 2021

Alliance Council

Nashville, TN

Christian & Missionary Alliance
CMAAlliance.org/events

NAE President Walter Kim will speak at this year's Alliance Council, which brings together leaders in the Christian & Missionary Alliance. The conference will include both in-person and online participation options.



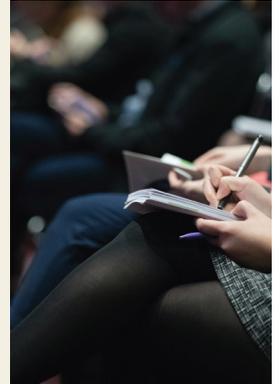
JULY 22–23, 2021

FEC Conference

Archbold, OH

Fellowship of Evangelical Churches
FECministries.org

The Fellowship of Evangelical Churches denomination has a strong evangelical commitment and mission to propagate the gospel nationally and internationally. NAE President Walter Kim will offer the keynote address.



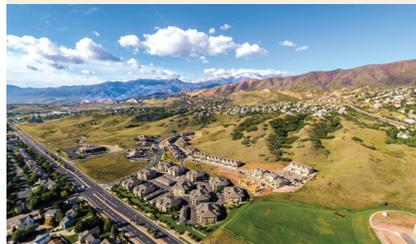
AUGUST 18–20, 2021

Summer Executive Retreat

Colorado Springs, CO

Accord Network
AccordNetwork.org

Executives of relief and development organizations will gather to learn from another and encourage each other in their ministries.



SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

See You At The Pole

Nationwide

National Network of Youth Ministries
SYATP.com

Since 1990, students have gathered around their school's flagpole to pray for their school, friends, families, churches and communities.

JUNE 24–26, 2021

Bioethics & the Body

Virtual

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity

Trinity International University
CBHD.org/conf2021

Distinguished speakers will examine foundational concepts and bioethical considerations related to the myriad ways in which we view, interact with, manipulate, and analyze our physical bodies.



SEPTEMBER 22–24, 2021

Innovate 2021

Dallas, Texas

Missio Nexus
MissioNexus.org/innovate-2021

The Missions Leaders Conference provides leaders from the North American missions community a place to network and catalyze relationships in global missions.

SEPTEMBER 16–19, 2021

Nevermore

Baltimore, MD

Citygate Network
citygatenetwork.org

Citygate's annual conference brings together leaders of faith-based crisis shelters and life-transformation centers to connect and be equipped. This year they will commit to *nevermore* rest on past successes, but instead to push forward with intentionality, fresh vision, stronger partnerships, creative innovations and a renewed commitment to transform lives.

WORTH NOTING

✔ Churches Respond to COVID-19 Vaccination Needs

The COVID-19 vaccine has not only brought a sense of hope, but also many questions. Is it safe after such a quick development? Will it be effective? Are there ethical issues involved in the creation of the vaccines that Christians should know about? Many denominations, churches and other Christian organizations are sharing resources to bring clarity to these questions.

According to the January Evangelical Leaders Survey, a very high percentage (89 percent) of leaders said they will encourage others to get the vaccine, as an overwhelming majority (95 percent) said they plan to receive the vaccination when it becomes available to them.

The vaccine solution also presents logistical challenges for vaccinating millions of people in the United States in a matter of months. Administration of these vaccines is moving beyond the doctor's office, local drug stores and pharmacies. Faith communities are stepping in to

help. Many congregations have facilities large enough to safely handle hundreds of people. Churches — like First Baptist Church of Glenarden, an NAE member church — are offering their buildings as vaccination sites and providing volunteered staff to partner with public health officials to safely and efficiently administer shots.



Discover a curated list of coronavirus resources from the NAE at [NAE.net/covid-vaccines](https://nae.net/covid-vaccines). Among other resources is a popular podcast with Dr. Francis Collins, head of the National Institute of Health, on the safety, efficacy and ethical issues around the vaccines. That conversation is also available in Spanish.

✔ Christian College Students Hope to Heal a Divided America

The NAE's annual Christian Student Leadership Conference is typically a week-long event held in Washington, D.C. This year, the power-packed conference was held online and welcomed a broader audience of students. The virtual event was held over two evenings, featuring speakers such as Chaplain Barry Black, Rep. James Clyburn, Sen. Tim Scott, Sen. James Lankford, Sen. Marco Rubio, Sen. Sherrod Brown, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, Nicole Baker Fulgham, Justin Giboney, Russell Moore, Barbara Williams-Skinner and David French.

One attendee said, "I truly enjoyed the conference; it was very educational and wonderful to hear from strong Christians on both sides of the aisle." Jorie

Mack from Wheaton College said, "I appreciated the conference and felt the speakers approached important issues with conviction, authenticity and respect. I think more people should hear discussions like this."



Visit NAEstudentconference.com to watch select videos from the conference.

✔ NAE Works to Make Tax Credit Policies More Effective

The National Association of Evangelicals is committed to strengthening families and seeking justice and compassion for the poor. The Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) are two policies that support these goals and can be made more effective.

The family is the foundation of any healthy society. The NAE seeks to increase support for parents of modest means who are raising children by permanently increasing the CTC and making it fully available to low-income families. After 2021, under current law, the complete benefit will only be received by middle and upper-income families. This will need to be extended.

The EITC keeps low-income workers from being taxed into poverty. While it is our nation's largest and most effective anti-poverty program, there are gaps. Workers who are not raising children only receive \$530 or less per year. Reforming the EITC to better support childless workers, as well as those under 25 and over 65 could lift millions more Americans out of poverty. This would also reduce racial disparities by helping minority workers who represent a disproportionate share of low wage employees. The American Rescue Plan temporarily increases the EITC for childless workers, but a renewed commitment will be needed.

✔ World Relief Announces Retiring Leaders and Replacement Search

In early 2021, World Relief's Board of Directors announced the upcoming retirement of Scott Arbeiter, president, and Tim Breene, CEO, at the end of the summer. The duo collectively served the organization for more than 30 years. World Relief has partnered with CarterBaldwin to accept applications, conduct interviews and evaluate candidates for its next leader.

"We have much to anticipate. We will be inviting the next leader into a stable, well-positioned organization. Our executive team is strong and well placed. Our global impact is extraordinary, and our economics strong. ...The stage is set for World Relief's next president/CEO to bring about evolutionary change. And for all of this, we are immensely grateful to Tim and Scott for modeling leadership with 'integrity of heart and skillful hands' (Psalm 78:72)," said Steve Moore, chair of the World Relief board.



✔ Commitment to Unity Is What the Church Needs Most

The most resounding need of the American church in the post-election season, according to evangelical leaders, is a commitment to unity. The NAE's Evangelical Leaders Survey revealed other common themes: remember Jesus is Lord, focus on evangelism, heal personally and heal communally.

"Our country is in desperate need of unity. Without it, America will be unable to tackle the enormous challenges that so many people now face... My prayer is that we will see this moment as an unparalleled opportunity to be the redemptive community that Christ called us to be," said Commissioner Kenneth Hodder, national commander of The Salvation Army.



Cullen Rodgers-Gates is director of development and membership for the National Association of Evangelicals.

A Beacon of Light for Faithful Living

How the NAE Helped One Couple Make Decisions About Worship and Giving

Annie and Steve Kullberg attended their first missions conference in 1983 and had no idea how it would galvanize their spiritual journey for the decades that followed. As a young couple and relative newlyweds, they were conspicuous among a mostly older crowd that gathered at Wheaton College that summer. The Kullbergs believed that God was calling them to participate in missions as “senders” (financial givers), and they were exploring potential organizations to support. However, the couple realized that they needed some sort of guide to help them discern which organizations were most aligned with their theological convictions.

Plumb Line for Theological Integrity

Browsing the promotional materials of dozens of mission agencies represented at the conference, the Kullbergs found material from the National Association of Evangelicals. Immediately, they were drawn to the Statement of Faith as a compelling summation of their core beliefs. They decided to use the NAE Statement of Faith as a plumb line for evaluating the theological integrity of organizations they were inclined to support. By God’s grace and as a result of frugal living, the Kullbergs have already been able to realize one of their life goals: to give away a significant percentage of their income to charitable causes. They are grateful to the NAE for helping them identify trustworthy organizations that have stood the test of time in advancing kingdom work.

Over the past four decades, Steve and Annie have moved regularly for Steve’s work. Each time they moved to a new city,

one of their first tasks was to find a local church. In the course of their many moves, the Kullbergs ended up worshiping in churches from 10 different denominations representing the broad spectrum of evangelical faith. “As we moved to other places, we would ask churches to show us their doctrinal statements. We then compared those statements to the NAE Statement of Faith, and we would choose which churches to attend based on how closely they aligned with the NAE.”

Faithful Church Communities

But it wasn’t only the Statement of Faith that helped the Kullbergs. As they read materials produced by the NAE, the couple became more familiar with the diversity of churches and traditions, and they took note of the various denominations and churches who were NAE members.

Shortly after the Wheaton missions conference in 1983,





From left to right: Yvonne and Jimmy Kullberg, Emily and Cody Schlager, and Steve and Annie Kullberg.

the Kullbergs were living in Rochester, New York, and there they encountered a highly polarized Christian community, which made it difficult to find a church. Steve and Annie hadn't had any exposure to the charismatic movement, but after learning that the local Assemblies of God church was a member of the NAE, they decided to worship there. Steve recalls, "Knowing of the church's involvement with the NAE gave us a great sense of relief after the stress of struggling to find a church in an otherwise divisive context."

In some of the places they moved, the Kullbergs had a hard time finding a local body of believers with whom to connect. It was during these times, especially, that they relied heavily on NAE's resources. Faithful readers of the NAE magazine for several years now, the Kullbergs shared the following: "Whenever the magazine would arrive, we were reminded that we were (and still are) connected to a much larger body of believers, even when we had a hard time finding a local congregation."

In one church, the Kullbergs had doubts about whether the pastor's behavior was in alignment with Scripture. Referring back to NAE's resources, their doubts were confirmed. They were empowered to make the difficult, but necessary choice of leaving the church to worship elsewhere.

Steve sums up the NAE's impact this way: "The NAE has been a beacon of light and a standard by which to compare other organizations and churches. In our discipleship journey, the NAE has kept us grounded."

Substantive Evangelical Identity

Reflecting on how his understanding of the term "evangelical" has changed (or not) over the years, Steve shared the following: "I am still committed to the original meaning of

the term, but am concerned about how it's been co-opted and watered down over time. Before, it was a much more substantive identity. It pains me to see the way it's become such a negative point of reference in the media. For me, the key is living in the center of biblical balance. And the NAE is my central point for finding that balance."

Steve had the following message for fellow evangelicals who may be discouraged or struggling with their evangelical identity: "Don't despair about how the media portrays evangelicals. If we follow the core tenets of our faith, we will find like-minded believers. Yes, the Church is flawed, but there is a faithful remnant, although sometimes you have to dig to find it. As Christians, we are meant to be together, and the NAE plays a crucial role in helping us identify common ground that can unify us." 


WEA
World Evangelical Alliance


How has the NAE been able to shine as a "beacon of light?" Certainly, no organization is without its blind spots. It is important that we stand within a greater community of accountability. That is one of the many reasons why the NAE is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance. Composed of more than 130 national evangelical associations (of which the NAE is one), the WEA fosters unity among evangelicals globally and strengthens evangelical identity and voice for the ultimate goal of gospel transformation. With its work to both unify and provide theological clarity on the pressing issues of the day, the WEA is a manifestation of how the global Body of Christ can be connected in our common cause to advance the gospel.



CLINGING TO TRUTH

Biblical & Practical
Guidance for Competing
Narratives





Rich Nathan has been senior pastor of Vineyard Columbus since 1987.

“Democrats along with other global elites and deep state operatives are running a child sex trafficking, Satan worshipping ring.”

“The 9/11 terrorist attack was an inside job planned by the United States and Israel to justify the invasion of Iraq.”

“COVID vaccinations contain tiny nanochips to track our movements.”

These are all entirely false claims that are believed by tens of millions of Americans including many evangelical Christians. If you are a follower of Jesus and claim to believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, then truth matters to you. Or at least, truth should matter to you! After all, the word for truth is used 224 times in the Bible.

Virtually every book in the New Testament warns followers of Jesus to be on guard against false teaching and lies. This is not a marginal concern to New Testament writers; rather combatting false teaching and holding on to the truth is central to our Christian faith. So why have so many of us been swept away by conspiracies and rumors that are unsupported by an objective assessment of the evidence?

Why Do Christians Believe in Conspiracy Theories?

First, belief in conspiracies tend to spike during times of crisis, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, times of rapid societal change, or war. *Psychologists tell us that conspiracy theories are driven by our desire for understanding.* During times of rapid social change, it's hard to make sense of seemingly random events. A conspiracy helps people “connect the dots.”

Second, *conspiracy theories enable people to regain a sense of control.* Social scientists tell us that people who feel powerless are more likely to believe in a conspiracy theory than those who feel a part of the power structure.

Third, *conspiracy theories appeal to our pride*. A believer in a conspiracy is now an “insider” and “a holder of privileged information.”

Fourth, as Michiko Kakutani, a Pulitzer Prize winning literary critic for The New York Times, pointed out: *We are living in a period of “truth decay.”* She wrote, “The term ‘truth decay’ has joined the post-truth lexicon that includes now familiar phrases such as ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts.’” Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan once observed: “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.” That is not the world that we live in today. Today we not only wrestle over values and moral judgments, but also over “facts.” No matter what you assert, a person can immediately find 10 videos contending the opposite.

Fifth, *institutions have suffered a crisis of credibility, and we have lost “gatekeepers of truth.”* From the U.S. government to the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical megachurches, almost no institution is trusted by a majority of our fellow citizens.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul’s method for discerning truth includes a discussion about Christian community.

Sixth, *social media has “democratized” the publication of information.* We no longer listen to the news on one of the three major networks. One no longer needs to vet information or get past an editorial board in order to publish information on YouTube or elsewhere.

Seventh, *we suffer from the disease of “both side-ism.”* We have fallen prey to the idea that to be fair, one has to listen to both sides even if “both sides” do not have equivalent credentials, expertise or access to the facts.

How Can Christians Combat Truth Decay?

It’s extremely difficult to dissuade someone who believes a conspiracy, because the person already mistrusts mainstream sources of information. Standard counsel includes checking with nonpartisan, fact-checking sites, such as Politifact,

FactCheck.org or Snopes.com. While that’s certainly good to do, there’s also a biblical way to discern the truth.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul’s method for discerning truth includes a discussion about Christian community. Scripture teaches that our values and beliefs will be shaped by the community that we choose for ourselves. We need to ask ourselves: What is my community to my soul? Am I becoming a kinder person? A more joyful person? A more grace-filled person? Or am I becoming an angrier person? A more anxious and fearful person? A person filled with anger and rage? The community that we choose, and the community that we listen to will shape our values and beliefs. Our community can also be online. So we also need to ask: What is the online political or religious or social group that I’m a part of doing to my soul?

We also need to pay attention to our hearts. Have you ever presented someone with evidence that you think would convince any reasonable person, but your argument didn’t convince them at all? The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:17–19 that the issue of discerning what is true is not simply a matter of the intellect. There may be a “futility of their thinking.” But the deeper problem is not intellectual and will not be solved by better statistics or stronger arguments. Rather, the organ for discerning the truth is not the head but the heart, according to the Apostle Paul.

The Bible frequently points to the condition of our hearts as the reason why we are unable to hear the truth. Discerning truth is not only how much information you have in your head, but what I’ve often called “the inclination of our hearts.” Our heart inclinations are shaped by our willingness to embrace the truth. If you are a person who *loves the truth* — about yourself; about your flaws and your strengths; about your family; about big issues like race in our country or smaller issues like whether you’re a good listener — then you’ll receive more truth! But if you’re a person whose heart is hard to the truth — because it threatens you or threatens a personal interest of yours or your group — then the truth you have will be taken away. Set your heart on loving the truth in every area, even if it comes from sources that are unpopular with your particular circle. Be someone who loves truth and always wants more truth.

How can we determine what’s true? Choose your community wisely. Keep your heart soft. Love the truth! **E**



Mary Poplin is a professor in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University and author of *Is Reality Secular?: Testing the Assumptions of Four Global Worldviews*.

Sharing the Higher Rationality of Christ

“We Have the Mind of Christ” -1 Corinthians 2:16

Never has there been a more critical or opportune time to share the wisdom of God with others. People know (perhaps now fear) that all is not right with the world, yet few know the Christian wisdom that offers both profound hope and superior ways of thinking than the contemporary secular, “spiritual” and political frameworks. Sharing God’s wisdom gives people an expanded vision and hope for new ways of thinking.

To share God’s wisdom in this way, we first must be aware of the major worldviews that are dominant in our time, which are primarily held unconsciously. Once aware of these, we can discern their consequences on our culture, friends, and even ourselves. Today’s major worldviews outside of the Christian perspective include material/naturalism, secular humanism and pantheism/spirituality. While there is always some overlap, the Christian worldview is

wholly unique, complete, accurate and life giving. Christianity offers a “higher rationality” without the fallacies and/or omissions of other worldviews.

In his book, “Foolishness to the Greeks,” theologian Lesslie Newbigin described the superiority of Christianity in this way: “Though the Christian worldview can in no way be reached by any logical step from the axioms of [the other worldviews], nevertheless the Christian worldview does offer

a wider rationality that embraces and does not contradict the rationality of [these other worldviews].” C.S. Lewis aptly described Christ’s higher rationality in an appendix titled, “On the Words ‘Spirit’ and ‘Spiritual’”: “Man is a tower in which the different floors can hardly be reached from one another, but all can be reached from the top.”

Material and Naturalists

To the materialists all that exists in the natural and human world, including human consciousness, love, trust and religious belief, is ultimately reducible to matter, energy, chemistry and physical laws. This is obviously a faith statement, because there is simply no way for science to prove that all that exists are natural phenomena since the accepted methodology of science begins only after the identification of natural phenomena and thus can only state facts about those observations. A materialist will not believe in miracles or assign any “spiritual” meanings to ideas or actions. The Judeo-Christian critique of material-naturalism is not a critique of science but of *scientism*, the insistence that science is the only source of knowledge about reality and that reality can be entirely reducible to material. All scientists are not materialists.

Without a common moral plumb line, people will always believe radically different things unmitigated by true reason.

All truths cannot be measured solely with numbers. Numerical analyses of human conditions alone are rarely sufficient. For example, seeing COVID-19 statistics we know something about the whole story of deaths from the virus. But other conditions in which these deaths occurred are important variables that transcend the statistics. For example, we do not yet know (and may never know) the effects of separating loved ones from one another, or the effects of the paralyzing fear that has been produced in many people. Biblically, we are commanded, “Do not fear, it only leads to evil” (Psalm 37:8).

Secular Humanists

The largest group of non-believers are generally secular humanists who hold that humans are now able to analyze and work out problems from a solely humanistic standpoint. The single best visual picture of secular humanism was a cartoon published in the Los Angeles Times the day after the famous existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre died. Paul Conrad drew Sartre in the form of a statue bent over chiseling himself out of stone; he had almost reached his feet. Carved at the base of the statue was Sartre’s most famous quote: “Man makes himself.”

Many secular humanists are simply uninterested in God and believe the Christian story is just another story among many made up for a particular historical time. Essentially, all secular humanists would hold that religious worldviews are either wrong, unnecessary or private. Thus, religious beliefs should not be allowed into the public square; that is, they are not candidates for true knowledge.

The defining tenet of secular humanism is the belief that human reason is sufficiently reliable to guide the course of our lives — individually and collectively — without any consideration of divine authority, which is a priori rejected. To them, God is simply a social construct made by people within the context of one’s culture, language and desires. Regardless of increasing evidence to the contrary, some secular humanists are optimistic about our abilities as humans in community to come to consensus on civic and moral norms.

However, today humanism has gone from a modern perspective to a post-modern one, with even less ability or desire to find common ground. For example, critical theory challenges straightforward thinking claiming that we should reverse or ignore standard concepts such as good and evil,





and seek to reverse their meanings with preference to the lesser acknowledged one. Many of today's conflicts emerge from this theory and understandings of "social justice." Interestingly, the Bible never uses this phrase. Instead, the Hebrew word, *tzadik*, translated "justice and righteousness," indicates that in order to have one, you must have the other. One without the other creates ground for constant conflict, left and right. Here again, the words left and right appear 14 times in the Bible, and we are always instructed to avoid left and right. Without a common moral plumb line, people will always believe radically different things unmitigated by true reason.

Pantheisms: Spiritual but Not Religious

Alongside these secular worldviews sits an amorphous "spiritual" worldview, a kind of replacement religion where humans try to cooperate with and/or even control "spirits." According to Pew Research Center, in the United States, 3 percent of 30–49 year-olds hold to some of these beliefs, this includes many "tech giants" in our culture. Here again, there is no permanent moral plumb line. Pantheists' fundamental faith is that there is a spiritual reality that is one

with observed natural and human reality. Pantheists achieve various degrees of "spiritual enlightenment" by becoming increasingly one with the ultimate spiritual reality (Nirvana in Buddhism) or by actualizing their god-nature or their real self (Atman in Hinduism) when the soul becomes united to Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Disciplines such as meditation, the study of sacred texts, chants, ceremonies, trances, veneration of deities and other spiritual practices are designed to free us from the ignorance and desire that block our enlightenment. Salvation and enlightenment are solely the responsibility of the individual

person. Connecting with the ultimate spiritual reality and becoming enlightened is said to enhance both our human well-being and consciousness and in turn positively affect the world.

The principles of the various pantheist religions morphed when they entered the West; in part, they became less distinct and their practices less demanding. The secular urge and relaxed prosperity of the West made the demanding and distinctive forms less appealing, just as it diluted some Judeo-Christian thought and theology. Most "spiritual but not religious" friends will not be strict Buddhists or Hindus but people simply surfing the spiritual net. Studies have found that this group suffers more depression and addiction than Christians or secularists. The "spiritual but not religious" group are in desperate need of Christ. One advantage is that they do believe in spiritual reality, though they may have been in some dangerous "spiritual places."

The reality of spiritual transactions is one of the primary principles shared by Judeo-Christianity and pantheism; however, this reality is very distinct in pantheism. One of the clearest differences is that all desire is considered evil in pantheism. Christians understand there are good and evil desires. To know God and to imitate Christ should be our highest desire. The ultimate difference between the pantheist worldview and monotheism is that there is a personal all-knowing God behind all things — physical, spiritual and social. To pantheists "divine spirit" is believed to be an impersonal animating force coexisting with all things. Like all worldviews, these metaphysical presuppositions are not subject to scientific verification; they constitute the faith of pantheism. For "pantheists of all types" spiritual growth is largely the work of the individual through mastering the many techniques, versus simply knowing and honoring a singular God, imitating Christ, and discerning the Holy Spirit.

Discerning With Love

If we want to love our neighbors, we must discern their current worldviews and their most important concerns and needs. Then we can come alongside as a friend and gradually but persistently articulate in the context of their lives and current beliefs the "higher rationality" of Christendom. It has no equal. **E**



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Discipleship in the Age of Conspiracy Theories

How Church Leaders Can Nurture the Evangelical Mind

In the quarter-century since Mark Noll famously pointed out that the scandal of the evangelical mind was that there was not much of an evangelical mind, many church leaders have dedicated considerable time and effort to addressing the problem. The results of this effort have been mixed at best. As Noll acknowledged recently, he was “more optimistic, though not overwhelmingly so.” Despite the quality work done in evangelical seminaries and universities as well as significant published work by evangelical thinkers across disciplines, recent events suggest that the evangelical mind in its totality seems be continuing its decline.

The past few years have been a painful reminder of the consequences of this decline as we’ve witnessed the growing popularity of conspiracy theories in

our churches. While we have taught our people to serve, evangelize, worship and lead, too frequently our pragmatism limits our commitment to discipling our people to think well

(Romans 12:2). The result is that a disturbing number of our people — and more than a few pastors — have been ensnared by conspiratorial leaders. In a recent LifeWay Research study, nearly half of pastors reported frequently hearing church members repeating conspiracy theories. In essence, we have produced disciples that are easily “tossed back and forth by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14).

This is indeed scandalous, not only because it endangers our people, but because it degrades our witness precisely at a time when our culture is increasingly skeptical of faith. As Christians willingly submit their reputation to defending conspiracy theories on the account of little evidence, this raises questions about their evidence for believing the truth of the gospel. If we amplify lies about a globalist cabal subverting our democracy, what are others to make of our claims that Christ has risen from the dead? James reminds us that just as the same spring cannot produce both fresh and salt water, our witness is devoted to truth or conspiracy (James 3:11). If proclaiming the latter diminishes the gospel, Christian leaders must stand against its growth in our midst.

Facing such a novel and contentious problem, let us suggest two important responses.

The defining pastoral challenge of this generation of church leaders will be contending for our people’s attention.

First, church leaders must immediately address the underlying needs of our people that have given conspiracy theories footholds in their lives. When people are uncertain or overwhelmed with excessive information, they struggle to triage personally. The poet T.S. Eliot once observed that “when we do not know, or when we do not know enough, we tend always to substitute emotions for thoughts.”

Church leaders must therefore begin by seeing the popularity of conspiracy theories as a call to guard the flock (Acts 20:28). We need to speak to the emotional needs that

are bubbling over, applying the gospel to their fear, loneliness and anger. We must also provide guidance in this season of polarization, helping our people discern truth from falsehood in their media habits.

Second, church leaders need to look past a simple top-down approach of strengthening our educational institutions and empowering our leading minds. This has been the prevailing strategy for the past quarter century and it has yielded significant fruit. However, it has not trickled down to the pew level as many had hoped and a significant church/academy disconnect remains. Future success then requires dedicating ourselves to the task of, as Kevin Vanhoozer suggests, transforming the imaginations of their people to see, think about, and experience life through the prism of the faith.

The defining pastoral challenge of this generation of church leaders will be contending for our people’s attention. This challenge extends past conspiracy theories to the digital habits we have uncritically allowed to permeate our lives. As every social media platform or news source fights for our discipleship, pastors need to prioritize equipping their people for this battle. In essence, the task before us is not confining our discipleship to teaching *what* to think but *how*.

This work of discipling our people to think can be daunting. As Alan Jacobs points out, thinking is not natural but rather a discipline. “Relatively few people *want* to think,” Jacobs observes, “[t]hinking troubles us; thinking tires us. Thinking can force us out of familiar, comforting habits; thinking can complicate our lives.” This is where pastors must begin, challenging their people to move beyond the comfort of their existing media habits and to scrutinize who they give influence to and why. To discover the joys of *knowing* not only the rich depth of the Christian faith but learning from our disagreement with others.

If the Church hopes to combat the attention merchants of our digital world, it must meet the spirit of our times with a greater vision of human flourishing than chasing followers. It must combat the transient pleasure of the media frenzy with the transcendent richness of the Christian faith. It must offer a discipleship that is centered upon a perpetual awe of the enduring and unfathomable truth of the gospel of Jesus. **E**

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Why Truth-Telling Builds Bridges

The idea of unity is enticing. We all want to live in harmony with one another, avoid divisive conflicts, and feel we belong. Physical distancing and political polarization have heightened our longing for unity. The more elusive unity feels, the more we seek it.

As believers, we espouse the importance of telling the truth, but we have at times and for sustained periods avoided facing the facts. This has been the case in matters of politics, religion and race.

Too much of our understanding of the history of this country has been based on the lies of meritocracy, American exceptionalism and white supremacy. In recent months, we've seen attempts to suppress the truth in school curricula, grand juries and even in our efforts to educate churches about racial justice. When those in power seek to suppress the truth at all costs, marginalized communities wonder why. To build trust, begin with the truth.

If we want true unity in our churches, we have to start with the transparency that comes through truth-telling. Bridging any gaps cannot be done without first being honest and open with ourselves and one another. Beware of calls for unity that shuns truth-telling for the sake of preserving the status quo.

In "Be the Bridge," I wrote "If we avoid hard truths to preserve personal comfort or to fashion a facade of peace, our

division will only widen. Jesus can make beauty from ashes, but the family of God must first see and acknowledge the ashes."

Truth-telling often feels risky. It has the potential to disrupt our status quo and upend the social order that has benefitted some for generations. When you benefit from a lie, there is little incentive to seek the truth. But the Bible tells us that the truth sets us free.

Believing the truth about our history sets us free to create a future where the *imago dei* in everyone is honored and respected. It frees us to pursue the healthy, thriving, secure and inclusive relationships we desire. Truth-telling will free the Church to be a credible witness.

Truth is the bond that seals the work of bridge-building, and we are all called to be bridge-builders. We build bridges to close the gaps between error and truth, between false premises and sure foundations. In our deeply held belief that God is love, we do this holy work so that our love will show the world that God's goodness is for everyone. **E**



On Science and Faith

How Both Move Us Beyond Fear

Elaine Howard Ecklund is a professor of sociology at Rice University, where she founded The Religion and Public Life Program and holds the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences. One of her main research interests is the intersection of science and religion. She is the author of six books, including “Religion Vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think,” “Why Science and Faith Need Each Other: Eight Shared Values That Move Us Beyond Fear” and the forthcoming “Varieties of Atheism in Science.”

BASED ON YOUR RESEARCH, HOW DO PEOPLE OF FAITH VIEW SCIENCE AND SCIENTISTS? AND HOW DO SCIENTISTS VIEW PEOPLE OF FAITH?

In “Why Science and Faith Need Each Other,” I talk about the fears different groups have of each other. In some ways people of faith fear scientists and scientists often fear people of faith. Fear can masquerade as anger, leading to conflict. When we see conflict between religious belief and science, we should examine whether there might be underlying fear and try to understand it. Is there fear that accepting certain scientific ideas will decrease the strength of their faith or lead them away from faith altogether? Fear about certain scientific findings and technologies that raise ethical and theological questions? If Christians are responding to science based on such fear, we should consider how to assuage it or replace the emotion with more productive habits or practices.

DO EVANGELICALS FIND THAT SCIENCE IS COMPATIBLE WITH THEIR FAITH, OR DO THEY FEEL THEY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FAITH?

There is not a neat answer to this question. In the churches I have visited, I have met Christians who keep their children out of certain science classes, afraid that scientific education will lead them to doubt, and ultimately reject, their faith. Christians from minority communities — in particular Black and Hispanic Christians — and Christian women worry about being part of science and technology fields where not only their race, ethnicity or gender is underrepresented but also their faith. I have met Christians who are afraid of how scientists will influence religion and its place in society. I have also met many Christians who want to have more productive conversations about the relationship between science and religion. They hope to find ways to better engage with science



and the technologies that, at times, seem to be taking over our society.

HOW HAVE EVANGELICALS APPROACHED SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS, PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES AND VACCINES?

In general evangelical Christians place a great deal of trust in science, but they often have concerns about scientists as a people group. And they can include rejecting certain pieces of science as part of a broader group identity of what it means to be an evangelical. When it comes to scientists, some fear that scientists are not trustworthy or are inherently against religion and religious people. This may be especially true for Black and brown Christians who are in communities where there may be difficult experiences with the medical community. But as we have seen from a recent Pew Research Study report it's actually white evangelical Christians who have the most suspicion of the coronavirus vaccine. Christians, I think, have a responsibility to promote justice in science and to foster the scientific and medical careers of those who are in Black and brown communities.

ANXIETY LEVELS AROUND THE CORONAVIRUS AND VARIANT STRANDS ARE HIGH. HOW MIGHT SCIENCE AND FAITH — WORKING TOGETHER — ADDRESS THE FEARS MANY PEOPLE HAVE?

There are some wonderful Christian leaders — like Francis Collins, head of the National Institutes of Health, and Georgia Dunston, founding director of the National Human Genome Center at Howard University — who are speaking to faith communities and who are talking about the importance of scientific and faith communities working together for our common health. Those with a foot in both worlds, the faith world and the science world, really have capacity to act as what I call “boundary pioneers” in these times. This kind of boundary crossing has never been more needed.

WHERE DO YOU BELIEVE TENSIONS BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FAITH BEGAN?

There have been outspoken scientists and outspoken Christians who have argued vehemently for an incompatibility between science and faith. There have been and still are very real tensions. That said, the loudest voices often feel like they

are the majority, and the loudest voices sometimes make us miss the more nuanced grappling happening on the ground.

HOW CAN CHURCH LEADERS HELP THEIR PEOPLE BETTER INTEGRATE BIBLICAL TRUTH WITH SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS WHERE THESE APPEAR TO BE IN CONFLICT?

We tend to go right to transmission of ideas as a primary way that people learn new information; really social scientific research shows that people often learn best from those they trust. Pastors don't have to be experts in science. But they can encourage scientists who are in their congregations to talk more about their scientific work and how they connect it to their faith. If there are not scientists in a congregation, church leaders can connect people in their congregation — especially youth — to organizations like BioLogos, the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Dialogue on Science Ethics and Religion program, and Science for the Church. These are places to find great resources and, most importantly, find people in science and medicine who are people of faith and who can help them wrestle with these things.

And the direction is not one way. Scientific technology advances quickly, but theological and spiritual reflection advances necessarily much slower. Churches and thoughtful faith communities can provide spaces for reflection and commentary on the moral implications of science. It is especially important to provide ideas about how we can foster science and medical access in communities that are impoverished along with other issues related to science and justice. And of course, I would love it if churches would read, “Why Science and Faith Need Each Other,” which I wrote for Christian churches and leaders. Not only does it contain valuable information, but I've also included discussion questions in order to start these important conversations within our churches. **E**

Many people perceive tension — and sometimes even hostility — between faith and science. But there's more agreement than many realize. The NAE brought together a small cadre of authors to bring faith and science on to the same page. Download a free copy at [NAE.net/godandscience](https://nae.net/godandscience).





How the Bereans Sought the Truth

At the beginning of World War II, Oxford University considered closing down. What value was education, when England needed to marshal all its might as the world stood on the precipice of destruction? C. S. Lewis delivered a message “Learning in War-time” at Oxford to address this question. He vigorously contended that “Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.” If fascism, racial superiority and technology could militarize Hitler’s ascent, then ideas clearly had consequences.

The earliest followers of Jesus understood that ideas have consequences. Those disciples could not have a casual relationship with the truth, because persecution often accompanied the gospel and faith became a matter of life and death.

The Book of Acts commends the commitment to truth: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men” (Acts 17:11–12).

Two things stand out to me about the Bereans’ noble character as they sought to see what was true.

First, they displayed humble curiosity in an eagerness to learn. Pursuing truth is not simply, and perhaps not even primarily, a matter of intelligence. Truth-seeking requires

humility, a willingness to question ourselves and our penchant for self-justification. Sometimes, the first step of telling the truth is to point out the lies that we have believed. At times, truth will require repentance, and that is never comfortable.

Second, they were generous in spirit but discerning of mind as “they examined the Scriptures.” The particular word used for “examine” occurs elsewhere in the New Testament to describe a judicial hearing (see Luke 23:14; Acts 12:19). The Bereans inquired intensely and intentionally into the truth, undoubtedly cross-examining Paul, looking for evidence and seeking coherence.

In days often filled with a war of words or competing claims of reality, navigating complexity with biblical clarity requires the twin companions of curiosity and discernment. May the Spirit help us be people of noble character who eagerly seek what is true. 🙏

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—Vernon Grounds,
President Denver Seminary, circa 1965



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