

**20 Things
We'd Tell Our
Twentysomething
Selves**

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PETER AND KELLI WORRALL

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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PETER WORRALL AND KELLI WORRALL

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past, present, and future.*

Contents

Why This Book?	9
Our Story: Hindsight is 20/20	13
#1: Examine your foundation carefully	27
#2: Remain teachable	39
#3: Dig deeper than your doubt	47
#4: Choose your community carefully	59
#5: Feed yourself	69
#6: Foster good habits	79
#7: Learn to rest	87
#8: Be patient	95
#9: Don't worry	107
#10: Adjust your expectations	117
#11: Take risks	127
#12: Evaluate your emotions	139
#13: Press into pain	151
#14: Take sin seriously	163
#15: Embrace grace	173
#16: Seek healing	183
#17: Live loved	195
#18: Cultivate an eternal perspective	205
#19: Make God's glory your goal	217
#20: Finally, prepare to be amazed	225
Afterword: A few more things	241
Notes	247

Why This Book?

No matter who you are, where you live, or what you're doing, if you're in your twenties you are undoubtedly experiencing a decade of some transition—whether it be big or small.

You may be making career decisions, relationship decisions, geographic decisions, or education decisions. You may be living with family, you may be launching out on your own in the big city, or you may be packing your bags to move to some remote island in the South Pacific to serve with the Peace Corps.

You may have landed an entry-level position at your dream company, you may be making lattes at a trendy espresso bar, or you may be pounding the proverbial pavement with a stack of resumes, wondering when some door—any door—is going to swing open for you. You may be married, you may already have kids, you may be wondering whether your current significant other is “the one,” you may be tweaking your account with an online dating service, or you may be enjoying the single life. Regardless, for most of you in your twenties, your time of formal education and dependence and externally imposed structure is coming to an end, and suddenly “adult life”—whatever that means—must begin.

In generations gone by, this was typically a simpler shift. Children more frequently followed in the footsteps of their parents. Options were more limited, and expectations were often

imposed. If a mother was a seamstress, she likely taught her daughter the craft. If a father was a lawyer, his firm often added “& son” to the shingle after his offspring passed the bar. For many twentysomethings in the past, setting a course for life was straightforward and even predetermined.

Times, of course, have changed. Today’s twentysomethings face a future of innumerable opportunities. You can travel to exotic destinations. You can continue your education in many different and increasingly convenient ways. You can find jobs all around the globe. You can “meet” people from all walks of life, and if you don’t want to, you don’t even have to leave the comfort of your kitchen table.

Some of you may get excited about all of the possibilities to experiment and explore.

But many of you also look ahead with some measure of fear.

A “Quarterlife Crisis”?

Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilmer coined the term “Quarterlife Crisis” to describe this period of life. They interviewed dozens of twentysomethings and found that an overwhelming majority of them were experiencing some sense of confusion and helplessness, disappointment and even panic. Many feel the pressure that “the choices they make during this period will influence their thirties, forties, fifties, and on, in an irreparable domino effect.”¹

As professors at a Bible college, Kelli and I are privy to both the anticipation and the anxiety of many twentysomethings. Every week students and recent grads come to our offices and our home and confess their concerns. They wrestle aloud with issues

of direction and identity. But most of these conversations could be boiled down to one central question: *How do we make wise choices?*

Single Focus

Sadly, when it comes down to it, too many of us do not even make choices at all. Instead we let the waves of life toss us and the current of the culture carry us along. However, as Alexander Maclaren powerfully points out in his sermon on King Solomon, not making a strong choice *is* a choice in itself—a choice to drift. “There is more evil than good in the world,” Maclaren writes, “and if a lad takes his colour from his surroundings, the chances are terribly against his coming to anything high, noble, or pure. This world is no place for a man who cannot say ‘No.’ If we are like the weeds in a stream, and let it decide which way we shall point, we shall be sure to point downwards. It would do much to secure the choice of the Good, if there were a clear recognition by all young persons of the fact that they have the choice to make, and are really making it unconsciously.”²

At the start of his reign, when he was a young twentysomething, King Solomon had a choice to make. God came to him in a dream and said, “Ask what I shall give you” (1 Kings 3:5). Would Solomon set his heart on God, or on some other objective? He set it, mostly, after God. He asked God for wisdom, an understanding heart to judge between good and evil. But wisdom was really a tool for him to use in seeking his primary goal—to know the mind of God.

What have you set your heart on? Is God a tool in your toolbox that enables you to achieve your goal? Or is God Himself the goal?

In Jesus' first talk to His newly minted disciples on a Galilean hillside, He called them to such a commitment. The young men and women on that hill had committed to a Person when they agreed to follow Jesus, but they weren't really clear who He was or where He was going to lead them. It would take them a lifetime to find out. They worried about how they would pay their bills, what they might eat for dinner, or what clothes they could afford to buy. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told them that life was more than the details that wrap us up and pin us down in our twenties. Life is about a single focus. "Seek first the Kingdom of God . . . Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven . . . Enter by the narrow gate . . . be like a wise man who built his house on the rock . . ." (Matthew 5-7). Each of these individual ideas points back to starting life with the same singular focus. We must make that choice because, as Maclaren says, we won't just drift into what is significant and right.

When we were in our twenties, Kelli and I chose God. And then we didn't. And then we chose God again. And then we got sidetracked. And then we did ministry for God without living intimately with God. And then we did dating. And then God slapped us alongside the head. Then God splashed our faces with cold water.

God reminds us daily that life is all about Him. We forget. Everything in the world is created by God and for God. That includes us. And *that* is what this book is about. It's about the constant choosing that God gives us in our twenties. We leave home, and we leave school, and God asks us to choose Him. It took Kelli and me a while to develop some consistency. We'd love to share some of what we learned along the way.

—P. J. W.

Our Story: HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

This 20 Things idea began one year ago when I (Kelli) wrote an essay I didn't initially want to write.

I was on sabbatical from my teaching job at the time to try to write a book, one completely different book than this, mostly about the spiritual journey with all of its peaks and valleys, twists and turns. And I was afraid that brief essay would oversimplify some of the important ideas I hoped to unpack in a longer manuscript.

However, the more I tried to avoid that essay, the more it wrote itself in my heart and in my head. And the more I decided that it really ought to be.

See, Peter and I work with twentysomethings.

And we love so many things about them. Their vision and passion. Their honesty and creativity and courage. Their desire to change their world. But when we speak on their dormitory floors or invite them into our home for tea and talks, they often ask: "What is the most important piece of advice you would give to us?"

I'll be honest. I never answer well.

Dozens of thoughts start swirling around in my head, and I can never grab ahold of what I would deem to be the “most important” one. Instead, I just stutter and stammer and try to say something sensible. So on the surface that 20 Things essay was for anyone who had ever asked me that question and been disappointed.

Well, that essay I didn't want to write seemed to resonate enough so that now it is becoming a book of its own.

But here's the thing about that essay and this book. These 20 Things have truly grown out of our own journey with all of its peaks and valleys and twists and turns. These 20 Things have grown out of our own regrets, out of a gut-level compassion for who we were back then, from a wish that somehow we could step back through time, give our twentysomething selves a hug, shake our twentysomething shoulders at times, and sit down with our twentysomething selves for a long heart-to-heart over a skinny vanilla latte and a piece of chocolate cake.

Let us explain.

Me in My Twenties (Kelli)

I graduated from college at twenty-one with a communications degree and a dream. I felt called by God to go to Romania and tell people about Him—though I didn't know how or when or with whom. I shared this belief with the pastor of my home church in Minnesota. He was planning a five-week, solo summer mission trip for me, and I asked to spend at least part of that time with a Romanian pastor friend of his in Oradea.

A couple of months before the trip, however, my pastor

called me to explain that Romania was not going to work. I was scheduled to travel just a year and a half after the Romanian Revolution, and the country was still too unsettled. My pastor felt that it was too risky to send me there on my own. But, he said, I could go to the Netherlands and Germany instead. Not a bad back-up plan at all.

So I went.

I spent a week serving in Holland and another week working in Germany. I was preparing to leave for Belgium when I received an unexpected invitation from a missionary to join a team he was leading into Romania in just a few days. I was stunned.

So unexpectedly I was able to spend two life-changing weeks in Romania, falling hard for the country and its people. It was the first time I had seen God move in such an extraordinary and surprising and powerfully personal way. And I was hooked—on all of it. I spent much of my twenties trying to get back to that place Literally, back to Romania. Spiritually, back to that mission trip “high.”

At the end of that summer, I moved from Minneapolis to the Chicago suburbs to start my career and my grown-up life. A small Christian publishing house hired me to create a new children’s church curriculum product for kids. The project got off to a good start. My boss believed in me, expanded my responsibilities, and even sent me to seminary.

I enrolled in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, seeking a seminary education—and, truthfully, a seminary man. But, while I dated a bit, mostly I threw myself into my job, my studies, and my ministry at my new Chicago-area church. I sang in the choir, taught children’s church, mentored the youth—became extra busy about God’s work.

I moved into the upstairs apartment of a decrepit old house in downtown Wheaton. It was quirky and filthy when I first saw it. But it had wood floors and a claw-foot tub. Lots of “character.” To me, it was ideal. I cleaned it up and painted every inch of the place. I decorated with inherited antiques and flea market finds and made for myself a quaint, cozy home.

And that’s what I would have wanted you to see if you had come to visit.

A creative, independent, driven, ministry-minded twenty-something sort of girl.

However.

There were other things going on—beneath the surface and behind the scenes. Some of which I was aware. Others of which I was not.

Because, really, I wasn’t just driven and busy. I was trying to prove myself and trying to add worth to my existence and to find happiness. I was filling my life to overflowing, so I didn’t have time to think or feel too deeply or ask the hard questions or heal. I kept most of my friends at arm’s length. I dated the wrong men. I tossed and turned many nights—trying to beat back loneliness, doubt and fear. I wanted to own the faith I had been handed, but at the same time I wondered why it seemed that God kept slamming doors in my face. Why did He keep saying no to some of my deepest desires—like Romania and marriage and—as the decade wore on—a more fulfilling career?

Then, when I was twenty-eight, some doors—that had for so long been shut tight—finally started to swing.

I landed a teaching position at a Bible college. My dream job.

And I had only been on campus for one month when I met Peter. My dream man.

Me in My Twenties (Peter)

When I turned twenty, I was studying theology and philosophy at a college in Plymouth, England, where I am from. I was also training to teach primary (elementary) school.

Faith in God is floundering in England. Church attendance is plummeting. At my university, even my undergraduate theology professors rarely saw the inside of a church. In fact, they attacked the very existence of God and the reliability of the Bible. And when I tried to stand up for a biblical view of God, they humiliated me in classroom discussions. “No one believes that anymore,” they said.

Still, I tried to hold on to my faith throughout those four long years. And finally, I graduated, a moral and intellectual mess. I was torn between the two worlds of belief and doubt. Hedonism (a love of pleasure) had a strong hold on me. And I had a love affair with romance. But—by the grace of God—I also had a seemingly irrepressible belief in Him.

Not long after I graduated from university, I left England to explore the world. My first base was Japan. I lived for three years in Tosayamada, a rural town where I taught English. As the only local Englishman, I was something of a celebrity. I was invited to many social events in town, made more money than I needed, and, with no obvious accountability, I felt free to live my life as I pleased and for my own pleasure.

However, after those three years of indulging myself, I found that these things left me cold. I still sometimes enjoyed a good theological debate with my atheist friends in the local coffee shop. But, ironically, like my undergraduate professors, I rarely set foot in church. I knew I was standing on the edge of a dark

abyss, peering into its depths. And I knew I had to pull myself away before I was sucked in completely.

So I decided to move again. This time to Pakistan, to teach at a Christian school in the foothills of the Himalayas—for \$100 a month.

I enjoyed that mountain setting and the work, teaching and coaching the children. But because I tried to keep up with fashion and dressed accordingly, because I tried new teaching methods, and because I spent my free time playing soccer with the students, I soon became the subject of slander among my fellow missionary teachers and staff. Then the way I overreacted to a breakup with a girlfriend added fuel to their gossip fire.

In an effort to clear my head and regain perspective, I went into Afghanistan for a month. Trying to survive in a country marked with malnutrition, ravaged by civil war, and crippled by Taliban corruption soon brings the mind to focus. God showed me that my faith had been motivated by making life good for myself. I had been viewing God as a player in *my* story, and I had been frustrated when He didn't deliver the romance and the trinkets I thought I should have.

My time in Pakistan and Afghanistan also awakened my desire for more Bible training. So I enrolled in a master's degree program in Chicago to see if conservative theologians could unravel the tangled knots in my mind. The professors in the graduate school there were patient, intellectually diligent, and willing to converse with alternative ideas. They took me under their wing, and one of them even introduced me to a certain young professor named Kelli Ann.

Us in Our Thirties

The story of how we met and dated varies considerably, depending on which one of us you talk to. This is my (Kelli's) version.

One bright September Friday, Peter was having lunch in the campus cafeteria with several of his classmates and a professor, Dr. Green. I wandered in and was looking lost and lonely in the salad bar line when Dr. Green recognized me from faculty orientation and took pity.

“Would you like to eat with me and some of my graduate students?” he asked.

Well, of course, I would.

Dr. Green led me to a long table, crowded with a dozen or so students. They shifted and created a space for me. Then they introduced themselves. Peter was seated next to Dr. Green.

In the middle of the meal, I overheard Peter tell another student—in his charming British accent—that Minneapolis, Minnesota, was his favorite city in the United States. Minneapolis is my hometown. Being the loyal Minnesotan that I am, I had to find out why this Brit was partial to it.

That was our first conversation.

Peter explained that his parents had lived in Minneapolis for a year while his dad did a teaching exchange. I explained that I grew up there. And we agreed on the city's best feature. The lakes. Peter asked me what I taught, and we discovered a shared love of literature and theater. And then, as I told him about the play I hoped to direct the following spring, he started smiling. One of those smirky smiles. As if he had some secret joke. I blushed and faltered and scrambled to recall what stupid thing I must have said. Then he jumped in to rescue me.

“I’m sorry,” he said, all dimpled and brown-eyed and British, “but I just love your accent.”

This is where our stories diverge.

I floated back to my office, grabbed my lesson plans, somehow found my class, and tried to form complete sentences. Later that afternoon, when I was packing up to go home, I pulled out my journal and jotted a few lines about that lunch. “I think I just met the man I am going to spend the rest of my life with.” Then I added, “I can’t believe I wrote that!”

Minutes later as I left my office building to catch a train, I looked across the lawn and there was—of all people—Peter. Sitting on a bench. With another girl.

So. For me, lunch that day was a divine introduction to my future spouse.

For Peter? At the time, not so much.

We ran into each other several times over the next few weeks, sat together at a missions conference session, lingered over dinners in the dining hall, talked all evening one Friday—at the end of which Peter walked me to my train.

After that, he started walking me to the train almost every day, and we would stop for coffee talks, which grew in both length and intensity as the weeks went on.

Eventually, I assumed that we were “dating.”

And Peter? At the time, not so much.

Or so he claims.

One week before Christmas Peter showed up at my apartment unannounced. Since he was stranded in Chicago for the holidays, I had invited him to join me and my family in Minnesota. He had accepted the invitation, and we were planning to drive up in just a few days. However, on that surprise

visit he came to tell me that he couldn't spend time with me any longer. The Other Girl on the bench ("just a friend") had encouraged him to cut ties with me, reminding him that he came to Chicago to focus on God, not girls.

I felt so many things. Pain, of course. Fear. Determination to handle this breakup better than I had some others. A desire to glorify God no matter what. And a strange assurance that this was not really the end.

I am a visual person, so I wrote on slips of paper—Peter, love, marriage, fear, and more. I struck a match and watched each piece burn in a bowl. I sacrificed my desires and my will on the altar.

Then I went to Minneapolis on my own.

Just a few days later, Peter got in touch. We reunited after the New Year, and thankfully he didn't run out the door when he asked about the bottle of ashes on my kitchen table and I said, "Well, that's you."

We spent a month in focused prayer for our relationship, both believing by the end of January that God had indeed brought us together for good reason.

That May Peter took me to England to meet his family. Then we worked side by side for the rest of the summer at a junior high day camp. One August night, Peter proposed. It wasn't a flashy affair. There wasn't even a ring. No diamond. No production. He just dropped to one knee in the middle of our nightly run. And asked, "Will you marry me?"

"Are you serious?" I said at first. I had imagined something a little more special.

"Yes," he said.

Then I said, "Of course."

At that point we believed that we could make it work. That we were allies and partners. Better together than we were apart.

The wedding was in England that Christmas. I was thirty. Peter was twenty-nine.

We started our fourth decade of life as husband and wife—full of anticipation and hope. For a couple of years, we lived the dream. I continued to teach. Peter took on a fifth-grade classroom and an administrative role at a Christian school. He was also invited to be the interim pastor at a small urban church. We bought a spacious 1920s condo in an artsy near-north suburb. And we made regular romantic weekend trips to quaint B&Bs.

However.

About three years into our marriage, the wheels began to wobble.

Peter's dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. And died a short seven months later. He was only fifty-six.

Peter and I tried to start a family. But we were unable to get pregnant. Testing was inconclusive and treatments failed.

My parents—who both had cerebral palsy—were still in Minnesota, but they needed more and more help. They eventually decided to move to Illinois, and we bought a sizable home together with them. We were still getting settled when we found out that we were pregnant for the first time. A wonderful surprise. Then we lost the baby a few weeks later. It felt like the cruelest of jokes.

Two months after that, in the midst of major home renovations, we had a second pregnancy and miscarriage and a call from my mom to say that she had been diagnosed with cancer as well. Mom and Dad moved into our house at the end of the summer. We helped Mom through surgery in September and treatment throughout the next year.

Two years after they moved in, when Mom's cancer seemed to be at bay, my dad fell and broke his hip. His cerebral palsy and arthritis complicated the recovery, and it became impossible for us to care for him at home.

During all of this, Peter and I were also pursuing adoption. Our two-year China adoption process had turned into six. And while we waited, several other adoption possibilities fell through. We had dinner with one birth mom, then she chose a different couple. Another birth mom did choose us, took our \$3,000, and disappeared without a trace. We provided a six-week safe home for one baby who was "probably going to be adoptable," but then her birth mom changed her mind. We were driving to the hospital to pick up another newborn when we received a call, informing us that this birth mom decided to tell the birth dad about the baby after all, and he was on a plane from Memphis. And so on. Blow after blow.

In the following spring, Mom's cancer returned. Dad's health was declining. And one day while I was meeting with the hospice nurse, receiving instructions on how to care for my mom in her final days, the nursing home called to recommend hospice care for my dad as well.

I collapsed into a chair—too incredulous to process it all and too numb to cry. After a few minutes, I willed myself to my feet, left my mom in the care of my mother-in-law, and drove across town to deal with my dad.

And that's what you would have seen if you had come for a visit.

A stressed, struggling, utterly-spent, thirtysomething sort of couple—holding a marriage and a family and a life together. But barely.

Yet, there were other things going on as well—beneath the surface and behind the scenes.

I (Kelli) was still trying to prove myself and add worth to my existence. I was still filling my life to overflowing so I didn't have time to think or feel too deeply or ask the hard questions or heal. I still kept friends at arm's length. I took Peter for granted and shut him out. I was still trying to beat back the pain and the loneliness and the doubt and the fear, screaming at God in anger for three years, crying out to Him in frantic desperation for another three. He seemed so silent.

I (Peter) wasn't in much better shape. I kept trying to talk with a wife who wasn't mentally or emotionally there. I kept trying to hold together a family in the only feeble ways I knew how. I shut down essential parts of my nature that I couldn't control. I stuffed and buried emotions and memories that I couldn't process—until they started to morph into dark thoughts and nightmares that were the beginnings of adjustment disorder, anxiety, and depression.

But here's the thing. While God brought us through that long, dark valley—and He has clearly used it for our good and His glory—we could have handled it better. We could have learned more quickly. And while He probably had these life events in store for us and that wouldn't have necessarily changed, we could have been better prepared. If only we had better understood these 20 Things.

Your twenties may look similar to ours—or it may look radically different. You may wander the world and relish repeated adventures, or you may settle down in some place safe. You may land a job quickly in your chosen field and begin the corporate

climb, or you may wait tables and park cars and take your time figuring out what you really want to do. You may marry your college love and have babies before you know it, or—like we did—you may enjoy the independence (and simultaneously struggle with the solitude) of the single life.

But wherever you are and whatever you're doing, please don't underestimate the importance of this decade of your life. For in these pivotal years, you are charting a course. You are establishing a pattern. You are laying a foundation for the rest of your life.

Actions to Consider

Make a “Life Map”—some sort of visual representation of the most formative experiences of your life. Be as creative as you care to be in its design.

Share your Life Map with someone (or a group of people) you trust.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What have been the most formative experiences of your life thus far?
- How did these experiences shape you? What lessons did you learn (rightly or wrongly)?
- How did these experiences prepare you for adult life?
- Are there any lessons that you think you will need to “unlearn”?
- Where did you see God during these experiences? What did you learn about Him?

#1

Examine Your FOUNDATION CAREFULLY

It's your worldview. Look deeply at what you value and what you believe about God and man and truth and reality. Then make it your own. Because it will affect every decision you make. Because life has a way of picking you up and tossing you around, and you always want to nail the landing.

*What comes into our minds when we think about God
is the most important thing about us.*

—A.W. TOZER

We all have a worldview.

It's what we believe, not necessarily what we profess.

It's the ideas that actually control our lives—often without

our realizing it. It's what drives our every thought, every decision, every move we make. It affects how we relate to other people, what we feel, and what we do under pressure. It informs how we spend our money and how we spend our time.

We come by our worldview effortlessly. We were helped in its construction—from the day we were born—by our families, our friends, our teachers, our experiences, our culture, our problems, and our faith.

To see how this happens, let's look at Mike.

Mike was raised in a suburban Christian home. For much of his life, his parents took him to sports every Saturday and to church every Sunday. He paid decent attention in Sunday school and youth group, and by the age of fourteen he thought he had most of the Christian thing figured out. Be nice to people. Read your Bible. And pray. Actually—if he was honest—Mike didn't really see the point to all of that Bible reading and prayer. It bored him. But he was as nice as the next guy.

In school Mike learned how to make sense of the world—through math and science, literature and history. He learned that the human race continues to evolve and progress. He learned that there is no ultimate authority, no single truth that applies to everyone for all time. Rather, he and his peers got to figure out what was true for them.

Mike learned about relationships from movies and music. He learned that men should be strong and assertive, that girls want a man who will make them feel good, and that having a girl by his side would make him feel good too.

Mike learned about happiness from advertising. In order to be happy, he needed the latest game system, the best car, the

trendiest clothes, and the most money. And, of course, he needed to have the most fun.

When he arrived at college, Mike stopped attending that suburban church. In fact, Mike stopped attending church much at all. He learned that sleeping in on Sunday mornings helped him recover from Saturday nights.

Mike's college friends came from all over the United States, even from all over the world. These new friends subtly influenced Mike's worldview. Although he had learned at his old suburban church that Muslims and atheists did not believe the truth about Jesus and would spend eternity separated from Him, the real Muslims and atheists he met were much nicer than he had imagined.

So, by his midtwenties, Mike was at a crossroads.

Before the cement of his worldview had even had a chance to cure, it had been placed under considerable pressure—at many points. And Mike was hardly even aware that it was happening.

Eight Worldview Questions

A few years ago I (Peter) sat down with a group of twentysomethings, and we developed this set of questions to help people identify their worldview:

1. Is there a supreme force, power, or being? If so, what is it like?
2. Is there a physical world, a spirit world, or neither?
3. Are human beings good, evil, or neither?
4. Is there such a thing as truth?
5. What do you value?

6. Can logic be trusted?
7. What books, people, or media inform your life?
8. What happens when people die?

Our answers to these eight questions will reveal—to a large degree—our worldview: Why we believe and feel and talk and act the way we do.

In answer to these eight questions, many people who grew up in a church (just like Mike) might say something like this . . .

“Sure, there’s a God.” They might acknowledge that He exists. However, they don’t act as if He’s terribly involved with the world—or with their life. They might pray in a time of undue stress, or even sing a Christian chorus (with arms raised?) if the opportunity presents itself. But God has little to do with their job or schoolwork or habits or hobbies or the way they interact with their family and friends. When people believe in such a distant God, they have to create their own purpose for living. They might decide that they want to live to serve others and make the world a better place. They might decide to focus on what feels good and to live for themselves and maybe their family. Or they may even decide that life is meaningless. They may even succumb to despair.

In answer to question #2, they might hem and haw and say, “I think there’s a spirit world.” But it doesn’t matter much because they live in the here and now and trust their own senses. They are only aware of what they can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and they aren’t worried about what might be going on behind the scenes.

Most people find the question about truth to be tricky.

In answer to question #3, many

people who grew up in the church will say, “Of course, I’m good. Most people are.” Then, if asked to define “good,” they might say, “Nice.” “Kind.” “Not a jerk.” And they would reserve “evil” for terrorists, murderers, human traffickers and such. And even then, they might hesitate to judge. After all, if those people were doing what they believed to be “right” and “true,” who are we to pass blame?

Most people find the question about truth to be tricky. Some would say, “There is no such thing”—not realizing that this, in itself, is an assertion of truth. Others would say that truth is complex and unknowable. And if anyone claims to have it figured out, he must be arrogant or ignorant or intolerant or all of the above.

When asked what they value, many people might say, “Family. Friends. Work. Life. Health.” Or they might say, “Authenticity. Selflessness. Justice. And peace.” They might list all sorts of people and activities and objects and ideas. But the better question might be: Where do we spend our time and money and attention? Because that will reveal our actual values—whether we would name them as such or not. And while the things listed above are good, we also have to ask: When it comes to my life values, is “good” really “good enough”?

Many people also struggle with logic and its role. Historically, logic was central to learning. An hypothesis had to be researched and proven—with valid reasons and compelling evidence. However, our culture’s standards today have shifted. Rather than requiring a solid argument, we now trust whoever tells the most heart-rending tale. Narrative trumps thought. Also, we feel obligated to give assent to absolutely everyone—no matter what they believe. To do otherwise—to engage with logic and to think

critically—can be considered uncompassionate and cold.

When asked to name the sources that inform their lives, most people today find them too numerous to count. Certainly, family and friends still rank high on the list. However, their voices now compete to be heard over the hundreds of television stations and websites and billboard ads and celebrity promos and musical performances and Internet videos we encounter in a given week. And the indicator of whether or not something is worthwhile and credible is whether or not it went viral.

Finally, in answer to question #8, most people assume that their dead loved ones have gone to heaven and, of course, they themselves are headed there too. They might not use that exact term. But they comfort themselves with phrases like this: “I’ll see him again” or “she’s in a better place” or “he’s looking down on me.” And they believe that even people who had no time for Jesus on earth have gone to spend eternity with Him.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton gave a fancy name to the worldview we just described. It’s “Post-Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” and it’s all the rage—in our culture and in many of our churches.¹

However, it is something less than Christian.

A Christ-Centered Worldview

If we were to try to align our worldview with that of Christ, then it might look more like this . . .

We might say, Yes, there is a God. He is holy and sovereign and loving and unchanging. And He is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives. We live for His glory. And knowing Him changes absolutely everything.

Yes, there is a spirit world. It is the foundation of the world we can sense, and it permeates it at every point. It transcends the physical world as a giant transcends a ladybug.

Yes, I am evil. At least I was born that way. Now the evil person who came into the world can be crucified with Christ and a new person may live in her stead.

Yes, there is truth. And it is found in God and His word and His world. And though none of us will ever come to understand it entirely, we will spend our lives seeking it out.

Yes, I value family and friends and other good things. But even more than those, I value God. All other things are a pile of dung compared to the value of knowing Him (Philippians 3:8).

Yes, I value logic. But my own logic pales in comparison to God's. He is all-knowing and perfectly reasonable, though He may not always seem so to us.

Yes, there is a heaven. And there is a hell. Heaven is a relationship with God—a loving God who does not force people to be with Him for eternity. So He has provided a second option. Eternal estrangement. We call that hell.

A Fractured Foundation

When I (Kelli) was in my twenties, my worldview had some huge holes.

I believed a lot about God. I had already studied Him for years. And I thought I had Him all figured out. The theology that my church had handed me had hardly been questioned or challenged or truly made my own. God still fit in a nice God-sized box that I had set on the shelf. He was holy (check) and sovereign (check) and on down the list. He was also good, and He wanted

good things for me. So if I delighted in Him, if I worked hard enough on His behalf, He would give me the desires of my heart. On demand. As far as I was concerned, that was the deal.

When I was in my twenties, I believed certain things about human nature and about myself. Though I would have told you that people are sinful (evil) and are the grateful recipients of God's good grace, I had a hard time accepting that grace for myself. Secretly, I wanted to believe that I was pretty good, and I lived the tiresome life of a perfectionist—trying to perform; trying to live up to some unspoken, but powerfully perceived, expectations; trying to control my world. Grace was not sufficient and failure was not acceptable, so when I did fail—when I didn't get the job, when a mentee pushed me away, when a boy and I broke up—I couldn't forgive myself. Let alone accept forgiveness from God.

I spent most of my time at work and in ministry, with my friends, in seminary studies, and at the gym. I spent my small salary on coffee and clothes and quirky antiques—but also on mission trips and serving the teens from church. Certainly, I did value good things: people, service, education, health, and home. But truthfully, in hindsight, I think I mostly valued what these good things said about *me*. Their contribution to the identity and image *I* was seeking to create. And a more thorough inspection of my values may have revealed a preference for activity over intimacy, pleasure over purity, and spiritual ritual—small groups, quiet times, Bible memory—over real life change.

When I (Peter) was in my twenties, I believed that the Bible contained truth. But for me there were other truths as well. I held to a sacred/secular divide though I wasn't even aware of it. I could switch easily between these two worlds: one in which God existed, and one in which He did not. Biblical truth and scientific

truth had no overlap in my mind. And though the borderline between the two realms was indistinct, it was there nonetheless. As a result, I led two lives. In my “secular” life, I taught in the public schools, partied with friends, and traveled the world. In my “sacred” life, I believed the truths that remained locked in the pages of Scripture.

When I was in my twenties, I thought I was rational. I enjoyed a rousing debate in the corner coffee shop. However, I was rational like a French movie—dark and intellectual until love was involved. Then when a *femme fatale* entered the scene, I’d die a dramatic death on the stage of my own passion. I couldn’t deny my heart, no matter how corny or melodramatic it seemed.

When I was in my twenties, the Internet had not yet been born, so I was influenced by books and music and movies. I read *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and watched *The English Patient*. These two works reinforced the darkness and fatalism surrounding my unrequited love. One was a classic piece of literature, and the other won Best Picture for 1996. So they *had* to be communicating truth, right? Not necessarily. I found out later that Napoleon banned his troops from reading *Werther* when too many love-sick soldiers were jumping off bridges rather than charging the enemy. *C’est la vie*.

Finally, when I was in my twenties, I believed that my destiny was a distant heaven. It may be a matter of some concern for the old and for the sick. But as a young and healthy soul, I was content to live in a vacuum until sometime in the far-off future when I might see Christ face-to-face.

**It makes sense, then,
to do a thorough
inspection—sooner
rather than later.**

Inspection Time

So, the bottom line is this. We all arrive at our twenties with some sort of worldview in place. The forms were long ago built. The concrete has been poured. But the material is still malleable.

Why does this matter?

Because, for the rest of our lives, it is upon this foundation that we build.

It makes sense, then, to do a thorough inspection—sooner rather than later.

It makes sense to allow God to examine your footings. To look for signs of structural failure. To identify the cracks. To drill down to bedrock and make thorough repairs—rather than settling for temporary remedies. In so doing, you will undoubtedly avoid some of the very costly repairs that can otherwise happen down the line.

Actions to Consider

Ask your family and friends the eight questions from the beginning of this chapter.

Keep a careful log of where you spend your time and money for an entire week. What does this tell you about your values?

Re-watch your favorite movie or listen to your favorite music with the eight questions in mind. Ask: What worldview is being communicated?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How would you answer the eight worldview questions from this chapter?

- Are you conscious of choosing a worldview? Or have you drifted into it?
- How do you see your worldview reflected in the way you live your life each day?
- Have you identified any areas where your worldview is not in harmony with God's design? If so, what are they?
- What might be the consequences of continuing down this worldview path?
- What might it look like to change how you think and act in this area? What steps might you take to change in this area?
- Ask God to reveal any places where He wants to address your worldview.

Other Things to Read

Romans 12

Acts 17

Colossians 3

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/>

when-your-twenties-are-darker-than-you-expected

Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholemew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Baker Academic).

J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity).

Glenn S. Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Zondervan).