

The Story of Everything

How You, Your Pets,
and the Swiss Alps
Fit into God's
Plan for the World

Jared C.

Wilson



“Abraham Kuyper famously said, ‘There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!”’ In *The Story of Everything*, Jared Wilson has followed the biblical storyline to show that Kuyper was right. And he’s done it in readable prose for a new generation. Everything matters to God. Let Wilson help you understand what this means for you!”

Josh Chatraw, Executive Director of the Center for Apologetics and Cultural Engagement, Liberty University

“*The Story of Everything* is one of the most accurately titled books I have ever read. Jared Wilson rightly diagnoses the desperately ‘truncated vision’ with which most of us live our daily lives, and *The Story of Everything* is just the needed tonic. Accessible, highly engaging, and humorous, this book brings home the overarching narrative flow of Scripture in a way that leaves the reader hungry for the happy ending yet also eager to get the most out of every page in between now and then. I have been waiting for years for someone to write this book!”

J. Alasdair Groves, Director of Counseling, CCEF New England

“If you need to hear some incredible news, read this book. It will change you. In his creative sovereignty, God’s plan makes sense of all the incomprehensible events in the world. In *The Story of Everything*, Jared serves as a wise, caring, funny, and insightful tour guide who explores the terrain of this promise. When you feel the haunt of futility or if you ever feel lost, it is important to know that God has a plan for everything.”

Justin S. Holcomb, Episcopal priest; professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; author, *On the Grace of God*

“We serve a grand and glorious God who does indeed have a plan for this world. How do we fit into this plan? Dig in. Jared Wilson gives us a thought-provoking glimpse into the big questions of life and the greatest story of all—God’s story.”

Jacob Tamme, tight end for the Atlanta Falcons

“It’s fitting that a book called *The Story of Everything* would weave together things like the cosmos and pets, Augustine and Plato, football and Ecclesiastes. In a truly accessible way, Jared Wilson helps us see that there is indeed something that links all this and more together.”

Michael Kelley, Director of Groups Ministry, Lifeway Resources Division

“Imagine going on a trip without having any idea as to your destination. You would end up confused, lost, and probably pretty scared. Knowing the starting place and destination is a crucial part of every journey. Too many Christians end up confused, lost, and even scared because they don’t know the beginning and end of the journey called ‘life.’ If you don’t know what God is up to, it’s hard to trust him when things seem out of control. In *The Story of Everything*, Jared Wilson uses the Bible as a map to take the reader from the beginning of time to the return of Christ. Wilson helps us see just what God is up to, in order that we might love God more, worship God, and live on earth as citizens of heaven.”

Stephen Altrogge, author, *The Greener Grass Conspiracy* and *Untamable God*

“This book really made me think, well, about everything! Jared helped make sense of how my life and talents fit into God’s story of grace and glory!”

Daniel Seavey, recording artist; 2015 *American Idol* finalist

“Like a tour of life, Wilson takes the story of the infinite grace and glory of God colliding with the souls of man and shows how it relates to bacon, to sex, to work—to everything. As a former athlete, current husband, father, pastor, author, and bacon-eater (of whom I am the foremost), I needed this guided tour of life, this story of everything, and the grace beyond the sun that makes it matter.”

Jim Essian, Pastor, The Paradox Church; former professional baseball player; author, *Like Father, Like Sons*

“*The Story of Everything* is a small *summa* for our time. Wilson holds the multifaceted jewel of the world up to the light of the gospel, slowly rotating it, allowing the reader to see the present and future goodness of God reflecting and refracting in every part. Insightful, profound, simple, and witty. Wilson has the gift of writing with theological depth and precision while maintaining complete clarity and popular appeal.”

Steve Bezner, Lead Pastor, Houston Northwest Church

“We humans have bad memories when it comes to God’s redemptive work, which means we often don’t realize how God’s story of redemption impacts all of life—even the mundane parts. *The Story of Everything* reminds us that life should be lived differently because of God’s goodness in creation and redemption. Don’t miss this opportunity to (re)discover the wonder of the perfect God who has invited us into his story.”

Russell L. Meek, Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, Louisiana College

“*The Story of Everything* is an engaging introduction to a comprehensive worldview where Christ is literally the center of everything and everything in life exists under his lordship. Wilson helps us see our place in history, live life in our present reality, and look forward to the blessed hope of Christ’s return. The book offers a well-written, funny, and relentlessly biblical framework for all of life.”

Bland Mason, Chapel leader to the Boston Red Sox

“Jared reminds us to joyfully live like there is a God who is good, powerful, and very much involved in this world. Cutting through the fog of our seemingly mundane, everyday lives, *The Story of Everything* trains our eyes to delight in this God who is at work to make all things new.”

Erik Raymond, Senior Pastor, Emmaus Bible Church, Omaha, Nebraska

The Story of Everything

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The Story of Everything

How You, Your Pets, and the Swiss Alps
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 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Story of Everything: How You, Your Pets, and the Swiss Alps Fit into God's Plan for the World

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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover image and design: Wayne Brezinka, Brezinka Design Co.

First printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-4457-6

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-4460-6

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-4458-3

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-4459-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilson, Jared C., 1975–

The story of everything : how you, your pets, and the Swiss Alps fit into God's plan for the world / Jared C. Wilson.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-4457-6 (Trade paperback)

ISBN 978-1-4335-4460-6 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-4335-4458-3 (PDF)

1. Redemption—Biblical teaching. 2. Biblical cosmology. 3. Glory of God—Biblical teaching. I. Title.
BS680.S25W55 2015
234'.3—dc23 2014049264

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Conclusion

We always begin having made a conclusion. The story of my aching to know what on earth God was doing—I mean, what God was doing *on earth*—began with a rather startling conclusion about my place in the world.

I was roasting in bumper-to-bumper traffic on FM 1960 in Houston, Texas, one blazingly hot afternoon when I realized that I was an alien. The thought struck me as both out of nowhere and a long time coming, like an ungraspable part of my brain had suddenly become dislodged. I realized with stunning clarity, “I don’t belong here.”

Now, I was born in Texas and, save for three years of childhood spent in New Mexico, I grew up in Texas. But I never felt quite at home in Texas. And yet, the problem I had just found the solution to in that muggy traffic trap was not exactly about where I lived. It was more about the circumstances and my processing of them. It was about the thick traffic, sure. It was about the humid air, yes. It was a lot about the fact that at the time I was working three jobs *and* going to college. But it was mostly about the fact that I had no idea what any of my displacement meant. I was not just an alien in my culture; I was an alien in my own life.

This is what I mean: In all my routine—daily facing the grind of work-traffic-school-traffic-work-traffic-work—I felt completely lost. Like the proverbial hamster on a wheel. In that crucial moment of traffic-jam clarity, I realized life was happening to me and I had no clue what I was supposed to be working toward. It wasn’t

so much that I wanted to get out of Houston, although that was part of it. It was more that I wanted to know that whatever I was doing—wherever I was doing it—actually mattered.

I wasn't thinking primarily of being transported out of my life; I was thinking how great it might be if some kind of meaning were being transported *into* it.

I think this is largely true for everybody. Most of us can deal with less than dream jobs and staying put in one place for a long time if we can only get the sense that there is something important, fulfilling, and eternal about the ordinary stuff we do in our everyday lives.

Because isn't that what life normally is? Ordinary? Not many of us are international adventurers or ninja warriors. Most of us are just regular kinds of people. Most of our days look pretty much the same. Every now and then something out of the ordinary happens, both good things and bad things. They excite us or disrupt us, or both. We usually ponder the big questions of life in those extraordinary moments—at weddings and funerals, at the birth of a child or the loss of a job, when we win the lotto or have to declare bankruptcy. But hardly anybody is contemplating the meaning of life over their bowl of shredded wheat.

But that's what I did. Hands sticky on the steering wheel, classic rock blaring from my radio, sweat beading on my brow, I thought, "I was made for more." Not bigger. Not better. Not even different. But more. Deeper. Meaningful.

What if there was actually a key that unlocked all this stuff? What if there was that One Thing that made sense of everything? What if both mountain climbing and traffic jams communicate something beyond themselves when we discover that One Thing?

I've got that thing. It's in the pages of this book. It's in the sunshine and in the air and in the pop-up ads on the Internet and in the checkout line at the grocery store and in the roaring stands of the football stadium, and it's right there, actually, under your skin.

Underneath the crust of creation there echoes the beating heart of a promise made long, long ago. It is sending out a signal, tapping

out a rhythm, informing us and reminding us that this world isn't all it's cracked up to be. What we certainly feel in our sorrows over suffering and injustice, and what we ruefully admit when we are honest about our joys and laughter, is that this can't be all there is.

And yet—the answer cannot be that all this means nothing. Right?

What even so many religious people, including their leaders, have missed for so long is that the very real God has a very real plan for this very real place. And it isn't just to wad it up and throw it into some cosmic wastebasket. No, back in the recesses of time, before time even began, God was proclaiming his vision for the world he hadn't yet made. And when he made the world, he made his vision clear. And while he didn't make the mess of brokenness we deal with every day in the world and in our own hearts, his vision is not so easily derailed.

The world is broken, yes, but God has a plan. And God's plan has always included making sense of all the incomprehensible events that disrupt our own.

God does, in fact, have a plan *for everything*. For sickness and health, for art and medicine, for marriages and families, for individuals and nations, for life and death, and for earth and creation. In the chapters ahead, I want to reveal to you that secret One Thing, the mystery God has hidden in plain sight everywhere. And I want to share with you the story God is telling through this mystery—how it leaves nothing under heaven untouched by heaven itself. We will spend quite a bit of time in the beginning of the big story (Genesis) and quite a bit at the end (Revelation), and then take a look here and there at how some curious dudes named Paul and Koheleth helped us make sense of the beginning and the end for all of us in the middle.

The secret makes every ordinary second bigger than it seems, including this very second right now. While you are reading this book, the future is having an impact on you.

So read on. Let me show you that God has a plan for everything.

God's Modus Operandi

God's Plan

On August 15, 1977, a man named Jerry Ehman came across a radio signal from deep space that confounds scientists to this day. Ehman, a volunteer for SETI—an organization dedicated to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence—was monitoring the Big Ear radio telescope at Ohio State University. Looking over the printouts of what that Big Ear had been hearing, Ehman could see all the typical background noise of outer space: the standard movements of satellites, the signals emanating from earth refracted off of space debris, and the like. But then something stood out. There was an anomaly. A big one.

6EQUJ5. That was the sequence on the printout indicating a strong, unique signal from outer space. It did not match the background noise. In fact, it looked much like you'd expect a radio signal from an intelligent source to look. It came from the region in the sky where the constellation Sagittarius is found, and its frequency appeared to match the "hydrogen line," a promising trait for SETI researchers who figured intelligent beings might use the most common element in the universe to broadcast a signal.

Blown away by what he'd discovered, Ehman took a red pen and circled the 6EQUJ5 sequence on the printout, writing "Wow!" off to the side.

Scientists have never found the source of the Wow! signal. They have never heard it again, despite consistently listening in over the years to the same region of space with radio telescopes much more powerful than the Big Ear. They have so far heard nothing like it. And yet the Wow! signal continues to captivate, stirring curiosity and fueling hope that somewhere out there *someone* is listening to us, that someone is sending out a signal.

Why does the search for extraterrestrial life entertain us so much? Since the earliest days of UFO sightings and the burgeoning genre of science fiction in the likes of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, what itch does yearning for outer space scratch?

One of my favorite movies is Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Though overshadowed by Spielberg's other sci-fi masterwork—a little movie called *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*—*Close Encounters* follows similar themes but on a much larger scale. In *E.T.*, Spielberg uses the science fiction conceit really to speak to the ideas of fatherlessness and family. In *Close Encounters*, he speaks to man's universal search for meaning.

As the aliens get closer to revealing themselves to mankind's official spokespeople in a stunning climatic scene at Devil's Tower in Wyoming, key characters inexplicably find themselves making replicas of the tower or seeing visions of it. Richard Dreyfuss starts with his mashed potatoes at dinner. Eventually he's pulling up the landscaping to make a minitower in his living room. A little boy shares these compulsions. A scattered group is drawn together by their inner yearning for this extraterrestrial contact. It seems to speak to something missing in their lives, to promise an answer to everything that is unsettled in them.

When the aliens do finally arrive, for these aching souls it is like heaven has finally come to earth. Dreyfuss's character goes with them in their spaceship to lands unknown.

Of course, for many, many people, interest in science fiction and little green men and rockets to the moon aren't a reality at all. But I still think the inner human ache for the search for life in outer space is universal. We may seek to satisfy it in different ways, but we're all really trying to solve two fundamental human problems: loneliness and insignificance.

Deep down, though many do not realize it or admit it, human beings carry a deep-seated need to know and to be known, a need to feel *worthy*, to be part of something bigger, as if all that is around us is more than it seems. This is a collectively human problem, not just an individual one. We feel lonely as a species, not just as people, otherwise the community offerings all around us would do the trick. And being in community with people is extremely helpful and necessary. But our hearts still yearn for more. This is why we find it so hard sometimes to live with each other.

Humanity also faces the problem of insignificance. Consider how each generation, at least in the United States, identifies so strongly with cultural milestones like WWII or Woodstock. It isn't simply that we want to be thought great as individuals—though we do—but that we also want to be known as a great people. Tom Brokaw even wrote a book called *The Greatest Generation*. We identify strongly with our generations, our colleges, our states, and of course our nations. But these collective identities don't ultimately satisfy either. So what is the last frontier for man to be seen as great, to feel a part of something grand, universal, and important—not just in the world but in the universe? Well, outer space, of course.

Volunteers around the world today have set up their computers to take part in a vast SETI network, harnessing their collective strength to provide a great big listening grid aimed at the heavens. Every day these noble souls diligently scan computer screens and paper printouts looking for that next Wow!

But what is it, really, that they are looking for?

I think we are all really looking for connection and significance,

and we're all looking for them in ways we can't quite get a grasp on with the ordinary stuff of earth.

But the good news is that the answer really is out there.

The Search for the Secret

When I was preparing to write my first book—a supernatural thriller involving the spirit world and scientific theories about hyperspace—I did a bit of reading about multiple dimensions and time travel. I was surprised to discover that some of these far-out speculations have grounding in the very real work of brilliant men like Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking. One constant quest of these men is for the elusive “theory of everything.”

I'm not really a “science-y” person, so a lot of what I read was really confusing to me, but I found the general ideas fascinating. The essential conundrum in the search is this: scientists subscribe to both quantum mechanics and general relativity and yet, as currently formulated, these two fields are incompatible. Enter in all the work of the theoretical physicists with offerings like string theory to help explain or reconcile the two. The so-called “unified field theory,” or theory of everything, has taken on mythic status, like the search for El Dorado or the holy grail. The search has worn chalk and brains down to nubs. It is what gets physicists up in the morning and keeps them in the lab all night.

For the scientist, finding the theory of everything is finding the secret to the universe. It proposes to answer all the questions we have and reconcile all the disparate ideas, making everything unified and coherent and comprehensible. The secret once found will eliminate all the mysteries, satisfy all the longings, clarify all the misconceptions.

There once was a guy who called himself Koheleth who carried on his own search for the secret of the universe. He too looked for that theory of everything. He felt the inner pang of loneliness and insignificance and tried everything he could get his hands on to assuage it, even trying everything put together! He became

the most educated, the most rich, the most famous, the most entertained, the most comfortable, and the most sexed man on the planet, but the secret remained. Koheleth writes, “I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven” (Eccles. 1:13). He worked that chalk down to dust. He wore his brain and his stomach and his heart and his libido out. In the end, he decided this search is like chasing the wind. Why? Because, he writes, God “has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (3:11).

We’ve got outer space down in our souls.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God.” I suppose there are some things we will never figure out. There aren’t enough chalkboards in the universe, not enough radio telescopes on the mountaintops to help us wrap our minds around some things. The finite can *look* at the infinite, but it can’t rightly understand it. And yet, sometimes the infinite gives its secrets up. Sometimes God spills the beans, as it were.

One of the earliest Christian preachers emphatically declared, “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). For *our* glory? That seems to get at that “insignificance” problem. It makes sense that this glory would come from some kind of “secret and hidden wisdom”; we can’t seem to figure it out on our own. In Colossians 1:26, the same preacher, the apostle Paul, said that the mystery hidden for ages and generations has now been revealed.

You reading this right now, lean in close; I have something to tell you. Are you listening? Okay, here goes:

That secret of the universe? I know what it is.

All right, I know that is an audacious claim. I’ve already confessed that I am not science-y. So where do I get off claiming to know the secret to the universe?

Well, I don’t know the equation for the unified field theory. I don’t know how quantum mechanics and general relativity may

be reconciled. But that's all child's play compared to the stuff that really hits mankind's sweet spot. I do know the secret that fills that eternal void in the human heart. I do know what answers our longing for connection and significance.

Remember, it was Einstein who said, "God does not play dice with the universe."

No, he doesn't. But before we see what exactly God is doing with the universe, let's take a look at the games we *think* he is playing. To do that, we'll turn to the life of another historic figure, another German in fact.

Are You There, God? It's Me, Martin

Like Albert Einstein, Martin Luther was a tinkerer with ideas. The son of a copper mine owner, Martin grew up with high expectations to pursue a career in law. Dutifully working through a rigorous academic life with difficult studies in philosophy and logic, he often had difficulty reconciling his tutors' emphasis on reason with his own search for certainty. Even the law, Luther feared, could not provide a sense of security. It would seem from many of his recollections about his own youth and subsequent religious training, that Martin was a pretty neurotic guy. "If I could believe that God was not angry with me," he once said, "I would stand on my head for joy."¹

The result of this confluence of expectations, education, and inner turmoil left Martin vacillating between the two poles of humanity: license and legalism. To some extent, Martin found himself given to his own appetites, but the guilt that resulted always plagued him. This guilt of course led him to a severe sense of religiosity. Caught between these irreconcilable differences, license and legalism—the quantum mechanics and general relativity of the spiritual life—he was disoriented and terrified. One night while riding home in a thunderstorm, as the story goes, a bolt of lightning

¹Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 315.

struck nearby. In fright, Martin cried out, “St. Anne help me! I will become a monk.”²

It seemed his sense of turmoil and his love for certainty had collided in that moment, and he was trying to make a deal with God to save his life. It was a deal he kept. Martin abandoned his aspirations of law and joined an Augustinian order of monks.

But where a life of ambition and money had not quelled his unsettled spirit, a life of religious devotion only seemed to make it worse. He wrote at one point:

In the monastery, I did not think about women, money, or possessions; instead, my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me. . . . [I] could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works.³

About the only thing that worried Martin more than his own uncertain status with God was what he saw as the Roman Catholic Church’s exploitation of the poor and ignorant. It seemed to Martin that every sin earned a demerit with God and every good work a credit, but he could not figure out how to get his credits to outpace his demerits. Further still, he couldn’t quite trust the institution allegedly ordained to sort out this merit system to provide the kind of comfort he sought.

Martin was caught. He was caught between a desire to be finally, eternally settled, and the realization that he could never reach that settledness, even with years upon years of religious duty and good works. In a way, seeking to “find himself” had brought him to the end of himself.

The apostle Paul, the guy with the secret mystery revealed, once came to a similar conclusion, writing, “I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good

² Roland Herbert Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), 18.

³ Quoted in John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God’s Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 84.

I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:18–19). Paul was caught too. The good he wanted to do perfectly, he couldn’t do. The bad he wanted to avoid, he couldn’t avoid.

According to Martin Luther’s son, the escape from this trap between license and legalism came just as suddenly and blindingly as the lightning that drove him into the monastery.⁴

In Rome there are a set of twenty-eight white marble steps called the Lateran staircase which, according to tradition once led to the palace of Pilate at Jerusalem and which therefore have been made sacred by the footsteps of Jesus. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church various indulgences (a forgiveness of sin or remission of punishment granted by the church) have been offered to devout pilgrims who ascend the steps after communion and confession. Many pilgrims ascend the steps on their knees hoping to attain forgiveness of sins. This is what Martin Luther was doing when he remembered Habakkuk 2:4!

Luther’s son wrote: “As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the Prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: ‘The just shall live by faith.’ Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine. . . . Luther himself said of this text, “Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with him because not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, he still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words—‘The just shall live by faith!’ ‘The just shall live by faith!’—then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God.”⁵

It was a lightning bolt of grace.

Suddenly, Martin had the answer. The unified field theory

⁴James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, *Micah–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 91–92.

⁵Ibid.

became fact, reconciling not license and legalism, really, but reconciling man with God.

And once he found the secret—really, once the secret found *him*—Martin saw how it began to impact everything within himself and in the world around him. The grace of God given freely to him in the good news of Jesus Christ received purely by faith provided the emergency exit out of the constant push-pull between God’s commands and the world’s temptations. God’s grace provided the security Martin had always longed for. And it gave a resonance to life he could only hope for, seemingly in vain, all his days before.

There is an oft-told (but unverified) story about Martin meeting a cobbler who had recently converted to Christianity. Much like Martin in his youth, the cobbler wondered how he might please God with his new religious devotion. He asked Martin, “What should I do?” Perhaps, he thought, Martin would tell him to pursue formal religious education, seeking to enter vocational ministry. Instead, Martin said to the man, “Make good shoes, and sell them at fair prices.”

See, like Martin before the lightning bolt of justification by faith struck him and like the cobbler with a desperate desire to please God, we all tend to think that God has set up the world to run along the track Christians might call “legalism.” It is similar to what many non-Christians might call “karma.” The idea is this: If you just put good stuff out there—positive vibes or what have you—if you just do good to others and have a good attitude, God (or the world) will reward you. The Bible does say, after all, that we reap what we sow.

The problem with this view of the world, though, is that we have so much evidence to the contrary. Bad people succeed all the time. And it doesn’t take much time for people who regularly do good deeds to discover that they have not created a force field against injustice, sickness, or other kinds of hardship. Bad stuff happens to people who do good all the time. So if karma is the way the world is supposed to be running, it’s not working out too well.

But in that way of thinking, it makes total sense that a shoemaker recently converted to Christianity might think that there was another kind of job that would please God more than making shoes. Surely shoes don't rank too highly on God's priority scale.

Instead, Martin Luther discovered that "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4), not by his works. This means two things. First, it means that real life, what the Bible calls "eternal life," comes not by working harder and doing more and being good, but by that grace of God we've been talking about. That's the good news. Second, Habakkuk 2:4 means that the righteous who've been made alive by faith (not by works) should then carry on their lives by their faith. So the cobbler could work every day on his shoes, secure in the fact that God loved him, approved of him, justified him, and secured him eternally *all because of Christ*, not because of his job.

But Habakkuk 2:4 also prompts us to believe this: making shoes can glorify God.

Grace is the secret of the universe.

And the reason grace is the secret of the universe is because it brings to creation the very thing that creation has been craving since everything went haywire.

God's Endgame

God's plan to bring lasting, satisfying connection and significance to mankind, to cure the angst for more that we all feel deep inside, to make us feel less like aliens and less like searching for them—is found in this thing the Bible calls *grace*. Grace is God's modus operandi in the world. Not everybody gets all the grace God has to give, but everybody who wants it does, and everybody else gets some grace just for being a human creature trying to get by in the world. (Christian theologians call this "common grace.")

What Martin Luther discovered is what we all discover: living our lives driven by appetites, seeking to gain as much pleasure or comfort or power as we can, does not solve the deep need for

significance. It might medicate us against it for a while, but it just doesn't last. Alternatively, living on the religious duty treadmill, trying to earn credit with God through personal righteousness, basically just trying to be "good people," doesn't solve our deep need for connection.

But the signal is coming from deep space. It transmits on lots of frequencies, some stronger than others. God is doing something with us. He is meaning something with creation. The message of grace—unmerited favor—hits the universal need with a specific message. And it bids us turn our gaze to the heavens to see God's impressive strategy for the whole world. Your bank account is affected by this signal. Your weekend on the golf course is affected by this signal. Your family tree, your family holidays, your family dog—all are affected by this signal.

There is something coming through in this transmission of grace that affects everything, that *changes* everything. If we pan out and look at grace from the cosmological perspective, we see nothing less than the eternally expansive glory of God.

The problem of loneliness and insignificance is actually a lack of glory. The glory of God solves those problems (and a million others besides). It actually cracks the code of human existence and the future of creation. See, God has not been silent. He has declared these realities. He actually tells us what he's going to do with everything! Like a Wow! signal straight from heaven, Habakkuk 2:14 announces, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

Habakkuk 2:14 explains the reasoning behind Habakkuk 2:4. The righteous are made alive by faith and go about their everyday lives by faith so that the earth will be saturated in the knowledge of the glory of God.

This is God's endgame for everything. Glory. He wants his glory to fill the earth, to drench it, really, making all the dry places alive again and all the dull places shine again.

This makes sense when we think about it, because God's glory is

the *weightiness* of all that he is—the beautiful summation of all his attributes. And since God's glory is perfect and beautiful and, well, *glorious*, it makes sense that when we somehow receive that glory, we become more than what we already were. When creation itself somehow receives that glory, as in the vision cast by Habakkuk 2:14, it takes on the gleaming quality of perfection.

No place or thing is quarantined away from God's endgame. His plan affects everything. So God's vision for his glory has dramatic implications for both the people who receive his grace and the people who reject it. It has very real impact on good deeds done in faith and bad deeds done in rebellion. And it makes no distinctions between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the natural. God has a plan for dirt and flowers, for sports and video games, for sandwiches and milkshakes, for anything you can think of. His glory will be brought to bear on literally *everything*.

It is no wonder, then, that God is constantly talking about the priority of his glory throughout the Bible. He's been declaring the point of everything from the moment time began. When light first appeared, it came from the eternally preexisting glory of God. When man first appeared, he was made to "image" God's glory. When God saves his people from sin and their own stupidity, he frequently says he has done it "for my own name's sake."

Ultimately, everything exists for the glorification of God.

Some will say this makes God sound like a first-class narcissist. But that kind of objection fails to take into account two important truths. First, God is entirely perfect and thoroughly glorious. He is not like one of us dull creatures puffing up our feathers to seem more glorious than we really are. He is actually what he says he is, and he is not trying to prove himself to anybody. More importantly he wants to *show* himself. We would call a less-than-glorious person preoccupied with himself a narcissist or a less-than-perfect person claiming perfection a hypocrite, but God does not qualify for either of those categories. He is fully glorious and totally perfect, so we shouldn't begrudge his claiming so. But

second, perhaps straighter to the point, God's prioritizing his own glory *helps* us. It is the thing we actually need! We don't have the glory that makes us feel totally connected and wholly significant, and we need it. The world is broken and is desperately in need of mending. If God's glory answers the deepest longings of the human heart, why would we fault him for talking himself up as often as he wants to?

Therefore, it's not for no reason that the theologians known as the Westminster divines decided that the purpose of mankind was to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." Mankind's joy is inextricably connected to God's glory. So in the end, what determines whether you are totally fulfilled and saved from ultimate despair is what you do with God's glory. Do you embrace it joyfully? Or do you resist it? The first option ends forever one's loneliness and insignificance. The second forever solidifies them.

The Secret of the Universe

So now you know the secret of the universe. The thing that makes sense of everything is the glory of God brought to bear by the grace of God. And God's *modus operandi*, his plan to reveal this secret, is the proclamation of the message the Bible calls "the gospel," the good news that the glorious God has sent the radiance of his glory to restore men who have sinned and fallen short of his glory (Rom. 3:23). As Martin Luther says, "For what is the Gospel but a declaring of the glory of God and his works?"⁶

When you connect these realities together, the constellation that results projects a picture of creation that gives meaning to everything. It is as if the reality we know is simply a pale version of some greater reality out there—or, rather, *in here*, at least somewhere.

When I was researching that novel about hyperspace and what-not, I came across the theories about multiple dimensions. Basically, some scientists believe that at the moment our universe

⁶ Martin Luther, "Psalm 22," in *Select Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, trans. Henry Cole (London: T. Bensley, 1826), 388.

began, in the event often referred to as “the big bang,” our current four-dimensional world split off from a six-dimensional twin world. The brightest minds in the world use variations of string theory to explain how all this could be so. It is an attempt to reconcile some of the irreconcilable truths in the world of physics and quantum mechanics. More fanciful minds have used these super-string theories to speculate about the possibilities of using wormholes to travel through deep space or even back and forth through time.

I am not sure what to make of the science of hyperspace and the possibility of higher dimensions, but I will tell you I love the idea of children crawling through a wardrobe in our world into an entirely different one on the other side. I think it is one of the best illustrations of heaven that a mortal has come up with. My thinking goes like this:

If heaven is not rightly understood to be some place up in the sky or far away in outer space but more simply “the place where God is,” and since God is omnipresent, would it not make some kind of sense to say that heaven is a higher dimension? This does not make it less real than our world or even less tangible, but perhaps even more so, though invisible to us now. And yet, what I know of this glory and grace and gospel stuff from the Bible is that God is seeking to make the invisible visible. He did this in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament, peeling back the curtain between earth and heaven every now and again to give some frail creature a glimpse at the terrific glory behind, but he did it most decisively in coming himself in the person of Jesus Christ. God became man, and in doing so, the twin dimensions of heaven and earth got a little mixed up. It happened every time Jesus healed a leper or walked on water or raised the dead. It certainly happened after his crucifixion when he came back from the dead himself. And one of the first things Jesus did with those resurrected, glorified hands and mouth was eat breakfast (John 21:12). Surely nothing escapes the grasp of God's glory.

Since you now know the secret of the universe, you're ready to discover how this secret unlocks the meaning of everything. God is actually telling a story in the world about everything. But in order to see how God's endgame impacts our everyday life, we ought to consider how our everyday life fits into the story of life itself. What story is God telling with this glory, grace, and gospel stuff?

God is telling a story. Are you listening?

We're all searching for significance—something deeper, richer, and bigger than what we can see in our unremarkable, everyday routines. The greatest news we can hear is that God has a very real purpose for everything in this life. In *The Story of Everything*, Jared Wilson explores the redemptive story that God is telling in and through the world, helping us play our part in his ultimate plan to make all things new.

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