

The
Unshakable
TRUTH

JOSH McDOWELL
SEAN McDOWELL



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

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CONTENTS

PART I THE TWELVE UNSHAKABLE TRUTHS OF CHRISTIANITY

1. What We All Want out of Life	15
2. Twelve Truths That Define the Christian Faith	29
3. The Real Meaning of Truth	37

PART II THE UNSHAKABLE TRUTH OF GOD'S CREATION

||||| TRUTH ONE: GOD EXISTS |||||

4. Who Is God?	51
5. Evidence for God's Existence	57
6. Discovering Your Identity	67
7. Living Out Your Relational Image of God	75

||||| TRUTH TWO: GOD'S WORD |||||

8. Why God Gave Us His Words	85
9. Evidence That God's Word Is Reliable	93
10. The Protection and Provision of God's Word	105
11. Living Under God's Protection and Enjoying His Provisions	113

||||| TRUTH THREE: ORIGINAL SIN |||||

12. The First Broken Relationship	125
13. Evidence That Sin Has Consequences	133
14. Choosing Right from Wrong	139
15. Practical Examples of How to Make Right Choices	145

PART III
THE UNSHAKABLE TRUTH OF GOD'S INCARNATION

■■■■■■■■■■ TRUTH FOUR: GOD BECAME HUMAN ■■■■■■■■■■

16. We Rejected God—God Accepted Us.	155
17. Evidence That God Became Human to Redeem Us.	159
18. What God's Unconditional Acceptance Produces	171
19. How to Accept Others As God Accepts Us	177

■■■■■■■■ TRUTH FIVE: CHRIST'S ATONEMENT FOR SIN ■■■■■■■■

20. The High Price of Forgiveness	187
21. Evidence That Jesus Was God's Perfect Sacrifice	193
22. The True Meaning of Love.	199
23. How to Love Others As God Loves Us.	203

■■■■■■■■ TRUTH SIX: JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH ■■■■■■■■

24. What Makes Us Right Before God?.	213
25. Evidence That Christ Has the Power to Save Us.	217
26. The Joy of Salvation	223
27. Explaining How to Have a Relationship with God	231

■■■■■■■■ TRUTH SEVEN: LIVING THE TRANSFORMED LIFE ■■■■■■■■

28. Understanding Your Purpose.	241
29. Evidences of a Changed Life	245
30. Seeing Yourself As God Sees You	255
31. Living Out a Changed Life	263

PART IV
THE UNSHAKABLE TRUTH OF GOD'S RE-CREATION

||||| TRUTH EIGHT: JESUS' BODILY RESURRECTION |||||

32. The Historical Necessity of Christ's Resurrection.	277
33. Evidence That Jesus Literally Rose from the Dead	281
34. Overcoming the Fear of Death	297
35. Living Bodily on Earth with Our Hearts in Heaven	303

||||| TRUTH NINE: THE TRINITY |||||

36. The Meaning of One God in Three Persons	313
37. Evidence That the Holy Spirit Exists	323
38. The Purpose of the Holy Spirit in Our Lives	327
39. How to Live in the Power of the Holy Spirit.	335

||||| TRUTH TEN: GOD'S KINGDOM |||||

40. Kingdoms at War.	349
41. Evidence That God's Kingdom Has Positively Influenced the World	355
42. Determining Your Kingdom Worldview	361
43. How Your Worldview Defines Who You Are, Why You Are Here, and Where You Are Going.	367

||||| TRUTH ELEVEN: THE CHURCH |||||

44. What Is the Church?	377
45. Evidence That God's Authentic Church Is Alive and Well	383
46. The Priority of the Church	391
47. How the Church Meets Human and Spiritual Needs	397

||||| TRUTH TWELVE: THE RETURN OF CHRIST |||||

48. Our Restored Home: Heaven on Earth 407
49. Evidence for Life After Death 413
50. Experiencing Eternal Joy 421
51. Fulfilling Your Destiny 427

FAMILY OR SMALL-GROUP ACTIVITIES

Appendix A: The Redemption Celebration 435
Appendix B: The Revelation Celebration 455
Appendix C: The Restoration Celebration. 473

Notes 491

Index 501



PART I

THE TWELVE
UNSHAKABLE TRUTHS
OF CHRISTIANITY

What is the Christian faith, really?



What do we believe?



Why do we believe it?



How is it relevant to our lives?



How can we live it out?

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT WE ALL WANT OUT OF LIFE

It was a beautiful fall day. The car windows were all rolled down. I (Josh) was in my first year of college, and I was driving some of my friends from campus to downtown. We were laughing and just having a lot of fun. A woman pulled up beside us at the traffic light, rolled down her window, and with a scowl on her face said, “What right do you kids have to be so happy!”

Our Desire for Deep Happiness

Deep down all of us want to be happy. We want to live a satisfying life, a life of joy and contentment. Actually, God wants us to enjoy that as well. Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11 NIV). Yet the quest for deep happiness often eludes us. Webster’s dictionary defines happiness as “a pleasurable or satisfying experience.” Happiness is often equated with pleasurable feelings. And of course there’s nothing inherently wrong with pleasurable satisfaction, except in how we pursue it.

Focusing on Self

I (Sean, Josh’s son and co-author) work as an educator. When I ask my students what they want most in their lives, their typical response is “happiness.” I ask them to define happiness, and most of them tell me that happiness is people feeling good and having fun. Many of us would define it that way. If happiness is about a pleasurable

feeling or experience of fun, then it should follow that the greater number of fun experiences we have, the happier we become.

But somehow, it doesn't seem to work out that way. For example, the earning power of the baby boomers increased dramatically over that of any previous generation in history. They have had more money, more leisure time, more access to sports, travel, and entertainment than any society has ever experienced. And yet according to happiness expert Dr. Martin Seligman, baby boomers experienced a tenfold increase in depression over any previous generation. The reason for the depression, Dr. Seligman concludes, was that people began a shift toward a focus on self.¹

When one's mission in life is to pursue pleasure, the result is to become "me" focused. And "me"-focused happiness is generally short-lived. Sooner or later, and for most people it is later, when we focus primarily on our own pleasure, our lives tend to become empty, depressed, and void of any real meaning. We come to experience the reality that a self-centered focus doesn't produce lasting satisfaction, joy, or real happiness. Christian philosopher and apologist J.P. Moreland suggests a conclusion to a self-absorbed life:

If happiness is having an internal feeling of fun or pleasurable satisfaction, and if it is our main goal, where will we place our focus all day long? The focus will be on us, and the result will be a culture of self-absorbed individuals who can't live for something larger than we are.²

Yet this is the current life philosophy that most people have bought into: The individual always comes first, with the number-one virtue being to feel good about yourself. The culture tells you to "be yourself, believe in yourself, express yourself." That's why we have *You*Tube and *My*Space. Self, self, self. The prevailing view is that you *do what it takes to feel good about yourself because that's the most important thing in the world. That is the way to find happiness.*

To some degree or another most of us have bought into that viewpoint. And it's easy to understand why. If the goal is happiness, then why shouldn't we pursue the things that will give us pleasure and thus make us happy?

Focusing on Jesus and His Worldview

Jesus, however, has another view on achieving genuine happiness and joy—one that encompasses a whole different set of priorities. Instead of seeking our happiness first, Jesus tells us to put *him and his kingdom* first (Matthew 6:33). He says we must die to ourselves; that to find our life we must lose it; essentially, that we must look beyond ourselves and pursue him first. In reading such things, many people wonder how we can expect to be happy if we set aside our quest for what gives us pleasure and

follow someone who asks us for our total commitment. As a result, they think Christianity might spoil all their fun.

This is emphatically not the case. Jesus said he was “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) and our source of genuine happiness. According to Jesus, happiness is not based upon a certain feeling. Instead, it is a sense of contentment, peace, and joy that transcends our circumstances and feelings. When Jesus said that his joy would be in us and our joy would be complete, he was defining the true way to happiness—a happiness that does not fade, but grows and expands into true and lasting joy.

|||||
A worldview is what we assume to be true about the basic makeup of our world.
|||||

He was saying to focus on him and his way—his view of the world. And by doing this we would understand who we are, and thus we would experience our identity as a person of value and worth. We would realize why we are here, and thus we would experience our purpose and meaning in life. We would know where we are going, and thus we would experience our destiny and mission in a life larger than ourselves.

And in this process we will find we have attained something much bigger and better than the way our culture understands happiness, which is based on the pleasure of the moment. We will find true, deep, satisfying, and lasting joy. It will be a joy that remains intact through all of life, with or without pleasures, through ups and downs, through pains, sorrows, and losses. That is something we all want.

The way to achieve this lasting joy is to buy into Jesus’ idea of life—that is, his worldview. A worldview is what we assume to be true about the basic makeup of our world. A worldview is like a mental map of reality. We believe certain things about ourselves and God and life, and then we interpret our experiences through them. Everyone has a worldview, even though not everyone *realizes* they have one.

Jesus’ worldview—his view of life—is called a biblical worldview. Embracing a biblical worldview means understanding and living life from God’s perspective. It means understanding what we were meant to know and be and how we were meant to live. This biblical worldview works because it explains the truth about God and about us. That is what Jesus and the whole of Scripture does—it gives us the truth about life and happiness, and the power to live according to the kingdom of God. As J.P. Moreland says,

This is why truth is so powerful. It allows us to cooperate with reality, whether spiritual or physical, and tap into its power. As we learn to think correctly about God, specific scriptural teachings, the soul, or other important aspects of a Christian worldview, we are placed in touch with God and those realities.³

Nothing works right unless it conforms to reality. A plane flies because engineers design its shape to conform to the realities of airflow and gravity. A boat floats because its designers shaped it to conform to the realities of water displacement. Try to fly a boat or float a plane and the results will be disastrous. It's the same with your life. If you want a significant life, you must run your life in accordance with what it was designed to do. Your life was created to work properly when it conforms to the reality of its purpose. And God has gone to great lengths to show us the reality of our purpose, which is diametrically opposed to how our culture understands happiness. He tells us that when we abandon self-absorption we will find significance. When we seek first His kingdom, all these things will be added unto us (Matthew 6:33). When we find the meaning he intends for our lives, we will gain a deep contentment even in the middle of the pain, loss, and abandonment that characterizes our fallen world. This is why it is vitally important to adopt God's perspective on life. This, and only this, is the path to genuine happiness and deep, lasting joy.

My (Josh's) Path

As a teenager, I (Josh) began my quest for happiness down the wrong path. Yet I sincerely wanted the answers to *Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?* So I started searching for answers. I certainly didn't find answers at home. My father was the town drunk. I grew up watching in fear and horror as my father beat my mother and wreaked havoc at home. I experienced sexual abuse from a man named Wayne, whom my parents hired as a part-time cook and housekeeper. As I got older I eventually told my mother about what Wayne was doing, but she didn't believe me. I can't describe to you the pain of abandonment I felt when my mother refused to believe me. Also, growing up I never remember my father saying that he loved me. The only love I ever felt was from a struggling, abused mother who died suddenly when I was a teenager. So my home was not a place to find answers or happiness.

In the small Michigan community in which I grew up, everyone seemed to be into religion, so my search started there. I really got into the church scene. But I must have picked the wrong church, because I felt worse inside the church than I did outside. So I gave up on the church to provide me any answers.

Then I thought that education might have the answers, so I enrolled in a university. I soon became unpopular with my professors because I hounded them with so many questions. But I learned that my professors had just as many problems, frustrations, and unanswered questions as I did.

I remember seeing a student wearing a T-shirt that read, *Don't follow me, I'm lost.* That's how everyone at the university seemed to me. I concluded education wasn't the answer.

Next, I tried prestige. I thought I could find a noble cause, commit to it, and in

the process become well known. So I ran for various student offices. It was great at first. People got to know me and I enjoyed spending the university's money getting the speakers I wanted. I also liked the idea of spending the students' money for throwing parties.

But the prestige thing soon wore off. I would wake up on Monday morning, usually with a headache from the night before, dreading the next five days. I endured Monday through Friday just to experience the party nights on the weekend. But every Monday brought the meaningless cycle all over again.

About that time I noticed a small group of people who seemed different from the others. They appeared to know who they were and where they were going. They had a clear set of convictions about what they believed. And what really stood out was that they appeared to be genuinely happy. Their happiness and joy wasn't like mine, which was dependent on my circumstances. I was happy only when things were going great—when I was having “fun.” But they seemed to possess an inner source of joy that I longed for, and I wondered where it came from.

I befriended these people and tried to figure out what they knew that I didn't. One day I asked one of these students (a good-looking woman in the group) what made her so different, so happy. She had told me before she hadn't always been that way but she had changed. So I asked her, “What changed your life?”

Her answer shocked me. She used two words as a solution, two words I never thought I'd hear at the university. She simply said, “Jesus Christ.” I immediately told her I was fed up with religion and the church and was certain it wasn't a solution. Again, this woman had convictions and she knew what she believed. She shot back and said, “I didn't say *religion*, I said *Jesus Christ*.”

She and her friends went on to explain that a relationship with God through Jesus Christ offered what I would come to know as a biblical worldview. They told me it was Christ and his worldview—seeing everything from a biblical perspective—that would answer all the questions I had. They didn't offer to walk me through a shallow prayer or get me to go to “church meetings.” What they did was challenge me to intellectually examine the claims of Jesus and to determine, in essence, whether God's worldview written in Scripture was credible. I accepted their challenge out of pride. I wanted to prove Christianity was a farce.

What I discovered was that I was the farce. My quest for happiness and meaning was found in Christ.

Most people who know my testimony know I set out to disprove Christianity, and they assume I came to Christ through the intellectual route. They think my examination of the evidence of Christ's deity, his resurrection, and the reliability of Scripture convinced me that God had spoken and that it offered me a worldview that would establish my identity, purpose, and meaning in life—and therefore I trusted in Christ.

Truth is, all the evidence I have documented in my books did not bring me into a relationship with Christ. The convincing evidence certainly got my attention, but it was God's love that drew me to him. I saw love between a group of Jesus-followers who devoted themselves to God and one another. And God demonstrated his love to me through them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit my life was transformed through a relationship with God. I discovered a whole new way of thinking and living that brought pure joy. This new way of thinking and living was possible as God empowered me to live out truth from his perspective—a biblical worldview.

Most Christians believe Jesus' worldview is what we need to follow, yet we encounter many who seem to have trouble making it work in their lives. Our experience tells us that the following quote represents untold numbers of people:

"I'm a Christian and I want to find real joy. I do believe I can find it in following Christ, but somehow it doesn't seem to be happening. I do my best to live out my faith. But to be honest, I really don't know a lot about why I believe what I believe. And when it comes to a biblical worldview, there are so many conflicting claims floating around about what that means, I'm not sure I'm forming the right one. How can I be sure?"

Answering these questions that we find on the lips of so many Christians is our first purpose in writing this handbook. We want to demonstrate a way to experience the happiness and joy that every person desires and that God wants us to have. We also have a second purpose in writing this handbook.

Our Desire to Pass the Faith to the Next Generation

We run across hundreds of Christians who tell us something like this:

"I'm a Christian and want to pass my faith on to my kids. Yet I don't feel very equipped to do that. But I definitely don't want to lose my kids to a godless culture. What can I do?"

The fear of the culture capturing our kids is real. This handbook is designed to better ground you in the essentials of the faith in a way that provides a greater understanding of what you believe, why you believe it, and how it brings you a deeper joy in life. That understanding in and of itself will serve as a platform to successfully instill a robust and active Christianity in the lives of the next generation. We know that passing on the faith is a real and vital need. And it doesn't happen automatically.

Captured by the Culture

Many times we have heard stories similar to the following scenario:

Marsha hugged her son as he prepared to leave. "It's been nice having you home again, honey," she said.

"Yeah, Greg," his father, Mike, echoed. "It really has been good." He stepped in for a hug. "I miss the weekends as a family, going to church and all. But I assume you've found a church home there in the college area by now, haven't you, son?"

Greg swung his backpack onto his shoulder. "Well, Dad, not really," he said hesitantly. "Being a freshman is tough, so I've been really busy."

Sarah, Greg's 16-year-old sister, handed him his duffel bag. "Is college really that hard?"

"Well, I wouldn't say hard, really. You just keep busy, you know?"

Mike gently gripped Greg's shoulder. "If you're too busy to be in church, son, I think you might be too busy."

"Well," Greg responded, "your kind of church just isn't my thing anymore, Dad. I've got some friends and we do a group study once a week and that's enough for me."

"I'd rather do things with my friends too," Sarah added. "Church is a bore."

"Sarah!" Marsha said. "That's a terrible thing to say!"

"Well, it's true!" Sarah said.

"She's right, Mom," Greg said. "Church just doesn't cut it for me anymore."

"Honey, don't say that." Marsha touched her son on the arm. "That college isn't turning you against God, is it?"

"No, Mom," Greg chuckled, "I'm just rethinking a lot of things. God is still important to me, I just believe some different things from you guys, that's all." He adjusted the weight of the backpack. "Hey, I've got to get going."

Greg moved on out the door as Sarah helped him with his things. Marsha and Mike stepped onto the porch and watched their son walk toward the car.

"We'll be praying for you, son," Mike called.

"Thanks, Dad," Greg responded with a chuckle.

Marsha and Mike watched in silence as he backed down the drive and waved to them as he drove away. "I hope we're not losing our son," Marsha said.

Mike nodded. "I hope we're not losing our son *and* our daughter."⁴

If we hear one dominating and recurring theme among the many church leaders and families we come in contact with, it's the fear that Mike expresses above. There is a deep, abiding fear among Christian parents that their kids, having been raised in a Christian family and having spent their childhood and teenage years in the church, will nonetheless walk away from God.

A Generation Gap

The problem is, this fear is becoming a reality. Presently, within ten years of entering

adulthood, most teens professing to be Christians will walk away from the church and put whatever commitment they made to Christ on the shelf.⁵ This doesn't mean all our young people are rejecting God outright and becoming atheists. That's not the case. It's that they are adopting beliefs and a worldview that are definitely not "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3 NASB). A large portion of young people today would echo Greg's remark to his dad: "God is still important to me, I just believe some different things than you." These differences, often referred to as the generation gap, are wider and deeper today than ever before. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, almost 80 percent of adults see a difference between the beliefs and points of view of young people and themselves. Asked to identify where older and younger people differ the most, 47 percent pinpointed the areas of social values and morality.⁶

Consider just some of what today's Christian young people believe:

- 23 percent are not assured of the existence of miracles;
- 33 percent either "definitely" or "maybe" believe in reincarnation;
- 42 percent are not assured of the existence of evil as an entity;
- 48 percent believe that many religions are true.⁷

It is difficult to lead a young person to adopt a Christian worldview when nearly one out of two can't say that Jesus is definitively "the way, the truth, and the life."

And even when our young people do begin to embrace a Christian worldview they are under intense assault from their high school years and up. According to a 2006 study by professors from Harvard and George Mason Universities, the percentage of agnostics and atheists teaching at American colleges is three times greater than in the general population. More than half of college professors today believe the Bible is "an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts."⁸

Students are continually told by today's culture that the Bible is unreliable, that Jesus was no different than any other religious figure, and that anyone who asserts there is an objective truth that shapes a worldview is intolerant and a bigot. It is very hard for young people to stand up against such pressures unless they are fully equipped, as the apostle Peter said, "always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15 NASB). The truth is, few are equipped and ready to face a world that is increasingly hostile to Christianity.

.....

Young people must be led... to adopt the biblical worldview as their guiding principle.

.....

If you have children or work with young people, you know how difficult it can be to get through to them. And it seems at times that all the advantages communication technology has brought us haven't helped a bit. In fact, the pervasiveness of modern electronic communication may be one of the obstacles we must overcome. In his book *Handoff* Dr. Jeff Myers says:

The young people our organization has studied spend between 27 and 33 hours per week using communication technology—gaming, watching television and movies, text messaging, instant messaging, and surfing the internet. In short, they're overwhelmed with information.

Information overload breaks down a person's capacity for discernment. For example, C. John Sommerville argued that the 24-hour news cycle actually makes us dumber, not smarter. It presents so much information that we find it impossible to figure out what is truly important.⁹

Then Jeff goes on to say:

With shopping and surfing available 24 hours a day young adults believe they can have whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want, and with whomever they want to have it. Nothing is more than a few clicks away.

Here's the paradox: when there is nothing more to see or do, there is nothing more to look forward to. It's easy to see why surveys of young adults pick up high levels of hopelessness, distrust, cynicism, and boredom.

The unceasing access to pleasure and the consequent unhappiness led evangelist Ravi Zacharias to reference G.K. Chesterton in saying that "meaninglessness ultimately comes not from being weary of pain but from being weary of pleasure."¹⁰

The task may not be easy, but if ever there was a time to make a concerted effort to instill a biblical worldview into the next generation—a way to think from a biblical perspective—it's now. Their misconceptions and distorted views of what is important in life and what brings happiness and joy must be addressed. The consequences of failing to tackle this problem head-on are disheartening.

Young people must be led to align their beliefs and behavior with ultimate reality, which means, in essence, to adopt the biblical view of the world as their guiding principle. In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, author Ron Sider concludes that people who have a biblical worldview live differently—in ways that are highly significant to the temptations today's youth face. They are nine times more likely to avoid "adult only" material on the Internet, three times as likely not to use tobacco products,

and twice as likely to volunteer to help the poor.¹¹ What people believe about God, truth, and the world around them (for example, a biblical worldview), makes a tangible difference in the way they live.

Equipping the Mind

Some might think their young people won't respond positively to addressing their beliefs and challenging them to examine why they believe what they believe. Some think that all today's kids want is to deal with relationships and what they can experience emotionally. This simply is not the case. In the recent "National Study of Youth and Religion," thousands of nonreligious teenagers said they were raised to be "religious" but had become "nonreligious." These teenagers were asked, "Why did you fall away from the faith in which you were raised?" They were given no set of answers to pick from; it was simply an open-ended question. The most common answer—given by 32 percent of the respondents—was *intellectual skepticism*.¹² That is a very high percentage given the fact that this was an open-ended question. Their answers included such statements as "It didn't make sense to me"; "Some stuff is too far-fetched for me to believe in"; "I think scientifically there is no real proof"; and "There were too many questions that can't be answered." Our kids want answers they can grapple with in their *minds* as well as in their hearts.

When it comes to spiritual and character formation, Scripture attaches great importance to training the mind. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world," Paul states. "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2 NIV).

All of us want our kids to be equipped in mind, spirit, and character, able to resist the pressures of this increasingly godless culture so that no matter what temptations and opposition they face, they will live lives we can be proud of—lives that are pleasing to God and others. We want our kids to live out a biblical worldview. Yet actually living out a biblical worldview is impossible apart from a transformed relationship through Jesus Christ. Neither our young people nor any of us have the natural inclination or power in our human strength to live out "the way" of Jesus—his worldview. That means each of us and our young people must place our trust in Christ and surrender our lives to him so we all can stand strong with deep convictions for the unshakable truths of God.

This handbook will provide guidance to lead your young people to such a faith in Christ. Because through a transformed relationship with God they "will no longer be like children, forever changing [their] minds about what [they] believe because someone has told [them] something different or because someone has cleverly lied to [them] and made the lie sound like the truth" (Ephesians 4:13-14). You want to teach and mentor and empower them to think and live as "children of God without fault

in a crooked and depraved generation, in which [they] shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:15 NIV).

There is probably nothing more rewarding to us (Josh and Sean) than being able to pass the baton of the Christian faith to our children. Jeff Myers said it well in *Hand-off*:

The universe is designed in such a way that passing the baton is the only way I can truly experience blessing, fullness, meaning, satisfaction, and joy in life. I may want to believe that serving myself leads to happiness, but my heart knows better. No matter how much stuff I buy, or what kind of house I live in, or where I travel, life only takes on meaning when I live for something bigger than myself.¹³

Use This Handbook as Your Guide

Some books are designed for you to curl up on a couch with them and enjoy a “good read.” Others are reference texts from which you glean specific information. This book is a handbook. The best way to use it is first to absorb it, and then to engage in a long-term process of applying its content incrementally in your own life and in the lives of your children, grandchildren, youth group, or others to whom you wish to impart the faith.

This book will present the essentials of the biblical worldview by exploring what we have identified as the 12 basic truths of the faith, which are noted in the 12 sections of this work. The next two chapters will give you an overview of these 12 truths, and then the following 48 chapters will delve into each truth thoroughly.

Each foundational truth will be given four chapters. Some chapters will be short and succinct. The *first chapter* in each section will identify a particular truth and what we as Christians believe about it. The *second chapter* will examine why you can believe it with confidence. The *third chapter* in each section will explore how that truth is relevant to your life. The *fourth chapter* will offer practical ways to live that truth out in the presence of those around you. As you live these truths out more and more in front of your family and friends you will be better equipped to impart them to others.

It is not necessary to read each truth and its chapters in order. There is no problem jumping ahead to a particular truth of interest or to one that applies to an immediate situation in your life. For example, if you are nearing the Easter season you might want to skip to Truth Eight: “Jesus’ Bodily Resurrection.” Or if Christmas is around the corner you might want to go to Truth Four: “God Became Human.” The point is, while each truth of the Christian faith builds off the other, each stands on its own merits. So if a particular time of year makes it more appropriate to address certain truths,

or if those around you are raising a certain question that makes focusing on a particular truth more timely, go for it. Eventually, however, we urge you to cover all the truths in this handbook—and to review them more than once.

There is a reason God instructed his people to “repeat [God’s truth] again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home. . . . away on a journey. . . . lying down. . . . getting up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). No matter how young or how old we are, we will never exhaustively understand the depths and riches of God and his truth. The truths of the faith can become fresh and alive to you again each time you go over them. Absorbing them repeatedly can give them deeper relevance because in the process of filling ourselves with knowledge of his truth we are actually deepening our relationship with a relational, infinite God. We would not mislead you—the McDowells, this father-and-son team, do not claim to understand all the deep truths we present here. Nor have we mastered the Christian life. Far from it. It is important that you realize that we too are on a journey of constantly uncovering the richness of God and applying these truths to our daily lives.

Experience an Enriching Celebration with Your Family

The 12 unshakable truths you will discover throughout this handbook are rooted in the Old Testament, even though most of the passages we refer to are in the New Testament. And to help you instill these truths in your family we have adapted three Old Testament Jewish festivals and made them into mealtime celebrations.

For centuries Jewish families have gathered around the dinner table to celebrate those festivals God had ordained for them. Many Christians today are realizing the benefits and richness of these festivals in aiding us to better understand the meaning of God’s plan for each of us. So to help you impart the truths of the faith to your family and friends, you will find in the appendixes to this handbook a Judeo-Christian Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and Feast of Tabernacles. These three mealtime events focus on celebrating the God of relationship, redemption, and restoration, which are all found in the sweeping story from creation to God taking on humanity to Christ’s return. We have provided you detailed instructions on how to plan and execute these mealtime celebrations. Take advantage of them.

The development of these festivals has been greatly aided by the help of Harvey Diamond and his “Pathways to Glory” interactive devotional. Harvey has done a phenomenal job of explaining all the feasts of the Old Testament and their relevance to today and to the Christian life. Visit www.ariseinglory.org and click on “Pathways to Glory Relational Devotional.” You will benefit greatly from Harvey’s teachings and insights.

Our Prayer for You

As you begin your journey, we pray that you will come to know God more deeply, understand your place within him and the world more clearly. And above all, we pray that God will empower you more fully to live out your biblical worldview so you can more effectively impart the living truth of Jesus Christ to your family and those around you. We live in a scary world dominated by pain and suffering, sin and heartache, war and death. But we are not to fear the evils of this world. The only one we are to fear is God himself (see Matthew 10:28). We serve a conquering God who is working in you and me to transform the present kingdom of this world into the future kingdom of God. It is an honor to engage in this mission with you. Let the journey of unlocking the unshakable truth of God begin.