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[Start the timer!]

Happy New Year everyone!

[Slide Title] We are going to kick-off a brand new series called, **The Great Questions of Life**. I am really excited by this series. We are going to look at some of the first order questions of life. A lot of go through life without thinking about the most important questions: Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the meaning of life? Who am I? How do I know what is right and wrong? We are going to look at these questions as we start out the new year.

[Slide] Today, I am going to focus on the first question: **“Where Do We Come From? (The subtitle is) The Harmony of Science and Faith.”** **[Slide]** Are we just a random accident in the universe or are we created by God? This is an important question for many reasons. But, let me just give you two reasons.

First, this dramatically affects the way we live. If we are just a random accident in the universe, there is no purpose for our lives. Life is about trying to make our meaningless existence enjoyable or at least tolerable. There is no real right and wrong. If there is, it is just a social construct. There is no way to gain a sense of our own worth and value outside of what we accomplish (there is only salvation by work), and even that is purposeless and useless in light of the vast reality of the universe. So, when faced with the logical consequences of a Godless universe, it is a dark place.

Second, we need to explore this issue because some people believe that science has disproved Christianity. Richard Dawkins, a famous atheist who recently wrote a book called *The God Delusion*, argues that you can't be an intelligent scientific thinker and still hold religious beliefs. Is he right?

[Slide] So, today, we are going to dive into the questions of (1) the origin of the universe and (2) the origin of life. Then, (3) we will look at what this means.

I want to say right from the get-go that this is going to be dense. I can't really get around it. It's one of those sermons where we're all going to roll up our sleeves and go through a lot of material together. So, every once in a while, I'm going to ask you if

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you're with me, and I want you to say, "Yes." Even if you're not with me, I want you to say, "Yes."

[Slide] I. First, let's look at the issue of the origin of the universe.

From its very first sentence, the Bible presents a Creator: **[Slide]** Genesis 1:1 says: **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."**

The universe had a beginning and God created it. The ultimate reality created reality. The timeless One created time, and the limitless One created space. All time, space, matter, and being are created by God, who is outside of the created universe. You noticed that if God created heavens and the earth, he must be outside of the created universe. He can't be a part of what he has created. A beam in the house can't be the builder. The builder can't be a part of the creation. He must be greater than the creation. The bible teaches us that God is infinite and the world is finite. That means God does not have any limits. He does not have a beginning. He does not have an end. However, the Bible teaches us that the universe is finite in that there was a time when the universe was created. It didn't always exist. There was a point in time when He spoke the universe into existence. Powerful Word! Let there be light, and there was light! He created the world through his word. **[Turn off Last Slide]**

Scientists used to think that the universe was infinite. In fact, that was the prevailing belief among physicists and astronomers up to the beginning of the 20th Century. Scientists used to study the stars and assumed that the universe always existed.

[Slide] However, in 1929, Edwin Hubble found a phenomenon called "red shift" which showed that galaxies were moving away from each other. In fact, he found that everywhere in the universe, objects were moving farther away from each other. If everything was moving further away from each other, then, at some point all of these galaxies were together in one incredible massive entity. Hubble's finding led to a massive number of studies and measurements, and now, about 90 years later, there is a consensus among scientists that the universe had a beginning; in fact, it began at a single

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moment. **[Slide]** They call this moment **The Big Bang**. There was a complete reversal in the scientific community.

Now, to me this sound very much like the biblical story of creation: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. If the Big Bang is how it happened, what was there before the Big Bang? What caused the Big Bang? Science can't answer this question.

[Slide] Francis Collins, the scientist who led the Human Genome Project, wrote in his recent book, *The Language of God*,

“The Big Bang cries out for a divine explanation. I cannot see how nature could have created itself. Only a supernatural force that is outside of space and time could have done that.”

Even agnostic scientists are coming to that conclusion. **[Slide]** Robert Jastrow, one of the world's most renowned astrophysicist and a well known agnostic, wrote about this in his book *God and the Astronomers*, and said in his final paragraph:

“At this moment, it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

[Now are you still with me?]

Let's go one step deeper in the question. **[Slide]** Let's me try to tell you a little about what scientists call “**the fine-tuning problem**,” meaning that the universe is *extremely* fine-tuned to allow to human life. Sometimes, scientists call this “the Anthropic Principle.” As scientists study the Big Bang, and the creation of the universe, they came face to face to the certain facts: There are incredible degree of fine-tuning in the way that the Big Bang happened. **[Slide]** Stephen Hawking writes:

“Why did the universe start out with so nearly the critical rate of expansion that separates models that recollapse from those that go on expanding forever, that

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even now, 10 thousand million years later, it is still expanding at nearly at the critical rate? If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in 100 thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present size.”

What Stephen Hawkins and other scientists are saying is that there are many precise valuables that created the environment necessary for what the universe is right now. If one of was off by one part in a zillion, it would not create the universe as we know it.

[Slide] Francis Collins says:

“The chance that all of these constants would take on the values necessary to result in a stable universe capable of sustaining complex life forms is almost infinitesimal. And yet those are exactly the parameters that we observe. In sum, our universe is wildly improbable.”

Why is this the case? Why is the universe so finely tuned to give rise to life forms like us? (There is universal consensus that the universe is fine-tuned). There are three possible responses to the fine-tuning problem:

[Slide] 1. The first option is called the **multiverse**. Not just uni-verse—one; but multi-verse. The hypothesis is that there are infinite number of universes, either occurring simultaneously with our own or in some sequence, with different values of physical constants, and maybe even different physical laws. Of course, we are unable to see or in any way measure those other universes because we are in only one of those universes. So, the argument is that the fine tuning of our universe is not miraculous, it is simply a product of trial and error. So, this is called the “multiverse” hypothesis.

[Slide] 2. The second option is that there is only one universe, and this is it. It just accidentally happened to have all the right characteristics to give rise to intelligent life. **So, we are just very very very lucky.**

[Slide] 3. The third option is that there is only one universe, and this is it. The precise tuning of all of the physical constants and physical laws to make intelligent life possible is not an accident, but reflects the action of the one who created the universe in the first place.

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[Slide] Regardless of one’s preference for option 1, 2, or 3, this raises a theological question. Hawkins said: “The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications.” In Hawkin’s book, *A Brief History of Time*, he said: “It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.”

[Slide] Another scientist, Arno Penzias, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who codiscovered the cosmic microwave background radiation that provided strong support for the Big Bang in the first place states, “The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five Books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole.”

[Slide—Keep this Slide On until next slide] So, which option is the most logical option?

The option 2 really has the smallest probability of being true. So, it is the least probable. Scientists came out with the multiverse hypothesis because they were not satisfied with the choice between options 2 and 3. That leaves us with options 1 and 3. The multiverse hypothesis vs. God.

Here are some reasons why multiverse hypothesis is problematic.

First, there is no scientific evidence for the existence of a multiverse. And it is unlikely that there will be any scientific evidence in the future for this hypothesis because it can’t be tested. Universe means everything we can see and measure. Science by definition means knowledge gained through the scientific method, meaning we start with a hypothesis, then that hypothesis is tested, and a theory develops. The word theory in the scientific community means a substantially established fact through scientific method. But, this can never happen with the multiverse hypothesis. That is why some scientists, including John Pockinghorne, an Oxford physicist who is one of those credited for discovering quarks, say that it is not really a matter of physics but a more a matter of metaphysics, a matter of philosophy. Pockinghorne describes this as a “metaphysical guess.” So, in a way, this is not a science. It is philosophy. It is a matter of opinion and

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speculation based on logic. It is the only other possible explanation if God is not involved.

Second, if we follow the logical argument of the hypothesis, it goes like this. If there were infinite number of universes, and we are just one of these universes, then it is possible to solve the fine-tuning problem. Now, that is true only IF we knew that there were infinite number of universes. We can never know that. Sure if there were enough monkeys typing on a typewriter, they could produce the work of William Shakespeare by luck (this is actually called the monkey typewriter hypothesis); but, no one looks at the work of William Shakespeare and say there must be a lot of monkeys with typewriter somewhere. In the absence of evidence that there is a lot of monkey working away, everyone will make the assumption that it is the work of one intelligent mind. And that goes to the fine-tuning problem of the universe.

Third, that leads us to the Occam's Razor, a principle in logic that suggests that the simplest explanation for any given problem is usually the best. Since Big Bang is the way the universe was created, option 3, the creator God is the simplest solution the problem of fine-tuning. It not only solves the problem of fine-tuning, it solves the additional problem of what is behind the Big Bang. Even if there were multiple Big Bangs to create multiple universes, as the multiverse hypothesis speculates, it does not solve the problem of what is behind each of the Big Bang. What caused the Big Bang? What existed before the Big Bang? Can universe come from nothing? No scientist has solved this problem.

So, the most logical answer is option 3. God is the one who fine-tune the creation to make it what he intended it to be.

[Are you guys with me?]

[Slide] II. Now, let's go on to the second point. The origin of life.

I know that even if you are a Christian, you have a lot of questions about this stuff. How do we reconcile all the stuff that we've learned in school about the theory of evolution with the creation account of Genesis? I know some of you just don't want to

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deal with it because you decided to compartmentalize your faith and your mind. But I don't think that there is an irreconcilable conflict.

Let me start off by saying that Christians who are sincere followers of Jesus Christ disagree with how to read the Genesis passage. So, I think this is an area that some of us have to agree to disagree.

Some Christians believe in the story in a literal way. God created the universe in 6 literal days. Of course, this runs counter to the theory of evolution that we learned in biology classes at school. The idea is that all species, including you and me, evolved over millions of years into human beings through a process called natural selection. Charles Darwin proposed this theory and it is universally accepted by biologists right now.

Now, other Bible believing Christians interpret Genesis differently. They point out that the Hebrew word for “day” has many meanings, even within Scripture. Since the sun didn't appear until day 4, the writer probably didn't mean 24 hour days. The word can mean a long period of time. So, they say it is possible that God may have used evolutionary processes to create species.

Many Christians read Genesis 1 as a poetic and theological narrative that is not meant to be a scientific account of creation. Poetic language can be true without being literally true. When the psalmist wrote, “The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved” (Psalm 93:1), he was using a poetic image. But, when Galileo's opponents took it literally, they argued that the earth was stationary and that the theory that the earth was revolving around the sun was wrong. So, in the same way, these Christians feel that we shouldn't take the creation narrative as if we are reading a scientific account of creation. That's just not the way it was written or the genre that it was written in.

Genesis was written by a real person, in a real context, to a real audience, to address real questions that were being asked in that day. Those were not questions about the “Big Bang,” or “natural selection,” or Darwin or modern science. That discussion was not going on then, and that's not *why* the book was written. It was written against a backdrop of *polytheism*.

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In the Mesopotamian Ancient Near East culture, lots of gods were being worshipped; lots of objects were worshipped; the sun was worshipped; the moon was worshipped. People would look to the stars to give them guidance. They thought their future was controlled by the position of stars and planets.

They did not believe that there was a connection between these gods and morality, ethics, or justice. They believed that human beings were created to provide food for the gods and to be slaves to the gods. People were just an afterthought. Therefore, infant sacrifice was often part of their worship.

The writer of Genesis is concerned with these ideas and uses the linguistic raw material of that day, that age, that culture to make statements that were radically unique:

- that there is one God;
- that this God is the One who created the heavens and the earth;
- that creation is good, but it is not God;
- that human beings, in particular, are unique as they were created in the image of God;
- that something has gone wrong and we are not what we should be;
- that death and decay have messed up creation;
- that they came in because of sin;
- and that God is our only hope to set it right, because we cannot do it on our own.

That's what is at the core of those opening passages of Genesis. The writer is not trying to answer questions posed by modern science, because there was no “modern science” back then. That's a different agenda.

I'll give you one example of why I think this is true:

On the first day of Creation, according to Genesis, God says, “Let there be light,” and there is light. (Genesis 1:3)

Again, this is written against the backdrop of a time and culture when people worshipped the sun and the moon. The creation account unfolds in Genesis. The writer uses poetic language in the description:

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“And God spoke...And it was so...And God saw that it was good.”

[Slide] This is Hebrew poetry.

God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light over the earth... And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning—the fourth day. (Genesis 1:16-19)

The great light that governs the day...we call the sun. Does anybody think that it is kind of odd that the sun doesn't show up until the fourth day? Have you ever thought about that before? Again, I think very clearly what the writer of Genesis is not trying to do is to give a modern, scientific chronology of when the sun showed up. He is not saying, “There were three days where there was light and darkness, morning and evening, and then, on the fourth day, the sun came along.”

By the way, this understanding is not a new thought among Christians that has developed with the advent of modern science. **[Slide]** There was a church father named Origen, who was born in the 2nd century—about 185 AD—and this is what Origen wrote:

“For who that has understanding will suppose that the first and second and third day existed without a sun and moon and stars, and that the first day was, as it were, without a sky? I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things are intended figuratively and not literally.” (The Fundamental Doctrines 4:1:16)

In other words, the point of the writer of Genesis is something much bigger than a chronological account of what was going on. That's why I don't think that the idea that he's talking about 24-hour day periods jives with the meaning of Genesis. His point was:

- Don't worship the sun. Don't worship the moon. Don't look to the stars for guidance.
- God is God. God made the whole thing. It is only God who should be worshipped.

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Could God use evolution for the development of life on earth under God’s guidance, to create human beings who are unique and made in His image? I think God could use any kind of process that He wanted to.

Now, whether you take Genesis more literally or poetically, I think it is up to you. Christians have disagreed on this question for centuries. **[Slide]** Saint Augustine, probably one of the greatest intellects of his time and definitely the greatest theologian of the 4th century, was aware of the debate on the interpretation of Genesis, and he said this:

“In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it.”

Now, whichever view you take, you should note that there is not necessarily a conflict between science and Scripture. **[Slide]** Albert Einstein wrote, “A legitimate conflict between science and religion cannot exist. Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.”

[Are you still with me?]

[Slide] III. Now, thirdly, I want to address a little about what this means.

I think theology will not answer the details of what the nature looks like and how it works. You have to study the universe; you have to study the human body; you have to study matter, atom, sub-atomic particles like electrons, protons, neutrons, fermions, leptons, quarks; you have to study cells, DNA, the building blocks of life. I think the more you study it, the more you appreciate its complexity, its smallness and its vastness.

[Slide] Psalm 19:1 says “the Heavens declare the glory of God.” The heavens show us just how big, how huge, how unfathomably powerful and magnificent our God is.

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[Slide] At the same time, the Psalm 139:14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

In many ways, science becomes a way to seeing the glory of God.

But, science has its limitations.

Do you remember the scientific method that we all learned about in high school? We make observations and generate a hypothesis. Then we test the hypothesis, and, if it is confirmed, it might lead to a theory that can be empirically verified and so on. That’s the scientific method.

But, the deepest questions of life cannot be answered by the scientific method. We must answer them in order to live. We’ve all got to live! Whether or not we do it intentionally, formally, we all have to take a position on the questions:

- Why are we here?
- What is our purpose?
- What should we do?
- How should we live?

[Slide] Stephen Hawking, one of the most brilliant contemporary scientists, has admitted: “science may solve the problem of how the universe began, but it cannot answer the question: why does the universe bother to exist?”

Now, why did God create the universe? Why did he create us? Was He kind of lonely and didn’t have much to do? Have you ever wondered what God was doing before the creation of the world? What was this powerful infinite God doing before He decided to create the heavens and the earth? The Bible actually gives us a hint of it.

[Slide] In verse Genesis 1:2, it tells us that the *Spirit* of God of was hovering over the waters. So, it looks like the Spirit of God was there before the beginning with God.

[Slide] Then, Hebrews 1:1-3 says:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

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It says Jesus was there before the creation as well. He created the world through Jesus. The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) was there before the creation, according to the Bible. What did they do? Jesus gives us a hint of what was going on before the beginning in John 17:4-5 (this is a prayer that Jesus prayed right before He was arrested and crucified):

4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5
And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you
before the world began.

They lived in mutual glory. They loved one another, affirmed one another, honored one another for eternity. What we experience in drops, they experienced in ocean-full.

- There was a dance of the Triune community of God.
- There was glory in the Triune community of God.
- There was love in the Triune community of God.
- It was a perfect community—one yet three, and three yet one.

Then, why did God create us? In John 17:24, Jesus prayed this (it gives us another hint):

24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see
my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation
of the world.

God created us to see the glory of the Triune God. God created us to experience the glory of Triune God. There was a dance of the Triune God, and God created us to join Him in the dance! He is the Lord of the Dance and He has created us to join Him in the dance, to experience His presence, to see His glory, to live in His presence.