



How Jesus Changed This Scientist's Life

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I am a scientist with a PhD in Biochemistry. I was a professor at Iowa State University for 24 years. When I came to Iowa State University in 1986, I was not walking with Christ. I had attended church while I was growing up, but I never understood who Jesus was or why he died on the cross, and I didn't know what any of that meant for my life. When I left home to go to college, I quit going to church and didn't think much about spiritual things for the next 25 years.

When I arrived at Iowa State University, I was having a lot of success in my career. But my personal life was falling apart. My first marriage had broken up and my two children were living with their mother in Florida. I got married a second time but that was a disaster, and soon after arriving at Iowa State that also ended. I found myself living alone and very much afraid of relationships. Additionally, I began to realize that the excitement and personal glory associated with successes in my career were fleeting, leaving a big hole in my life. Surely there must be more to life than what I was experiencing.

In God's timing I began to feel the need for relationships in my life. Then, a Christian graduate student in my laboratory invited me to a church picnic where I made a connection with a Christian singles group. Over the next year through listening to teaching in church, reading the Bible and conversations with my new friends in the singles group, I discovered that God loves me and created me to be in a relationship with him. But there was a problem, my sin (rejection and disobedience to God) was a barrier to that relationship. However, God loved me so much that he sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for me as the perfect sacrifice for my sins. Then, after three days, God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign that he accepted that sacrifice, and as a guarantee that all who accept this perfect gift will have eternal life. In September 1992, I prayed with my pastor and invited Jesus into my life at the age of 46.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?

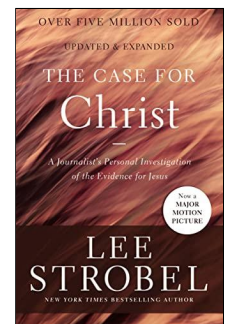
First, history has only one main event and that is the death of Jesus on the cross and his subsequent resurrection on the third day. Without the cross there is no sacrifice for sin and there is no way to face a sinless God. If there is no resurrection death is the end. Forgiveness of sins and deliverance from death are the claims of the cross. The cross is not just an event in history it is THE event in history. The Apostle Paul puts it this way:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in

Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-19)

Why do I believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

First, the four gospels are eyewitness accounts of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Two of the Gospels, Matthew and John, were written by Jesus's apostles. The Gospel of Mark was written by a companion of Peter who carefully recorded the Apostle Peter's, eyewitness observations of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Finally, the Gospel of Luke was written by Paul's beloved physician, who although not one of the twelve Apostles, carefully researched Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.



These accounts have been carefully preserved through history. According to Norman Geisler, and William Nix¹ there are more manuscripts of the New Testament than any other book from antiquity and it has survived in a purer form than any other Great Book in a form that is 99.5% pure.

Additional evidence comes from the fact that Mary Magdalen and two other women witnessed Jesus's death on the cross, his burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb and were the first witnesses of Jesus's resurrection. These facts remove several arguments to refute the resurrection, namely that Jesus didn't really die but simply passed out and that the tomb was empty because Jesus's followers misidentified Jesus's tomb. If you were making up this story, you would not have women play such an important role because of their low status in society in that culture.

Finally, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 provides unmistakable evidence for Jesus's resurrection in an early Christian creed that dates to within 2 years of Jesus's death on the cross.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one

1. Norman Geisler and William Nix in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of The Evidence for Jesus*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) p. 85

time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Impact on my life.

Meeting Jesus changed my life in remarkable ways. He brought a wonderful woman named Denise into my life and we have been married for 30 years. He gave us a son, Isaac, who we adopted from Russia in 1996, and he restored my relationships with my daughter and older son from my first marriage.

Becoming a Christian completely changed my understanding of my role as a university professor. Before I began to follow Christ, it was about personal fame and glory. Now I understand that being a Christian professor is a calling from God. He placed me at Iowa State University to serve and to glorify him.

Christianity and Science Honors seminar.

One of the ways that God has called me to serve is by giving me the opportunity to develop and teach a one-credit honors seminar called *Christianity and Science* which helps students understand and process the relationship between science and Christianity. The course deals with two areas of apparent conflict between Christianity and science. One is the question of origins and the other deals with claims by atheistic scientists that science disproves God. By the end of the course students gain a deeper understanding of the different Christian points of view and learn that there is no necessary conflict between science and the Bible. I've been teaching that course for more than 20 years.

The relationship between science and Christianity was an issue for me as I was becoming a Christian and is also an issue for many students, both believers and seekers. As I came to understand that Christianity and science were not enemies but friends that provide complementary perspectives about God's creation. I felt that what I was learning might be of benefit for students and I thought about developing a course on this topic. However, I had a problem with offering this course because while I have credentials as a scientist, I am not trained as a theologian.

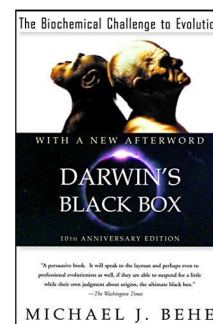
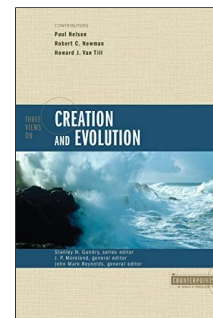
But then I had an opportunity to serve for one semester on my college's Honors Committee. There I discovered that students in the Honors program were required to take two one-credit Honors Seminars as a broadening experience. What the program liked to do was have a professor teach a course which blended his or her expertise in their academic discipline with a hobby interest. So, I saw an opportunity to develop a seminar about Christianity and science, which blended my expertise in science with my hobby interest "Christianity." I submitted a proposal for the seminar to the Honors Curriculum Committee and to my amazement it was approved, and I first taught the seminar in Fall of 2000.

Pushback in the University

Early in teaching the course I received pushback about the course content from my biology colleagues, the honors curriculum committee, and some university administrators. The first occurred in 2003, just 3 years after the seminar was first approved. Unlike normal academic courses at Iowa State University, Honors Seminars are reviewed by the Honors Curriculum committee each year. When I submitted the proposal for 2003, it was rejected by the committee. I found out from a friend on the committee that there were three atheists on the committee who were concerned that I was using a textbook from a Christian Publisher, *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*.^[^2] They also thought the course was inappropriate for a secular university class and they worried that I might be proselytizing students. One of the atheists also passed my proposal on to four of my biology colleagues as well as a professor from religious studies where I received some additional feedback. One of the biology professors was strongly opposed to the course. He thought the topic of the course was not a valid field of inquiry, would not be approved as a science class and because the class addressed different Christian views (Young Earth Creationism, Old Earth Creationism in addition to Theistic Evolution) he saw the seminar as an attempt to bring pseudoscience into the classroom. The other biology professors agreed that this would not be a valid science course but thought that this was a topic that should be addressed. The Religious Studies professor thought that this was an excellent proposal and was the sort of thing that should be taught in the Philosophy or Religious Studies programs. In the end the seminar was not approved for 2003. However, based on some of the comments I received, I made some modifications to the course (e.g., changing the textbook and being much more specific about what I was teaching when I submitted the proposal).

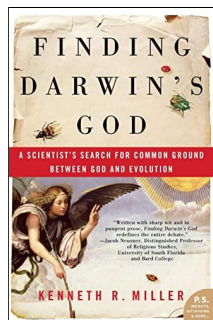
[^2] J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds. *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic; Counterpoints edition, 1999).

A second incident occurred in the Fall of 2005. During the early years of teaching the course I devoted one class period to the question "Does God have a place as an explanation in science?" We explored the boundary between Christian belief system and science using the notion of "Irreducible Complexity" and "Intelligent Design" as examples. In the class I presented Michael Behe's arguments for Irreducible Complexity and Intelligent Design in his book *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*² as well as the counter arguments from a chapter in Ken Miller's book *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*.³ My position on this subject is explained in more detail in two blogs I wrote for InterVarsity's *Emerging Scholars Network*.⁴⁵

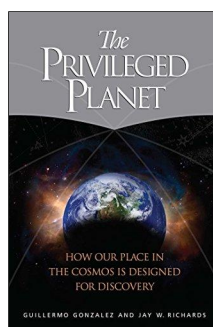


2. Michael Behe. *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. (New York: Free Press, 1996).

At this time, there was a lot of controversy both locally and nationally about the teaching of Intelligent Design. Locally, a young professor in the Physics Department, Guillermo Gonzalez, had coauthored a book *The Privileged Planet*⁶ with Jay Richards from the Discovery Institute in Seattle. This book, which promoted Intelligent Design, created a firestorm among professors at Iowa State University (ISU) who saw this as promoting pseudoscience and thus tarnishing the reputation of ISU. More than a hundred ISU faculty signed a petition saying that Intelligent Design was pseudoscience and should not be taught at ISU. This was happening at the same time as the Dover Trial⁷ about the legitimacy of teaching Intelligent Design in public schools was attracting national attention.



While I was teaching the Honors Seminar, I got a call from a Wall Street Journal reporter wanting more information about what I was teaching about Intelligent Design in my course. During our conversation, I told him that I was going to teach the unit about Intelligent Design soon and invited him to sit in on the class. He accepted my offer, sat in on my class and then went home and wrote his article. It appeared in November on the front page of the Wall Street Journal above the fold with an artist's sketch of my picture. I was shocked when I saw the headline for the article *At Some Colleges Classes Questioning Evolution Take Hold*⁸ with the subheading *Intelligent Design Doctrine*. I was even more shocked when I read the content of the article because he totally misrepresented what I did in class. He wrote about the arguments presented for Intelligent Design but totally left out the arguments from the other side. What I realized was that the reporter already had his story written and was only looking for a poster child to illustrate his story which unfortunately was my course.



On the day that the article appeared, the Dean of my college got an irate call from the President of the University wanting to know what

was going on with my seminar. Then my Department Chair got an irate call from my college Dean as well as from several of my faculty colleagues. Fortunately for me my Department Chair knew and supported what I was doing in the course. My immediate response to this all was to get out of Dodge as I was scheduled to go to a meeting in Florida. When I got back my department chair and I agreed that we should have a faculty meeting where I could explain what the Honors seminar was about and what I taught about Intelligent Design. It was a very intense meeting in which I felt that my colleagues weren't listening to what I said but simply vented their preexisting beliefs that Christianity had no place in the university. After this brouhaha I thought for sure that the Honors Seminar would never be approved again but I was wrong. It was approved by the curriculum committee for 2006 and has continued to be offered through 2023.

My relationship with Young Earth Creationism

I came to faith in a church that taught young earth creationism and I continue to be part of another church where young earth creationism is taught from the pulpit. Young earth creationism is the belief that God miraculously created the universe, the earth and all living creatures in seven 24-hour days. In contrast, I am convinced by the scientific evidence that the universe and the earth are very old. We don't yet know whether life originated through a supernatural or natural mechanism but after the origin of life I affirm that further development of life on earth occurred through a God created and guided natural mechanism (evolution by natural selection).

Why then do go to a young earth church. It's because I am an Evangelical Christian and I like the fact that the church teaches from the Bible and believes that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. While serious Christians have differing views about the timing and mechanism of creation.⁹ Most of the disagreement comes from differences in the interpretation of the text of Genesis 1. For me an important insight came from realizing that the main themes of Genesis 1 are first that God and God alone created everything, that he created with wisdom and order, and that he is sovereign over his creation. And second that humans are the pinnacle of God's creation, created in God's image with a purpose; to be stewards/rulers of his creation.¹⁰ These two themes resonate throughout the rest of the Bible and all my brothers and sisters in Christ in my church can agree on them. In contrast, the timing and mechanism of creation are secondary concerns that are not essential to God's plan of redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In closing, I am incredibly grateful for what God began in my life more than 30 years ago. To paraphrase the words of Psalm 103: *Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits...who redeemed my life from the pit and crowned me with [his] love and compassion!*

3. Kenneth Miller. *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

4. Thomas S. Ingebritsen. "Does Intelligent Design Rule Out Evolution?" Emerging Scholars Blog, 2004.

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6. Guillermo Gonzalez and J.W. Richards. *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery*. (Washington, DC: G. Regnery Publishing, 2004).

7. "Kitzmiller v. Dover: Intelligent Design on Trial" National Center for Science Education, 2015.

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Links

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