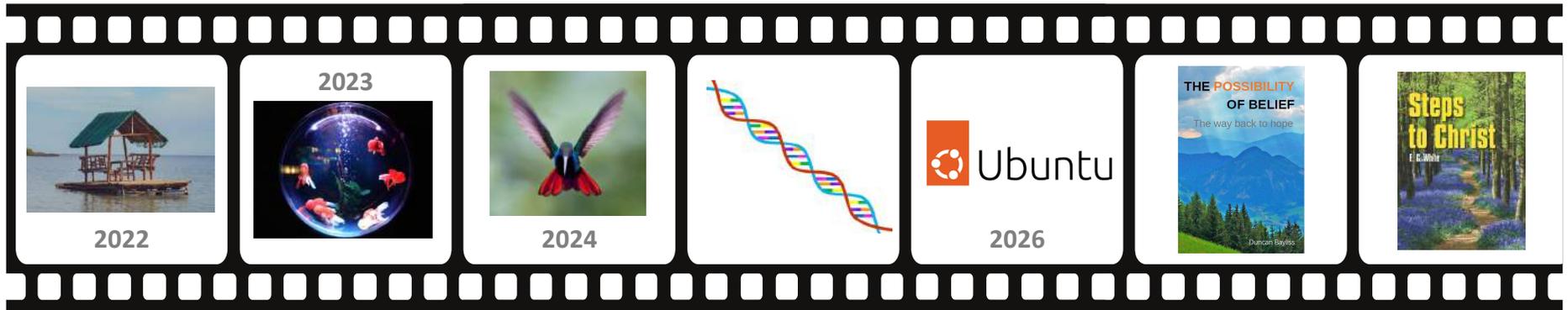


# Why can't they hear us?



*Pre-evangelism and why it matters for  
Adventism in Europe*

## *Why can't they hear us?*

### *Pre-evangelism and why it matters for Adventism in Europe*

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This publication is a hybrid document for both reading and sharing by projecting as slides.

It is in this A4 format to make it easy to print and also to project as slides.

It is graphical with limited text to make it easy to use across a wide range of European languages.

It is scaled so that the more graphical pages to work when projected as slides.

The pages with more text are better read as part of the document in pdf format.

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#### Using *Why can't they hear us?* in church and small groups:

Some of these slides can be useful for discussion in church and small groups. Different slides will be helpful to different groups. If you use just a selection of slides, make sure you attribute the full document and where people can find it.

# *Why can't they hear us?* – What is it about?

The aim is to catalyse a conversation across the church in Europe about how to become more effective at reaching people who are secular and do not have a Christian background

It is a very difficult challenge and there is no simple formula to follow

*Secular people are one of the hardest groups to reach with the gospel worldwide*

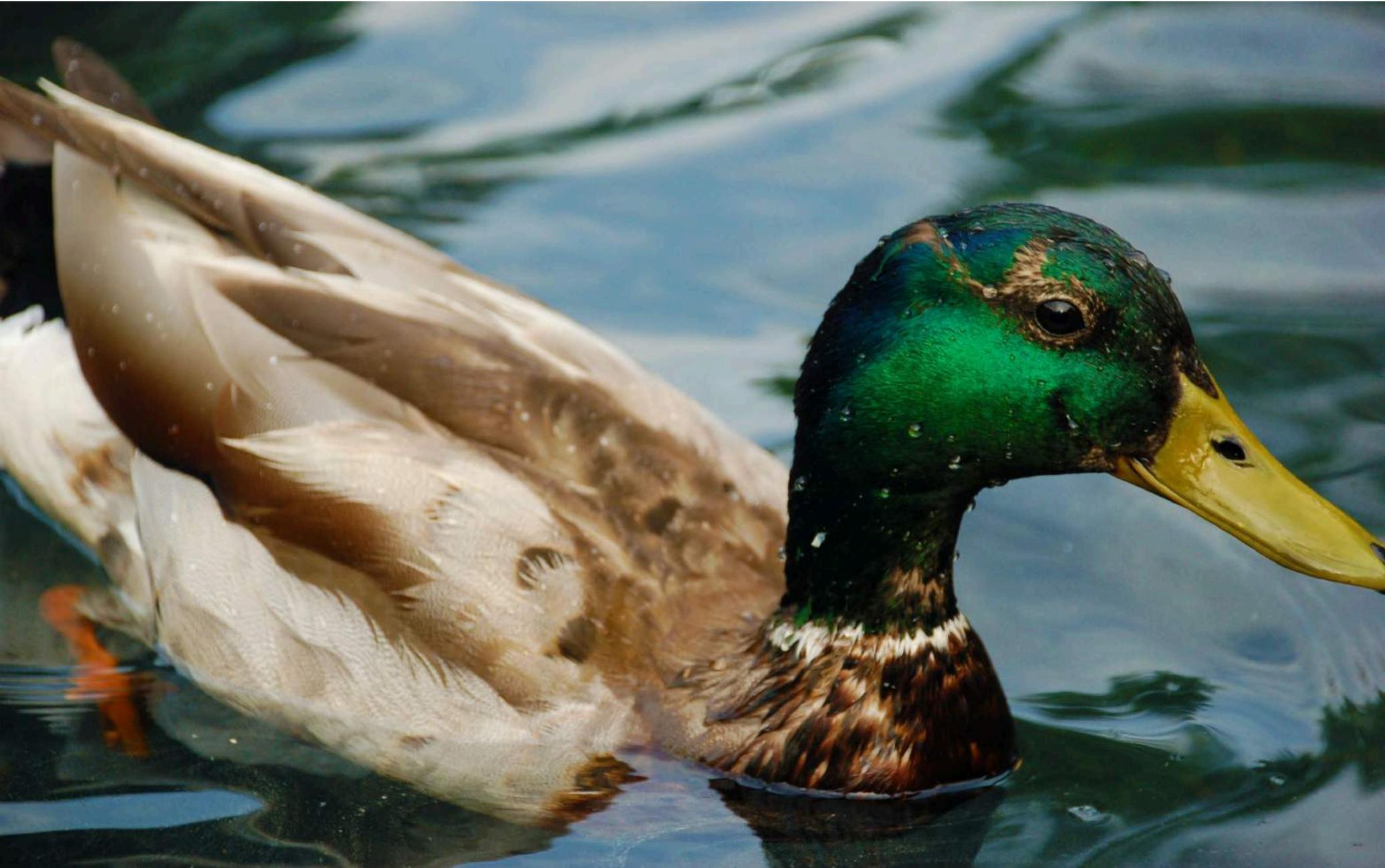
We will consider the scale of the challenge in reaching secular people in Europe

We will identify some of the dimensions of the problem. It is complex and there is a lot to think about

We will look at some ideas being suggested as part of the solution

Duncan Bayliss, 2023

Why does what we say seem like water off a duck's back?



# The scale of the challenge

The church across Europe is growing almost entirely by migration (people who are already Adventists moving in) and organic growth (children of Adventists) not mission, with a few exceptions

We have been **good at systematic theology**, but **weak on mission and discipleship**

Context: The UK and Ireland as an example

44,000 Adventists across the UK and Ireland in total

Approx. 1000 annual growth, mostly migration

Probably no more than 100 people from a non-Christian background are joining the church each year out of 70 million population! = the church is having almost zero impact on wider society

**Reaching secular Ireland and Britain, it is as though we are starting from Zero. It is the same across most of Europe**

AND what is more concerning - we have not been sure what to do about it....

*Secular people are one of the hardest groups to reach with the gospel worldwide*

# The impact of secularism



Secularism has done more to draw away young people from church than any persecution that the church faced in 2000 years.

Understanding and responding effectively to secularism is essential for reaching people with no Christian background in Europe and other secular contexts. It is also essential for helping young people growing up in Christian homes to respond to the challenge of secularism and retain faith in Jesus.

Secularism is no respecter of class, education, ethnicity or any other aspect of a person's background. It represents a set of ideas and a way of looking at the world that has been very effective at undermining the faith of millions. It has left millions more without hope, often seeing no way out of despair. As Christians we cannot look on and not respond.

# Why can't they hear us?

*Why can't they hear us?* is an attempt to crystallise what Adventists already know about the scale of the challenge in reaching secular society with the good news about Jesus, and to encourage us that we can rise to that challenge because "with God everything is possible."

We must do some honest soul searching as to why we have not been reaching secular people very effectively.

That means understanding how they think and finding ways to start conversations with people that start much further back than we have been used to doing – what might be called **pre-evangelism**.

It means meeting people where they are at rather than expecting them to come to us.

We need to understand the problem in reaching secular people and finding effective ways to share our faith with them.

*Why can't they hear us?* covers a lot of ideas that can be quite challenging to engage with, yet it is only a start of the journey into this important topic.

**Are you willing to be one of the people who makes this a challenge you take on personally, to help your local church become more effective at reaching out?**

*Secular people are one of the hardest groups to reach with the gospel worldwide*

# Become part of the solution!

Traditional approaches to evangelism have proven ineffective for some time now in secular Europe.

We can find new ways to share our faith and a lot of good ideas are already being used, but it is still a challenge for most churches to visualise what we can do differently that can be more effective.

There are no quick easy answers. No-one has a simple solution.

This requires long term engagement and needs a willingness to not just measure success in numbers baptised.

**Let's look at the journey to faith** that people with no Christian background might take.

What obstacles they might find on that journey? How can we start to understand what we can do to help?

**It means not assuming the structure of a Christian worldview in the minds of people we talk with.**

*"Pre-evangelism is no soft option." Francis Schaeffer in, 'The God Who is There'*

*This is a journey of discovery for Adventists as much as it is for secular people exploring faith*

# The journey to faith in Jesus

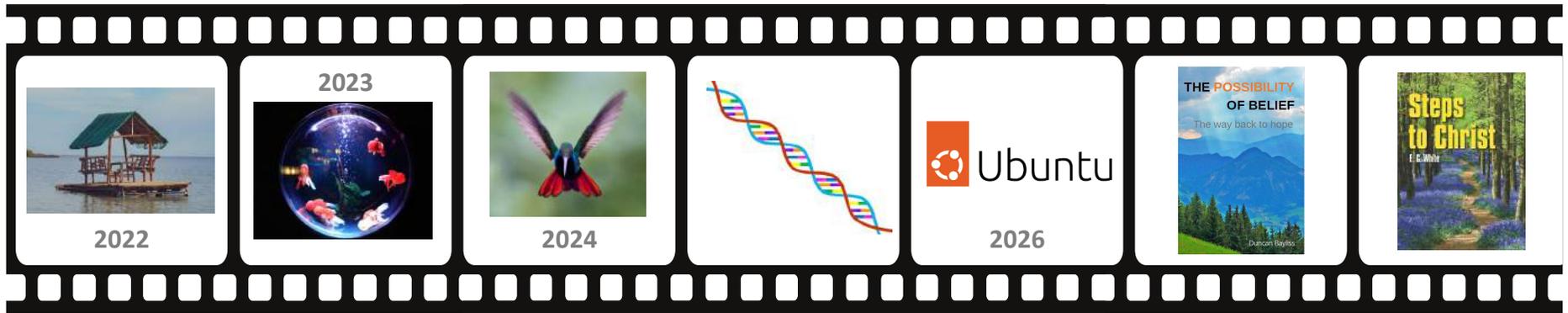
It starts before we see it

Where does  
the story  
start?

How do we  
introduce a  
whole new  
dimension?

Is there a  
ladder of  
evidence to  
belief?

So that a  
book like this  
makes sense



What do we  
talk about?

How do  
people  
develop a  
whole new  
way of  
thinking?

How long  
is their  
journey?

*Understanding where people are and the journey they need to take is essential*

# The journey can be long

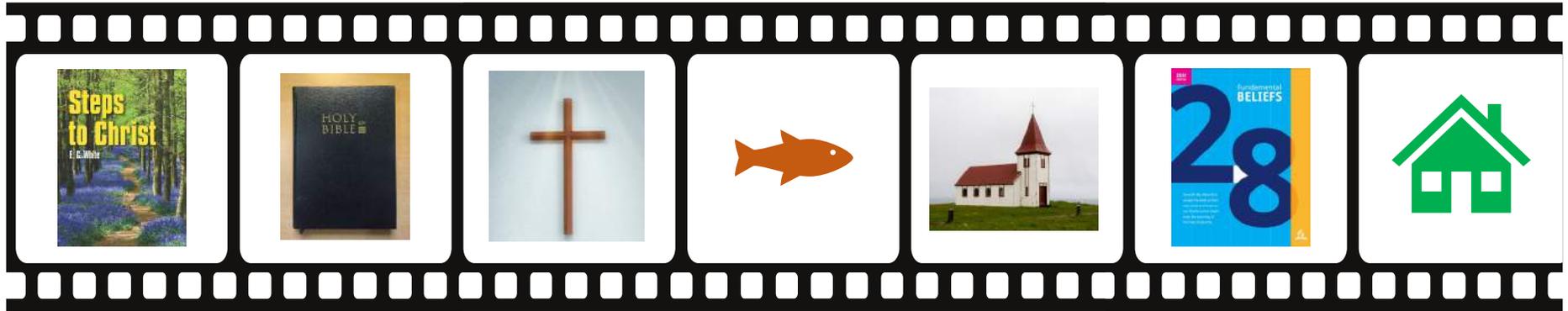
and it continues for life...

When a book like this starts to make sense

Coming to the cross is not the end

Church can seem a long way off

When is the secular person "home"?



This book can still be hard to understand

The journey continues

And all the details can be a lot to take in

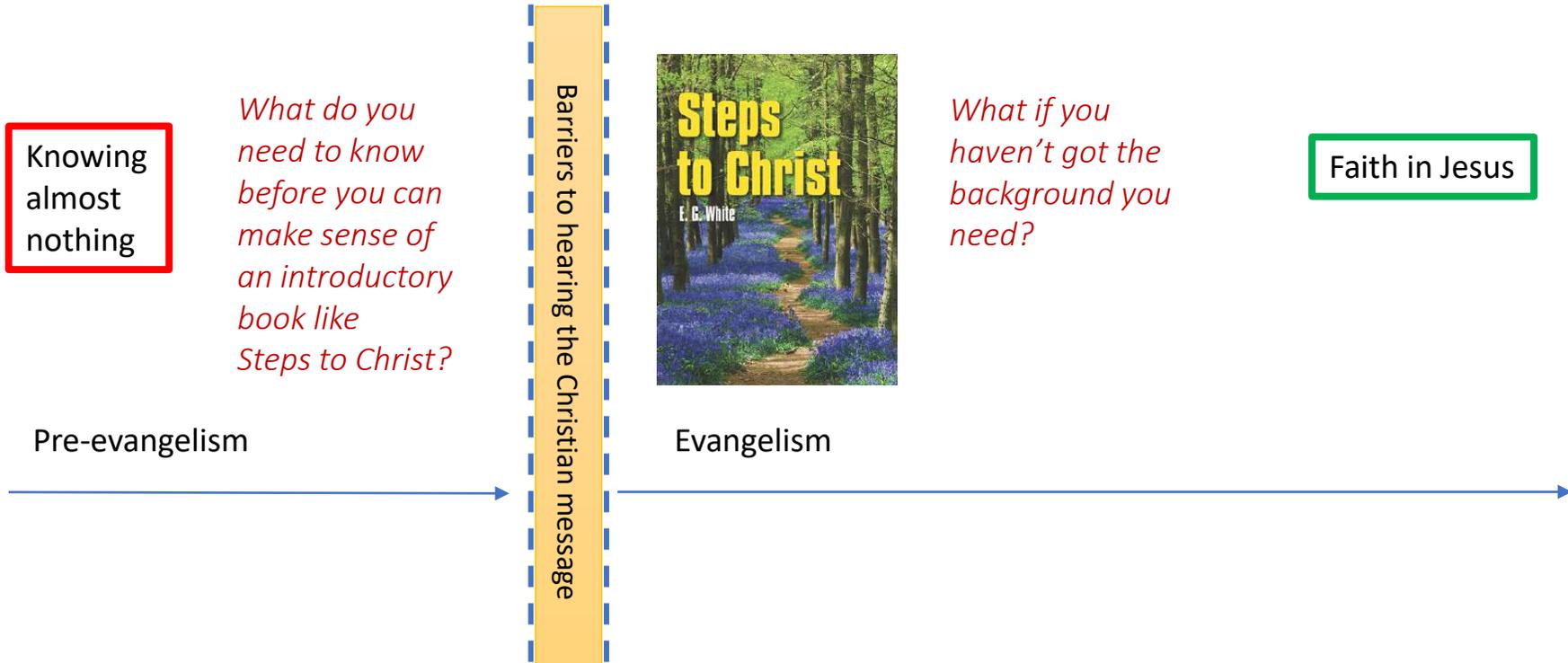
*In the past we have assumed that people are starting here*

*and can move rapidly*

*to here*

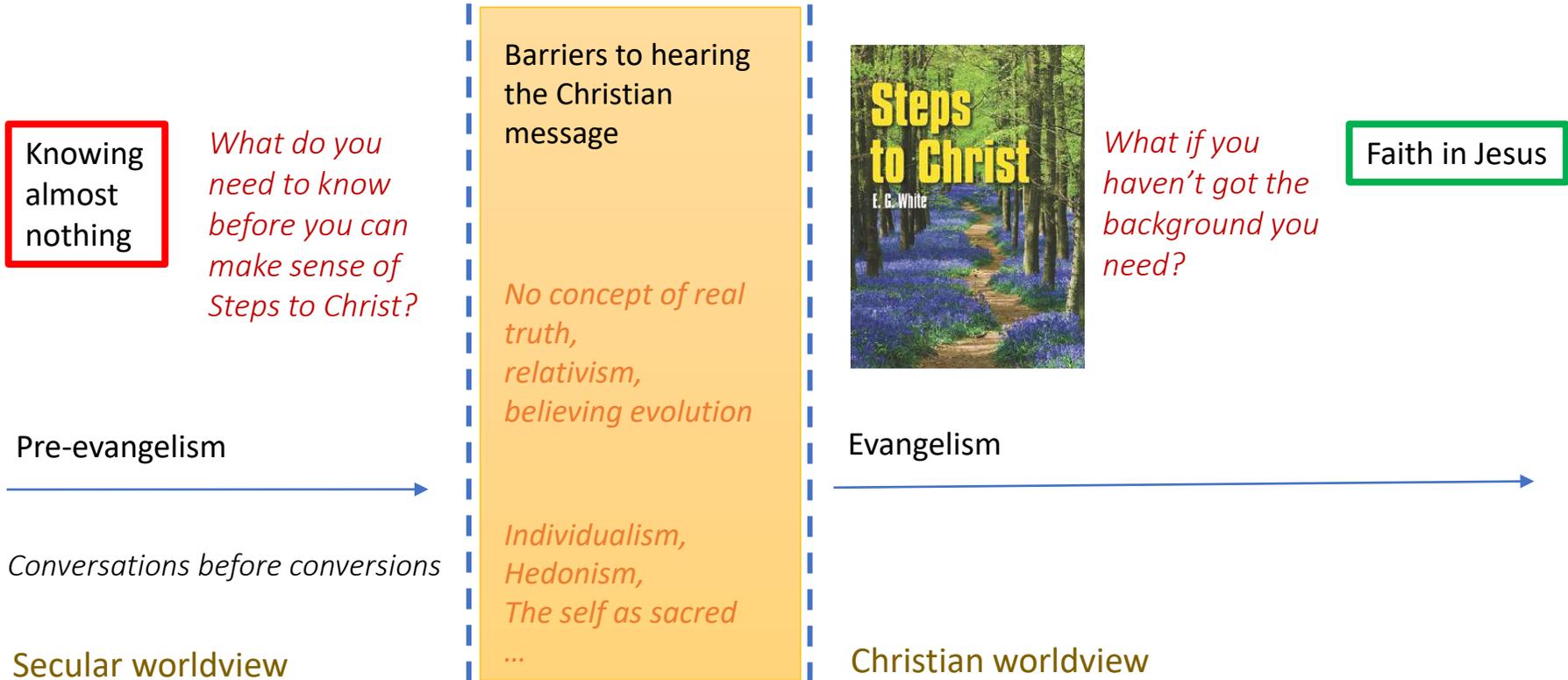


# What do we mean by pre-evangelism?

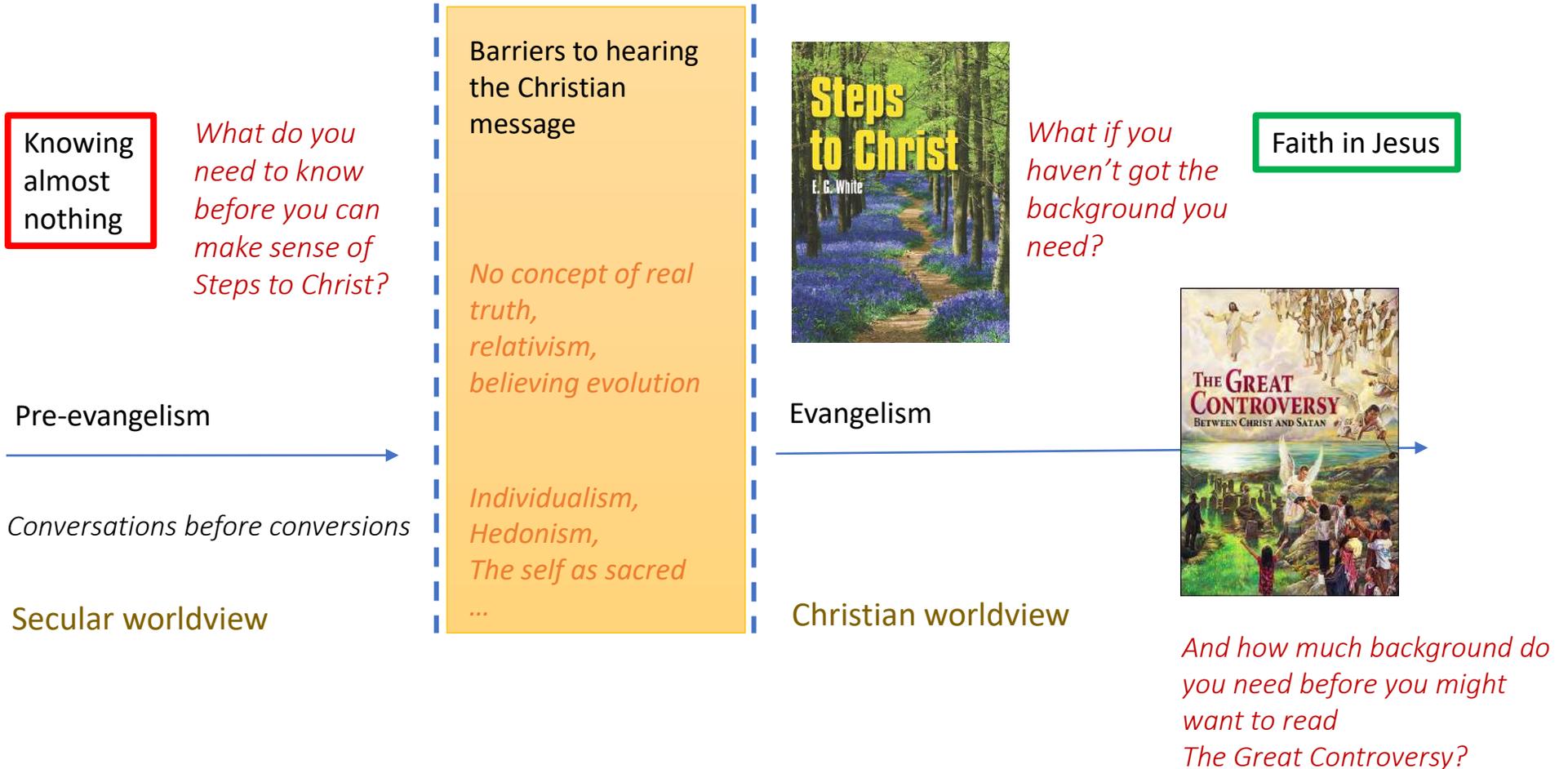


# What do we mean by pre-evangelism?

*We can add some detail to the problem*



# What do we mean by pre-evangelism?



# A word of caution about pre-evangelism?

We can look at the dimensions of the challenge in reaching secular people

We can consider some **principles to work with**

**But there is no set formula**

People are individuals and we must be sensitive to their situation

This requires much prayer and help from God

It is a task beyond our ability, the hard evidence bears that out, we must pray for God to awaken faith

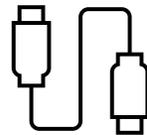
# Can we keep doing what we have done in the past expecting it to somehow work in future?

*"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."* 1 Corinthians 9:22

*"By all possible means"!*



*Can we endlessly recycle old approaches?*



*If the Apostle Paul was trying to take Christianity to secular people in Europe today, what would "by all possible means" actually mean?*

*The truth does not change, but how we communicate and connect with people does change*

# Who do the approaches we have used work for?



*In Europe we are talking to a shrinking part of society who can still hear us clearly*

*How big is the part that we can still communicate with effectively?  
50%, 30%, 20%?*

*But always remember that the approaches we have used before still work for some people*

# Is there just one Adventist way of doing things?

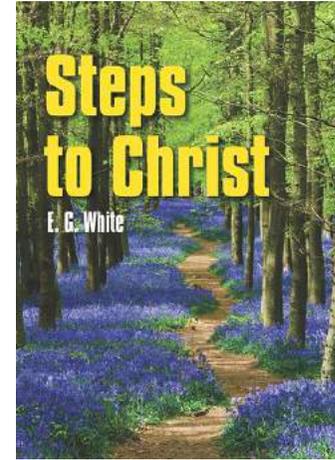
*“Whatever may have been your former practice, it is not necessary to repeat it again and again in the same way. God would have new and untried methods followed... to surprise people.”*

*“Let every worker.. study, plan devise methods to reach the people where they are. We must do something out of the common course of things. We must arrest the attention.”*

*“They must make use of every means that can possibly be decided for causing the truth to stand out clearly and distinctly, ... plainly and decidedly.”*

Ellen G. White in *Evangelism*

*Isn't this the same as the Apostle Paul saying “By all possible means?”  
1 Corinthians 9:22*



*“God never asks us to believe without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith.”*

Ellen. G. White *Steps to Christ*, chapter 12

*What is the sufficient evidence that secular people need?*

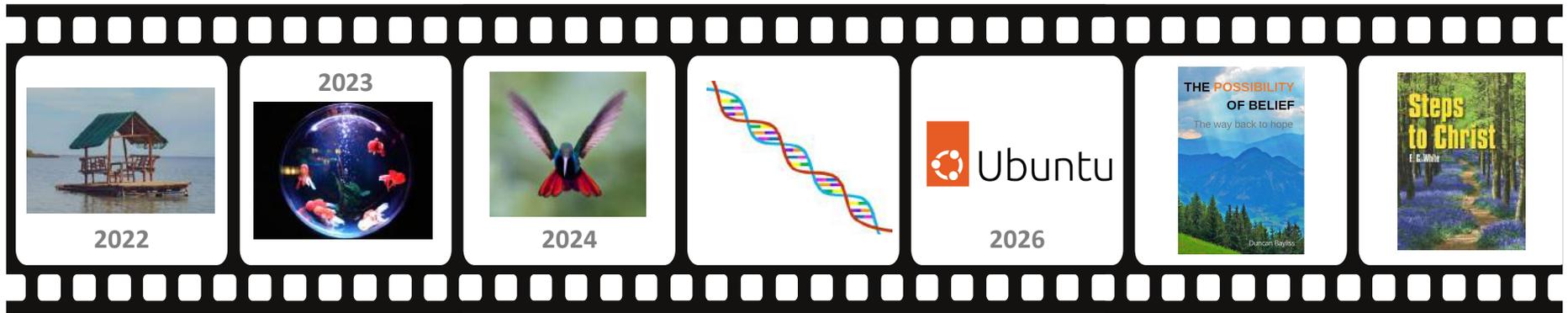
# Mapping the journey of faith onto life stories

Becoming  
aware

Understanding  
the basics

Recognizing  
credibility  
of Christianity

Realizing what  
Christians have  
been saying all  
along



Seeing  
relevance

Trying it out

Exploring  
more  
detail

*Their journey  
starts before  
we even see it*

*Not everyone will  
take the same route,  
but there are some  
typical steps*

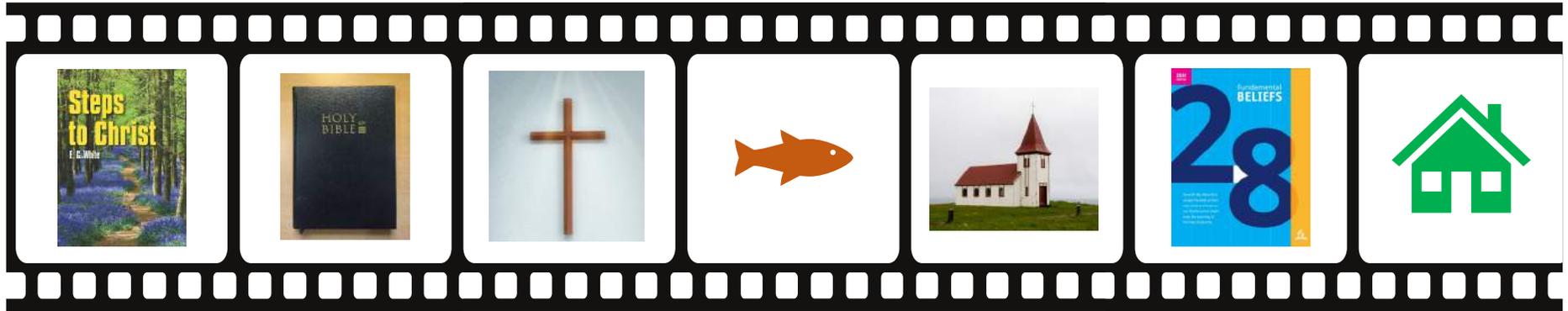
# The journeys of new believers will often be long

Christian books start to make sense

Finding emotional and spiritual healing and a new freedom in Jesus

Being part of church life in all its dimensions

When is the secular person "home"?



Deeper understanding of truth becomes possible

Commitment to be a disciple

Understanding more truth

Is church the destination?

*We need to focus on life-long discipleship not baptisms*

# The Christian Grand Narrative

When we believe in Jesus, the story of our life joins the story God has been making all along

Our story becomes part of God's story



Creation

Fall into sin,  
true moral  
guilt

Revelation  
of truth in  
scripture

Jesus' life,  
death and  
resurrection

New life:  
Forgiveness  
Salvation  
Discipleship

Return of  
Jesus and  
judgment

Resurrection,  
new heavens  
and a new  
earth



A perfect  
beginning

It all went  
wrong

God showed the  
way home

On the cross  
Jesus solved  
the problem

The solution:  
forgiveness and  
a new life  
starting now

God will deal  
with all the  
wrong in the  
world,  
deliverance is  
coming

Being raised  
from the  
dead to a new  
eternal life, a  
perfect future  
await us

*In becoming a Christian the story of our life is joined into the story of salvation*

From our perspective, secular people are adrift on a vast ocean without any certainties, on a self-assembled raft, trying to stay afloat



*From their perspective there may be nothing wrong with their life!*

*We can't dismantle their raft without first showing them that they have a viable alternative*

*"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have.*

*But do this with **gentleness and respect.**"*

1 Peter 3:15

*We must approach secular people with compassion for their situation and sensitivity to their values even where we disagree*

# Secular people are not all the same in how they think

The young are very different from older generations

For a long time evolution has been one of the most common stumbling blocks to faith. It offered an answer to the question:

*Where have I come from?*

*“Those rejecting religious belief cite scientific theories of unguided chemical and biological evolution more frequently than any other reason for their loss of faith.”*

Stephen Meyer in *The Return of the God Hypotheses, Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*

Now, young people are being indoctrinated into a much more radical secularism that presents significantly greater challenges to Christian belief and witness. Newer radical secularism is increasingly intolerant of Christian beliefs.

Many young people have no idea where or how to find a satisfactory answer to the most fundamental questions such as:

*Who am I?*

*Many Christians have not taken the time to understand how radical are the shifts in thinking that are occurring in secular countries*

# If secular people think about belief at all, what questions do they ask?

Does God even exist?

Isn't the Bible all just made up stories?

Doesn't evolution prove the Bible is just myth and fables?

Isn't God just part of patriarchal power domination?

Does truth even exist, is your "truth" the same as "my truth"?

If God does exist, why does he allow suffering?

Surely, I am who I feel I am? Who are you to disagree?



*Is secular society  
sawing off the  
branch it is sitting  
on?*

*These questions from secular people  
are an expression of a fundamental  
challenge to the whole Christian  
worldview and in fact to the very  
foundation of our societies that are  
built on it*

*How aware are you of the questions secular culture is asking?*

# Secularism – the core ideas that characterise our age

Secular people hold a combination of ideas that are interrelated and which make them highly immune to Biblical Christianity. These ideas stand in direct opposition to the gospel. They are contrasted here with God's revelation in the Bible. Many other statements in scripture could be added.

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Life can, and probably should, be lived without God. (**Absolute personal autonomy**)

vs Romans 6:16 *"You are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness."*

Everything can be explained in purely physical terms e.g. evolution, with no possibility of God acting into our lives from the outside. (**Naturalism**)

vs 2 Peter 3:5 *"But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed."*

The Bible is just stories made up by people. There is no revelation of anything by God. (**Naturalism, humanism**)

vs Isaiah 45:18,19 *"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak truth; I declare what is right."*

Hope and meaning only come as a leap of "faith" away from the realm of rational thought and "reliable" knowledge like science. (**Leap of faith**)

vs John 20:31, on Jesus miracles; *"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

The individual decides how to live their life and what is right and wrong for them. There is no objective truth, everything is relative, there are no absolutes. (**Relativism and Individualism**)

vs 2 Thessalonians 2:10 *"They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."*

The purpose of life is "freedom", through the pursuit of personal pleasure with no boundaries, promising no consequences (**Hedonism**), but it fails to deliver. (**Despair**)

vs John 8:36 *"So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

# How radical is the process of becoming a Christian?



Jesus: *"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

John 3:3 NIV

*"You should not be surprised at me saying, "You must be born again.""*

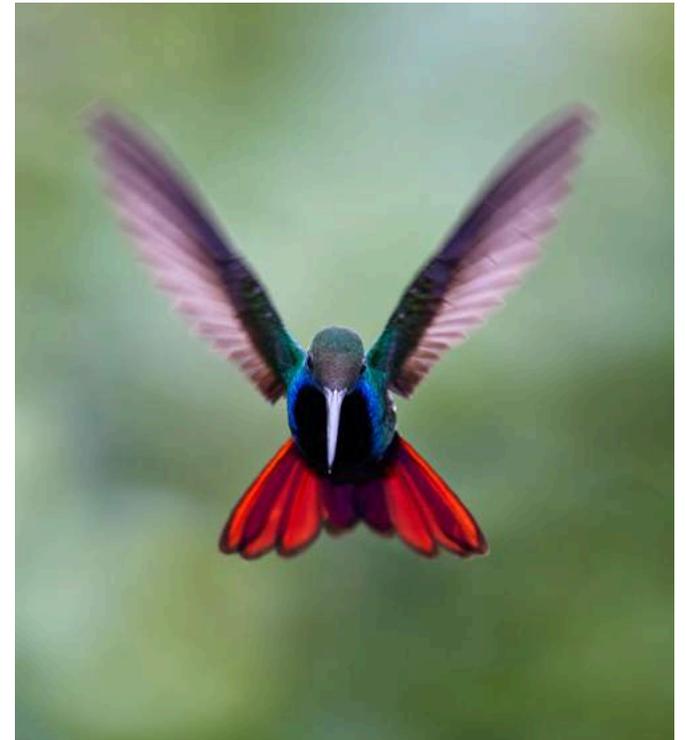
John 3:7 NIV

*For these fish, this tank is the universe*

*But, this bird exists in another dimension*

Paul: *"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed."* Romans 12:2 J. B. Phillips

*"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Romans 12: NIV



Credit to Bjørn Ottesen for this analogy

# An analogy - Becoming a Christian is like getting a new operating system

Imagine the secular person as operating on **Windows 95**

You might think the solution is an update to **Windows 11**

But what they really need is a whole new operating system—not **Ubuntu Linux**



**But HoS 1.0! Heavenly operating system**

In other words, becoming a Christian means developing a whole new way of thinking and looking at the world. A worldview is like an operating system for our perception, our thinking, our beliefs and consequently our actions. It shapes what we perceive and how we respond to information

*It is very easy to underestimate the scale of change in someone's thinking that is required to leave secularism and embrace Christianity*

# A worldview is like an operating system

It frames our perception, our thinking, our beliefs and consequently our actions

In a Christian worldview everything is within the frame of our operating system in a coherent way of thinking based on solid evidence

## Christian, biblical operating system

God exists

Truth exists

Science - Creation

History - The resurrection

Personality - We are made in image of God

The Bible - God has communicated

Prophecy - authority of the Bible can be tested

There is a solid basis for hope and meaning and purpose in our lives

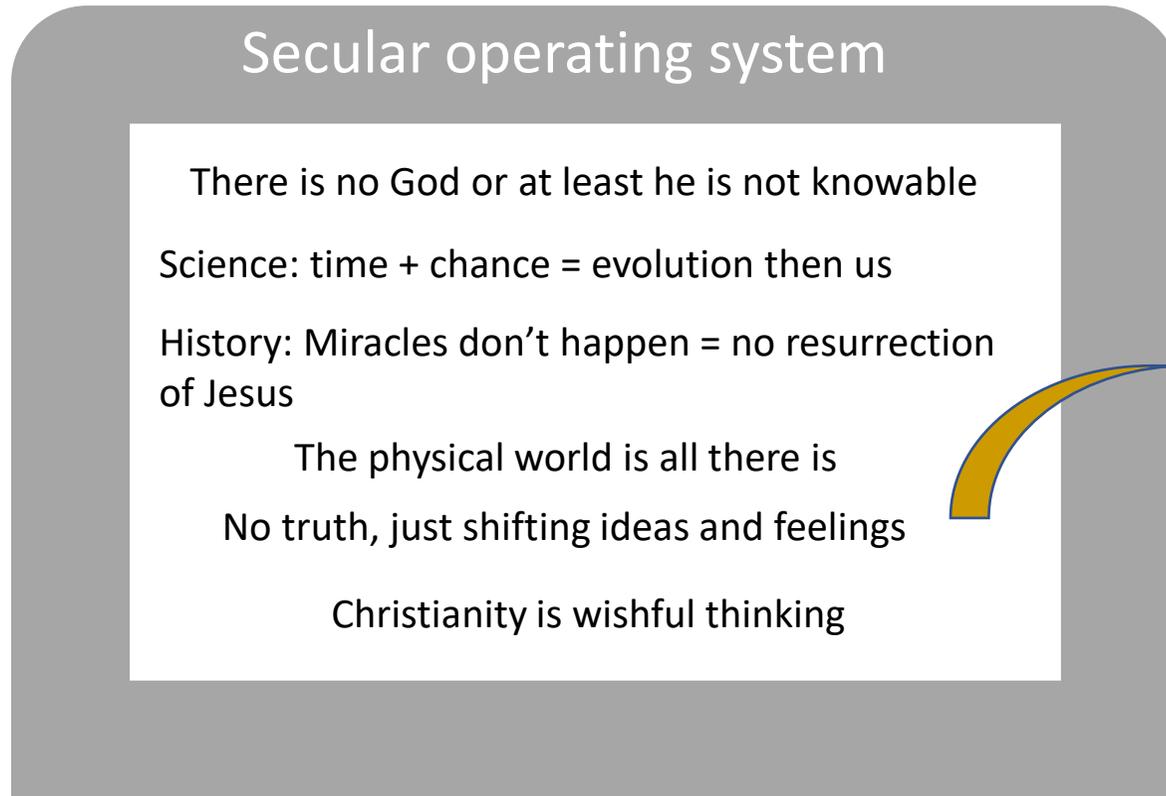
*The Christian worldview shapes how Christians think.*

*There is no leap of faith but instead faith is based on sufficient evidence!*

# The secular operating system is very constrained

The way in which secular people think excludes any sufficient basis for belief or hope

In the secular worldview truth, faith and real hope do not fit in the system of thinking, secular presuppositions such as Naturalism<sup>1</sup> exclude them



Secular "Hope" is a leap of faith away from what we know for certain

*The secular worldview can only offer a leap of faith towards hope and meaning, there is no basis for them*

<sup>1</sup> Naturalism is the assumption that the physical world is all there is. There is no spiritual or non-physical dimension. Evolution assumes this.

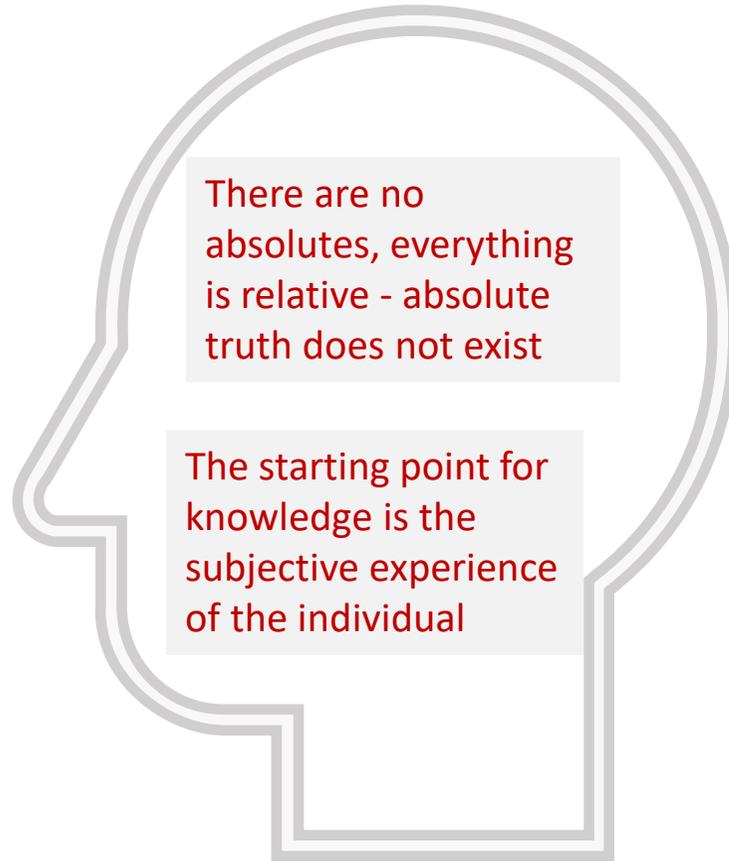
# How does secular thinking work?

Secular thinking denies the existence of truth and has no means for finding “true” truth

We cannot join up our understanding of everything into one complete coherent system

Religious “truth” and “faith” are separated from history and science

Everything is relative, so there are no moral absolutes  
Everything is shades of grey...



Either there is no basis for knowing whether God exists - agnosticism  
or  
There is no God - atheism

There is no objective transcendent reality

“Faith” is not rational and is a leap away from the world of reason and rationality

Meaning and purpose are sought in a leap away from the rational – but not found leading to despair

The secular mind

*The secular way of thinking has become universal in the west and infiltrated how a lot of Christians think as well*

# How does Christian thinking work?

The critical question is: What is truth and what is the method of finding it?

It is possible to have a rational, coherent, comprehensive system of thinking.

History and science are integrated into belief.

e.g. Creation not evolution

e.g. The literal physical resurrection of Jesus as a real historic event

There are absolutes, and we recognize morality is built into the very fabric of reality

Right and wrong are revealed by God

**God exists and is knowable**

There is an objective transcendent reality

God has communicated with us objectively, clearly and we can know and understand what He has revealed

Faith is not a leap but a reasonable step based on good evidence

Faith is based on truth and gives meaning and purpose and hope through credible answers to questions such as:

Where have we come from?

Why are we here?

Where are we going?

**Truth exists  
If something is true  
the opposite is not**

**The starting point for  
all knowledge is the  
existence of God and  
that He has  
communicated with us**

**The Christian mind**

*Before 1890 in Europe and 1935 in USA almost everyone thought in this way – Adventism still does*

# From secularism to a better place



*A leap of faith will not get you there!*



*You need a bridge built on sufficient evidence*



*To get to a place of hope*

You find the bridge with a new way of thinking based on good evidence:

- God is there
- Real truth exists, no more relativism and shades of grey
- He made everything, including the world of words and concepts
- He has communicated to us reliably in the Bible
- He came as Jesus to show us what He is like
- Jesus died and rose again in real history
- Jesus gives life to those who believe in Him – e.g. believing that He is the Son of God who died for our sins and has risen from the dead to give us eternal life

*Christians need to offer good evidence for all of these aspects of truth*

# The nature of truth and how to find it is the key issue

*The testimony of the external world  
and the testimony of what we can know about ourselves point us to God*

We must take people to the evidence

*“Two things fill the mind with ever increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and the more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” Immanuel Kant*

But we must make sure they understand what truth is and what it is based upon

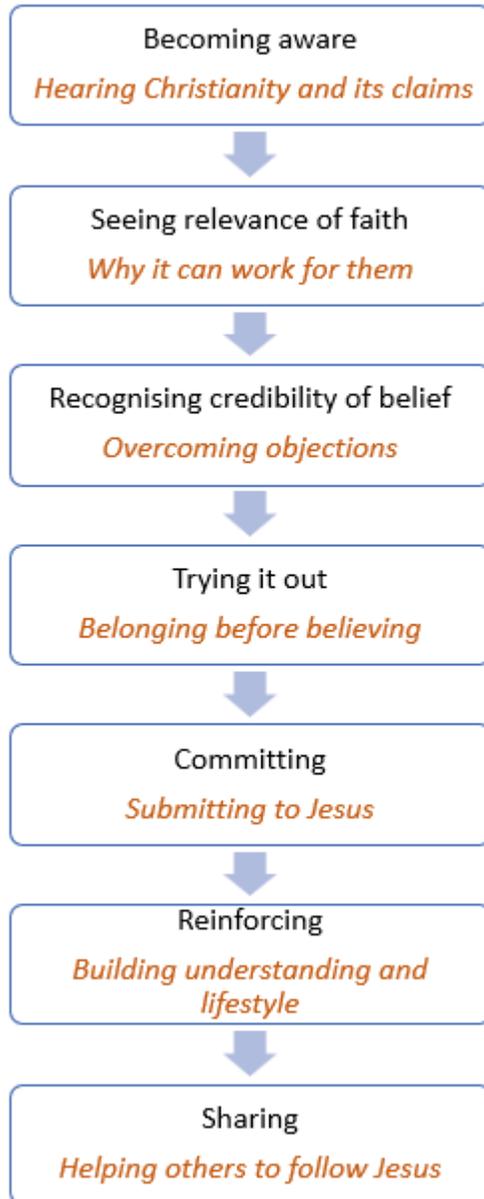
*“There is no use talking today until the presuppositions are taken into account, and especially the crucial presuppositions concerning the nature of truth and the method of attaining truth.” Francis Schaeffer, in *The God Who is There**

Before a secular person is ready to become a Christian we must ensure they understand the following:

- 1 “We must make sure that the individual understands that we are talking about real truth, and not something vaguely religious which seems to work psychologically.*
- 2 We must make sure that he understands that we are talking about real guilt before God, and we are not offering him merely relief for his guilty feelings.*
- 3 We must make sure that we are talking to him about real history, and that the death of Jesus was not just an ideal or a symbol but a fact of space and time... that if you had been there that day, you could have rubbed your finger on the cross and got a splinter in it.” Francis Schaeffer, in *The God Who is There**

*Real truth is the only basis for real faith*

## *The growth process*



# Steps on the journey to faith in Jesus

*For secular people starting with no Christian background it can be a long journey to faith in Jesus*

*Their understanding will go through many stages*

*It will often take several years*

(Flowchart adapted and extended from Keller, 1995)

## *Experiences on the route to faith*



(Adapted and extended from Keller, 1995)

# Experiences on the journey to faith

*Secular people will need to go through a range of experiences*

*Those experiences may not come in this order*

(Flowchart adapted and extended from Keller, 1995)

# Pre-evangelism and presuppositions

*Christians need to engage with the most basic assumptions secular people have about where they came from, why they are here and how they should live, if we want to communicate hope and meaning*

## *Christian worldview*

God made everything, so life was intended to be

We have a personality and we are valuable because we are made in the image of God

Right and wrong are real and people are in rebellion against God

God has revealed himself in scripture and has made prophecies about the future we can test

Jesus shows us what God is really like and He offers us eternal life starting now

The point of life is to know God and to love Him and to love others

Following Jesus brings peace of mind and hope

## *Secular worldview*

The universe just happened and life arose by chance

We are the result of random chance. We construct our own identity

Right and wrong are what you decide for yourself or we agree together

Science is the most reliable knowledge we have and not compatible with faith

This life is all there is

Do what you please but try not to hurt anyone

Decide for yourself how you want to live your life

Table adapted and simplified from *The Possibility of Belief* by Duncan Bayliss

*The 'Grand Story' Christians live within tells us that we are each of immense value because we were intentionally made in the image of God. We are so valuable to Him that he embodied Himself in Jesus to connect with us and bring peace, hope and purpose*

# The journey of discovery of truth

*The journey into historical, Biblical Christian faith takes a secular person a long way away from their secular presuppositions. **Secular society has lost the concept of truth and with it hope***

## *Key steps of the journey into truth*

God is really there, outside of and before all else

God made everything: space, time, and all aspects of reality, including words, concepts, meaning, purpose, hope

God has acted into history in an objective and testable way

God has spoken into our reality in scripture and made predictions about the future we can know and test

Right and wrong are not subjectively defined, or relative or pluralistic but absolute as revealed by God

We are separated from God by evil, within us and in the world around us

We have an absolute need of forgiveness; God doing what we cannot do

We contribute nothing to our rescue

Jesus was God “embodying himself in human form”, born into a humble life, he taught, was crucified and came to life again with a real physical body, bringing eternal life

## *The words historic Biblical Christianity uses*

God is the great “I am” transcendent and eternal

Creation not evolution

The Bible is real history and eye-witness testimony

Revelation and prophecy

“True truth” not just the content of truth but the very concept of truth based on antithesis (Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*)

Sin

Grace, leading to justification

All of grace not of works

The full divinity of Jesus Christ, his virgin birth, crucifixion for our sins and resurrection (and one day we will be resurrected too)

Table adapted and simplified from *The Possibility of Belief* by Duncan Bayliss and *The God Who is There* by Francis Schaeffer

*Every point of this journey is in direct opposition to the secular worldview*

# Implications for sharing our faith 1



*Those studying how to reach secular people suggest they often need to start with experience not theology. (But Christians doing kind and helpful things can be no more than social work)*

*We must get better at relating Christian belief to the secular mindset. (But the 'sufficient evidence for faith' can be just an academic exercise)*

*Experience + sufficient evidence is not enough on its own. Much prayer is needed for God to win the battle and open hearts to Him*

# Implications for sharing our faith 2

Finding points of contact  
to open up conversations

Helping people completely **change their way of thinking**: "True truth" - a strong concept of truth, no relativism

We can begin  
by helping  
people  
*experience*  
Christian  
spirituality

Not just lifestyle but intentionally  
challenging secular thinking:  
Faith comes by hearing truth and content

Helping people **experience** the reality of  
the Christian life and begin **a journey of  
discipleship**

But we help people move on to **content** by directly **tackling secular presuppositions** with good evidence

*We need to help people  
encounter all of these  
areas and more,  
though they will do so in  
different orders*

- Creation not evolution. Science can support faith
- The Bible as history. It is testable and reliable - prophecy
- The reliability of the transmission of scripture
- The reality of the physical resurrection of Jesus

*We can give people a solid and reasonable basis for faith, to back up the experience of faith*

# Challenging our model of sharing

What are we thinking when we share our faith?

*“We have the truth and you need to change to be like us”*

or

*“Join us on a journey of seeking Jesus who is truth”*

Secular people are likely to experience the reality of Christian spirituality first then to understand Christian truth, not the other way round

Many secular people do not feel a need of any kind of organised religion in their life. They don't feel any need to change. But when we look at the foundations of their worldview it is very shaky ....and when a crisis comes they often find they have nothing much to fall back on.

*Can they see faith modelled in our lives that works?*

*Do we have something they would want to have as well?*

*Do we do anything they value and would join in with?*

# How does Adventism see itself?

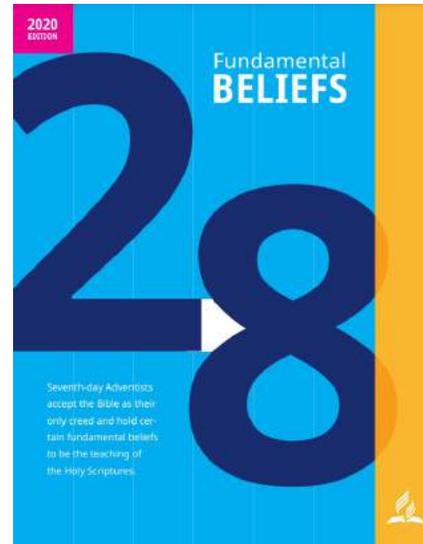
## *How accurate are these simple statements?*

### New England in the 1800s

We understand early Adventists as seeing themselves continuing the Reformation and recovering truth  
*"We have the truth!"*

### The 10/40 window and China

Islam and Marxism/ Communism are still the strongest persecutors of Christians  
*"We follow Jesus the Son of the one true God"*



### Central and South America

Many Adventists have defined themselves in opposition to Catholicism and its errors  
*"We are avoiding the 'Mark of the beast'"*

### Europe

Secularism has done more to empty Christian churches in the west than anything that has come before it  
*"We are not sure what secularism is, or how to respond to it" ????*

*Isn't secularism, which is becoming increasingly radical, the main challenge to Christianity in Europe?*

*How do we see ourselves in relation to secularism? Do we really understand it and know how to respond?*

# Adventism in Europe has focused on teaching doctrines and much less on discipleship

*What typically happens when people join the Adventist Church?*

*“Usually there is a brief orientation/training for new members on basic doctrinal teachings and the unique characteristics of that particular church. Then there is the assumption that the new believer will be assimilated into the church. Unfortunately, an intentional and real discipleship process is, in most cases, fully ignored.*

*As Dan Kohn asserts: “What is missed is the in-depth, extensive orientation to being a ‘student of Christ’ in order to be a well-prepared, inspired ‘follower of Christ’.*

*Limited is the ‘classroom’ training, let alone the complete absence of experiential learning, which Christ strongly emphasized with His first disciples. Jesus spent very little time inside temple walls” (2010:12).*

*The result? Non-functional church members and a great many “pew sitters” who attend worship, but very few passionate followers of Jesus Christ who minister during the ordinary days of the week.” Gonçalves (2014)*

Kleber De Oliveira Gonçalves is the founding and senior pastor of New Seed SDA Church in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He is also the Director of the Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies for Adventist Mission of the General Conference

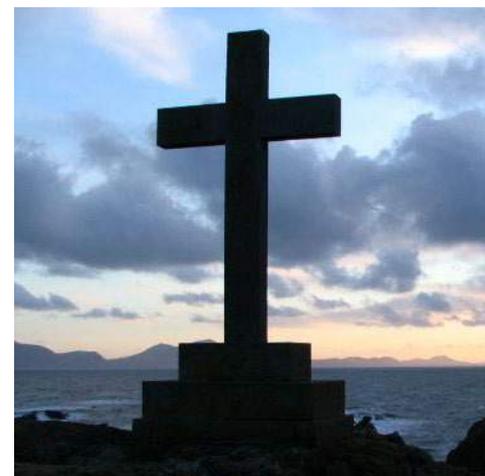


Image of cross : Duncan Bayliss

*Is this an accurate picture of your experience of church? Do you want to change it?*

# Where do we start?

Pre-evangelism built on experiencing the reality of Jesus must then lead to truth

*“One of the major opportunities postmodern sensitive churches have in dealing with postmoderns is provided by the belief that Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, is real and is active in everyday life. Postmoderns are more likely to accept the Christian faith through real spiritual experiences, which leads to accepting doctrines, rather than through mere intellectual exercise.” Gonçalves (2014)*



But it often begins with experience rather than doctrine

*“Richardson notes: “Today we need a personal, experiential approach to answering questions and defending our faith that is informed by good philosophy, and good evidence. But we must start with personal experience.” In the postmodern condition, Christian apologetics has its value and importance, but it should shift its focus from attempting to convince, to encouraging the postmodern seeker to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in an experiential, personal, and practical way.” Gonçalves (2014)*

*For secular people experience often comes first but it must then lead on to truth*

# How can we make connections to get started?

Adventism has emphasised a cognitive approach to faith. To say to people who do not have a strong concept of truth, “We have the truth” is not convincing. So how can we make connections to help start them on a journey of faith?

Secular people are often more likely to engage with activities outside a church setting and to *experience faith in action* before they are willing to engage with *faith as teaching*. Truth is central, but they must be willing to hear us.

*Community service projects* with secular people  
joining in - action giving credibility to teaching

*Reading and discussing the Bible as a text*  
(not for doctrinal proof) letting the stories speak  
into people's lives

*Addressing the weaknesses of the key elements of secularism, such as evolution,*  
showing that Biblical Christianity has a coherent and complete and credible  
understanding of all of reality –  
where we came from, why we are valuable, why we are here, where we are going

*Prayer with people as a path to finding meaning and purpose,* by encountering the reality of the transcendent

*What other ways can we make connections and open conversations?*

# What are Adventists doing to reach secular people?

## Zero Church, Madrid

In Madrid in 2016 the Spanish Union of SDAs started Zero Church. It is near the geographical centre of Spain, point Zero but it is also reaching people for Jesus who are starting with little or no Christian background.

Pastor Jonathan Contero says the church has **three levels of discipleship:**

First, **community oriented projects**, this is the first point of contact for most people. Many non-Adventists participate in these projects. If they become more interested in the church they are invited to church meetings.

Second, **Zero Church on Sabbath morning**. The talks and discussions are oriented to spiritual matters but aim to meet people where they are at, rather than where Adventists are at.

Third, **Sabbath School on Friday night** to help committed believers grow in their faith with in-depth Bible study.



Find out more at:

<https://cspm.globalmissioncenters.org/starting-from-zero>

After 17 months the church grew from 8 people starting it to more than 80 regularly attending, over half of whom are experiencing and exploring church for the first time.

# What lessons are there from projects like Zero Church?

Community projects help make connections.

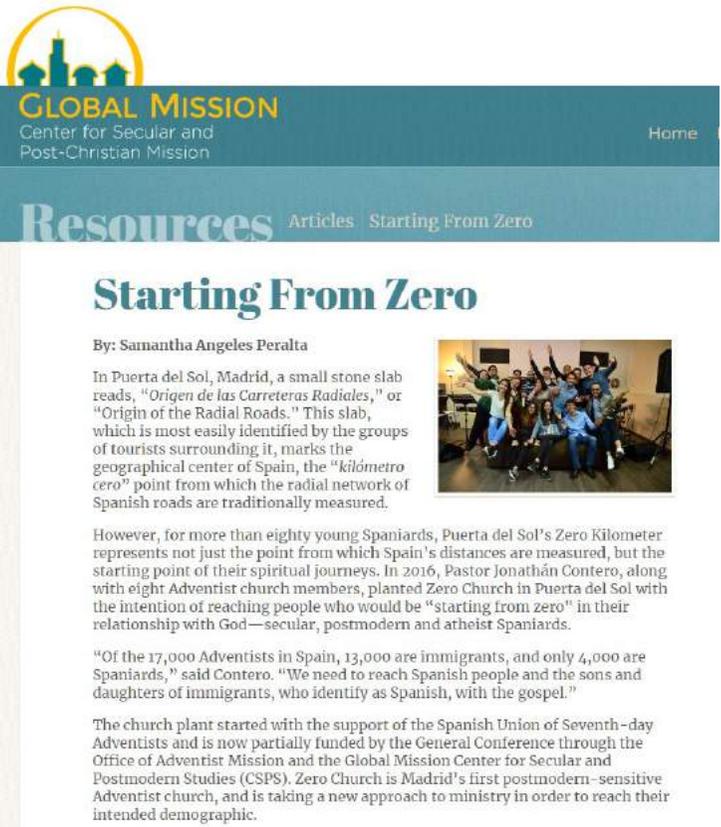
Lifestyle is not enough. We have to have the courage to share truth about Jesus, but we need connections so that people are willing to hear us.

Starting where people are at, rather than where we are at, is vital.

*“As Adventists, we tend to begin the conversation with theology or religion,” he said. “But non-religious and postmodern people reject the Bible, they reject institutionalized religion—but they are open to spirituality. We need to meet them where they are, not where we are.”* Jonathan Contero,

<https://cspm.globalmissioncenters.org/starting-from-zero>

There won't be fast “results” but starting and continuing along the life-long journey of discipleship is what is important.



**GLOBAL MISSION**  
Center for Secular and Post-Christian Mission

Home

**Resources** Articles Starting From Zero

## Starting From Zero

By: Samantha Angeles Peralta

In Puerta del Sol, Madrid, a small stone slab reads, “*Origen de las Carreteras Radiales*,” or “Origin of the Radial Roads.” This slab, which is most easily identified by the groups of tourists surrounding it, marks the geographical center of Spain, the “*kilómetro cero*” point from which the radial network of Spanish roads are traditionally measured.



However, for more than eighty young Spaniards, Puerta del Sol’s Zero Kilometer represents not just the point from which Spain’s distances are measured, but the starting point of their spiritual journeys. In 2016, Pastor Jonathán Contero, along with eight Adventist church members, planted Zero Church in Puerta del Sol with the intention of reaching people who would be “starting from zero” in their relationship with God—secular, postmodern and atheist Spaniards.

“Of the 17,000 Adventists in Spain, 13,000 are immigrants, and only 4,000 are Spaniards,” said Contero. “We need to reach Spanish people and the sons and daughters of immigrants, who identify as Spanish, with the gospel.”

The church plant started with the support of the Spanish Union of Seventh-day Adventists and is now partially funded by the General Conference through the Office of Adventist Mission and the Global Mission Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies (CSPS). Zero Church is Madrid’s first postmodern-sensitive Adventist church, and is taking a new approach to ministry in order to reach their intended demographic.

Source: <https://cspm.globalmissioncenters.org/starting-from-zero>

*There is not just one approach to copy, it will need to fit to the community*

# Some practical recommendations for implementing these ideas, based on the experience of Adventists

Kleber De Oliveira Gonçalves is the founding and senior pastor of New Seed SDA Church in Sao Paulo, Brazil

*“First, a new culture based on relational discipleship must be created in the church. Discipleship cannot be seen as an event or a training seminar that takes place for a few hours once a week within a church building.*

*Second, the church must promote urban mission models that foster continuous experiential learning in the context of community.*

*Third, the church must develop multiple assessment tools to measure church “success,” where discipleship becomes a priority. Counting baptisms is not enough.*

*Fourth, the church must implement theological training... that places intentional emphasis on discipleship as a process and that promotes relational discipleship opportunities for every student.*

*Finally, to reach emerging postmodern generations with the gospel, the local urban church must recover its uniqueness and identity as a sent community, recognizing that it is its responsibility to develop discipleship as the only Christian lifestyle in order to contextually, incarnationally, intentionally and successfully—follow the steps of the Master.” Gonçalves (2014)*

*It is a real challenge for Adventism to develop such new ways of thinking and discipling*

# Haven't we got the outline of an antidote to secularism already?

## Foundational lies of secularism

There is no God, or at least one who is knowable

Right and wrong are just relative?

Everything just evolved by chance

This life is all there is



A blackhole

VS

## Revelation 14

*"Fear God and give Him glory..."*

*The hour of His judgement is come...*

*Worship Him who made the heavens and the earth*

*Their deeds will follow them..."*



Hope

*Isn't there a direct confrontation between secularism and Christianity?*

# And we have advance warning of the false answers to secularism to help people avoid them

Warning about the wrong response to secularism

Revelation 14

False religion will not save you

“Fallen is Babylon...

Watch out, coercion will be used to enforce false religion

If anyone worships the beast and his image... he too will drink of the wine of God's fury...

*Cultural Christianity is not enough*

This calls for patient endurance...”

666

999 (or 112)

*Maybe instead of talking to people about “3 angels” we should actually give their messages!*

# More about the antidote to secularism

*A Christian understanding of truth as revealed by God gives hope and meaning*

It is worth emphasising how clear Revelation 14 is in contrast to the predominant secularism of our age and to compromised Christianity.

Revelation 14 directly challenges and refutes the dominant method of thinking and its false conclusions.

In secularism, “faith” and meaning are separated from science and history. Absolute truth is denied. Hope is lost.

In contrast, God’s warning to the world could not be clearer:

He exists. All knowledge begins from that fact.

Right and wrong are real. Judgement is coming.

Our response should be to worship Him because He made everything,

and He will call all into judgement, with consequences that will last for eternity.

*Isn't it amazing that the antidote to secularism was given in prophecy 2000 years ago?!*

*If we have the antidote to secularism we can't remain silent or just talking to ourselves*

# The context varies a lot across Europe

Their path to secularism varies but most European countries are heading in an increasingly secular direction



*Our understanding and response to secularism must be contextualised to each country.*

*North to South and East to West, Europe varies a lot*

*“In a very real sense, Europe can be called post-evangelised. Talking about the Gospel gives the impression of presenting ‘old news’ instead of ‘good news’”.*

Evert Van De Pol (2013)

The percentage of people for whom religion is important is very low in many European countries. (see: The Atlas Of European Values)  
[www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu](http://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu)

# The comfortable days will soon be over

*“A time of painful testing, even persecution, is coming. Lukewarm or shallow Christians will not come through with their faith intact. Christians today must dig deep into the Bible and church tradition and teach themselves how and why today’s post-Christian world with its self-centredness, its quest for happiness and rejection of sacred order and transcendent values, is a rival religion to authentic Christianity. We should also see how many of the world’s values have been absorbed into Christian life and practice.”*

Rob Dreher, (2020) *Live not by lies, a manual for Christian dissidents*, page 162

Revelation 3:16 *“because you are lukewarm, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*

*Haven't we known this for more than a century?  
Other Christians are now seeing the same issues*

# Tackling secular presuppositions – some examples

The following slides give some examples of the types of evidence we can share with secular people

Secular presupposition	Refuting evidence
Naturalism (also called scientific materialism) – i.e. that physical matter is all there is	There is good evidence from the science of DNA for the existence of information and thus God
Evolution made all life	There is good evidence that time + chance cannot create anything
The Bible is unreliable and miracles don't happen	There is good evidence that the Bible is reliable history and eye-witness testimony

*It is secularism that is built on a shaky foundation, not Christian faith*

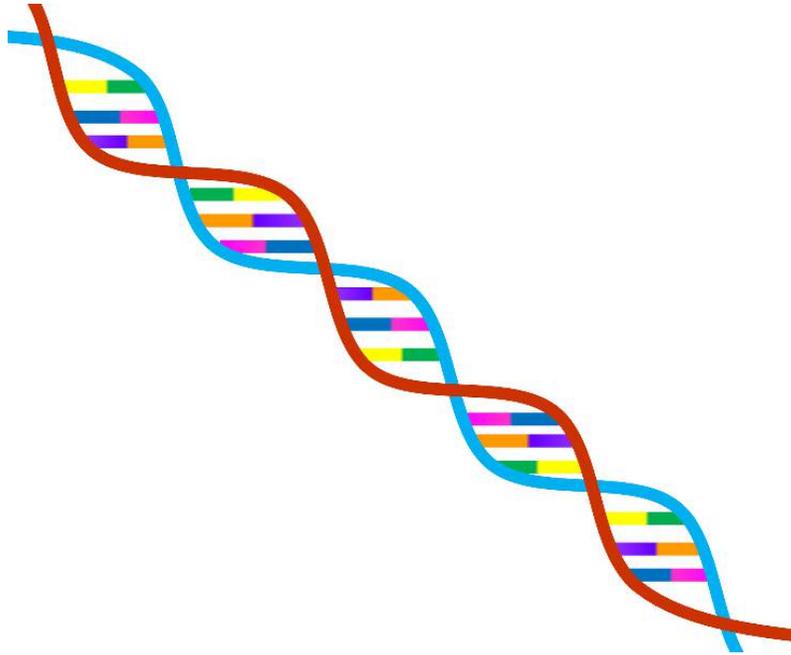
*Let's look at these examples in a bit more detail*

## Example 1 – DNA, information and God



There is good evidence from the science of DNA for the existence of God

# Evolution claims the physical and material are all there is i.e. all life arose from natural causes alone with no involvement of the supernatural



The astonishing digital world is made up of 1s and 0s

DNA is made up of 4 chemicals abbreviated to A,C,G and T

They are free to associate in any order so that they can act as a chemical coding system for life. There are about 3 billion letters in the DNA code in every cell in our bodies<sup>1</sup>.

There is nothing about their chemistry or the chemistry around them that controls how they are ordered

But their specific ordering is meaningful because it codes for the manufacture and control of other chemicals that make life – **they carry information**

Get the A,C,G and Ts in the wrong order and you are likely to be diseased or dead!

*So where did the information come from?*

Stephen Meyer calls this the designer's 'Signature in the Cell' (also the title of his book)

<sup>1</sup> Robert Carter (2014) *Evolution's Achilles Heels*, Creation Book Publishers, chapter 2

# Implication of DNA - We live in a word based universe!

Even down to the very information within every cell in our bodies

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”* John 1:1,2

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth....  
And God said, “Let there be light.””* Genesis 1:1,2

Before anything existed it was conceived in the mind of God. Mind is more fundamental than matter!  
God spoke and matter and energy came in to existence, as well as the realm of our minds!

When we find God's 'Signature in the cell', it encourages us that it is meaningful to seek out the God who made everything. We are more than just atoms and energy, physics and chemistry. The realm of personality, language and concepts are real because the God who is there made them too.

*“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* Jeremiah 29:13

*Mind is more fundamental than matter!*











# Some more big numbers from science

A typical cell in our bodies may contain 42 million proteins <sup>1</sup>

There are 30-40 trillion cells of 200 different types in our bodies <sup>2</sup>

We can estimate that approximately 400 billion synchronised chemical reactions per second occur in our bodies for us to be alive <sup>3</sup>

Yet, the information to make this possible is contained within our DNA.

The only explanation evolution has to offer for how this complexity arose is random chance plus time and we have just seen some of the severe practical limits to what is possible by random chance.

Whereas, to explain what we find we need to invoke information, a plan and intention, and as soon as there is a plan and intention you have design and a designer: in short God.

*“Intelligence is the most causally adequate explanation of the origin of the information necessary for life.”* Stephen Meyer, Signature in the Cell

*Science looked at dispassionately does not produce evidence that undermines faith*

<sup>1</sup> Alberts et al, *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition

<sup>2</sup> Bianconi et al, *An estimation of the number of cells in the human body*

<sup>3</sup> Isabel Moraes cited in *The Possibility of Belief* by Duncan Bayliss

## Example 2 – The Bible and history



Corinth

The Book of Acts is anchored in detailed history and eye witness testimony

# Secular people often claim that the Bible is totally unreliable and just made up stories

But the deeper you dig into Luke's writing, as an example, the better it gets

Luke uses the Greek method of synchronisms to give an accurate date  
He refers to a series of important historical figures to achieve this

*"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Phillip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanius tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came to John."* (Luke 3 vs 1)

*Luke was clearly confident of getting his facts straight!*

*This is real history anchored in real people and real places,  
from a credible source*



Jerusalem

Luke names so many places and puts them in the correct geographical order in the *Acts of the Apostles*, it is clear this is anchored in reality – real geography and real history

One study looked at Luke's references to 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands and found no mistakes.

(Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*, page 385)

Where Luke was present in what he is describing, we get a lot of detail such as in the shipwreck with Paul

Where he wasn't present but reporting his investigations, we get much less detail

*What is the reasonable conclusion? This is real history, plus Luke didn't make up what he didn't know!*

# Luke has been shown to be correct in many incidental details

Acts 19 vs 22 when Paul was in Corinth,  
Luke refers to Erastus (a Christian convert)

Paul later refers to an Erastus “who is the  
city’s Director of public works,” (Romans  
16 vs 23)

In 1929 an inscription was found dating  
from the mid First Century, stating,  
“Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid  
this pavement at his own expense.”

For more detail see C. Anderson and B. Edwards, *Evidence for  
the Bible*, page 166

*Luke wrote about real  
people who actually lived*



Erastus stone Corinth

*For people accustomed to thinking that religious faith is a leap away from evidence, the Bible seems so  
'unreligious', it is the actions of God in the lives of real people and real history*

# We can also explore evidence in all these areas that supports Christian belief as reasonable and credible

“The universe and all of reality around us points to a designer and an ultimate cause: God.

Random chance can explain nothing of our origins because it can create nothing.

We experience a moral dimension to our existence; all people everywhere do.

There is a moral law within us and there is a non-material reality of right and wrong that we all experience.

We have minds and we experience that non-material reality. Our own thought processes are proof to us that we are more than just physics and chemistry.

We have reliable versions of what was originally written in the books making up the Christian Bible and they are anchored in history.

Jesus existed as an historical figure.

Jesus was God embodying himself in human form.

Jesus’ death and physical resurrection proves his victory over death and makes his offer of life to us meaningful and believable.

Christian belief turns out to be true to all the evidence available to us and it offers in the life, teaching and resurrection of Jesus, real and lasting hope.”

# Some suggestions for the Adventist church in Europe

We need to build a process of **Adventists discovering pre-evangelism**  
e.g. understanding how we lay the foundation for people to be able to hear the truth (and to understand what truth is)

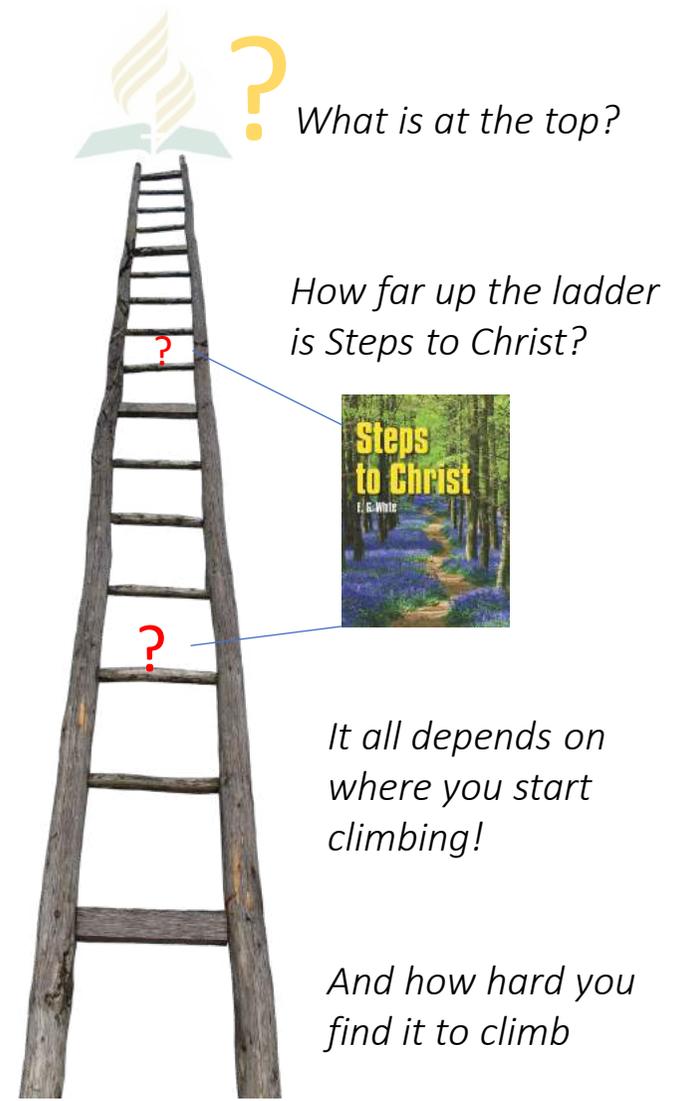
**We will need to approach communicating with European society as something like cross-cultural evangelism** as though we are starting for the first time – similar to Africa in 1800s to early 1900s

**We need to become more visible** to help people start a journey into faith in Jesus

**We need to re-model evangelism as beginning a life-long journey of discipleship**

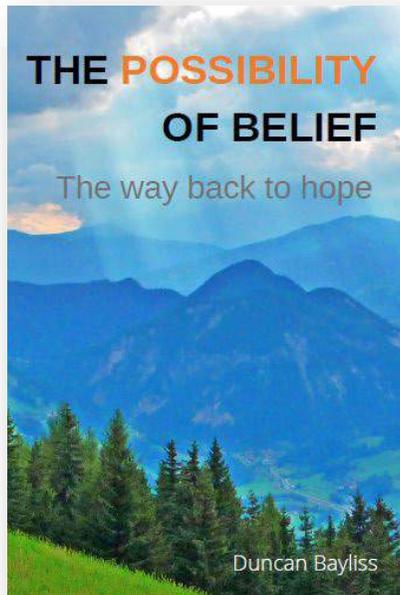
*There is not, nor can there be, one approach that works for all*

*There are no quick easy answers – this is long term engagement*



# What might be good to read, then share and discuss?

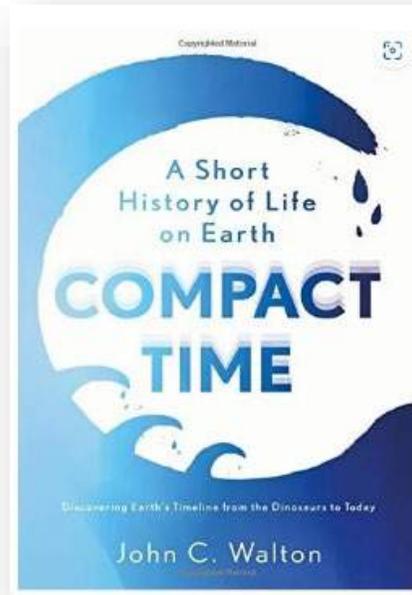
Some recent books by Adventists



*There is a reasonable basis for belief*

*Explore the journey from secularism to faith in Jesus*

<https://thepossibilityofbelief.org/>



*Science is compatible with the Bible*

*Science supports the flood and a young earth*

<https://www.johncwalton.com/>



*There are good reasons to investigate Christian belief and credible answers*

<http://searchseminars.org/>

# What might I watch and then share with others?

Some videos and resources by Adventists

The screenshot shows a YouTube video player interface. The main video area displays a woman looking up at a dramatic, cloudy sky with mountains in the background. The text 'The faith imperative' is overlaid on the video. The video title is 'BelievAble Talks - Episode 1 - The faith imperative'. In the top right corner, there are 'Watch later' and 'Share' buttons. A 'Watch on YouTube' button is visible in the bottom left of the video area. On the left side, there is a playlist titled 'BELIEVABLE TALKS' with 7 videos listed:

Episode	Title	Duration
EPISODE 1	The faith imperative	19:12
EPISODE 2	The truth about reality	17:52
EPISODE 3	The burden of peace	20:13
EPISODE 4	The mystery of origins. Part I: Cosm...	19:12
EPISODE 5	The mystery of origins. Part II: Theor...	35:46
EPISODE 6	The quest for certainty	28:33
EPISODE 7	The logic of possibility	27:19

At the bottom of the video player, there is a section titled 'IN THIS EPISODE:'.

*Believable Talks by Dan Serb, as broadcast on Hope TV*

<https://believabletalks.com/>

# Some more by Adventists to watch and share

LIFE-LONG LEARNER : VIDEOS

## The Grand Story

HOME » PASTORS » LIFE-LONG LEARNER » VIDEOS » THE GRAND STORY



### Living at the Crossroads

An exploration of the two competing stories about the universe...



### In the Beginning God

The theme of the creation story is the goodness of God. It reveals how God turned a chaotic mass into...



### The Crisis in Paradise

Why is the world the way it is? This is a story of seduction and deception that has catastrophic consequences...



### Surprised by Hope

Humans had fallen for the temptation to become masters of their own destiny, to define their own set...



## Videos

OTHER LANGUAGES



### Seeking Understanding

Scientists spend their lives studying nature, but what does this tell them about where everything came from? Does nature really appear to have made itself? Or does it look like a product of genius? Is...



### Design in the Galapagos Islands

What do giant tortoises, tree-sized daisies, marine lizards and inconspicuous finches have in common? All can be found on the Galapagos Islands and all exhibit the beauty of God's creation. At the same...



### Clash of Ideas

Is it true that our worldview influences the way we interpret data from the natural world? Is it also possible that observations from the natural world trigger revolutions in thinking? Exploring sites...

*The Grand story by Gunnar Pedersen  
A fresh look at the story God is telling in the Bible*

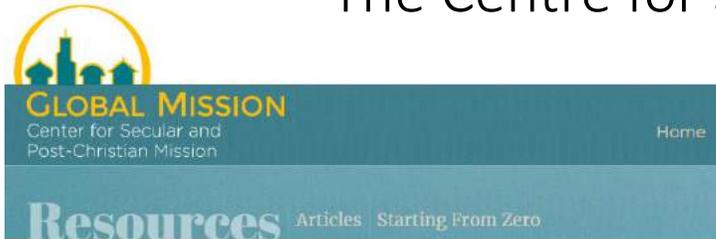
<https://ted.adventist.org/ministerial/pastors/life-long-learner/videos/the-grand-story/>

*Geoscience Research Institute videos on creation and evolution*

<https://www.grisda.org/>

# Where can I find out what other Adventists are doing?

## The Centre for Secular and Post-Modern Mission



### Starting From Zero

By: Samantha Angeles Peralta

In Puerta del Sol, Madrid, a small stone slab reads, "Origen de las Carreteras Radiales," or "Origin of the Radial Roads." This slab, which is most easily identified by the groups of tourists surrounding it, marks the geographical center of Spain, the "kilómetro cero" point from which the radial network of Spanish roads are traditionally measured.



However, for more than eighty young Spaniards, Puerta del Sol's Zero Kilometer represents not just the point from which Spain's distances are measured, but the starting point of their spiritual journeys. In 2016, Pastor Jonathán Contero, along with eight Adventist church members, planted Zero Church in Puerta del Sol with the intention of reaching people who would be "starting from zero" in their relationship with God—secular, postmodern and atheist Spaniards.

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The church plant started with the support of the Spanish Union of Seventh-day Adventists and is now partially funded by the General Conference through the Office of Adventist Mission and the Global Mission Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies (CSPS). Zero Church is Madrid's first postmodern-sensitive Adventist church, and is taking a new approach to ministry in order to reach their intended demographic.

### FEATURED VIDEOS

Check out these five high-impact presentations!

#### Danielle Pilgrim: Church Beyond Walls

Danielle discusses approaches to reaching Gen Z, particularly in the context of disadvantaged urban communities. She shares her church's shift in approach from holding "Purity Camps" to addressing the root causes of risky behaviors, and intentionally disrupting the cycle of pathology. The camp is now called "Purpose Youth Leadership Camp," and seeks to instill a sense of purpose, while also helping young people form their identity in Christ.



#### Edwin Vargas: New Wine in New Wineskins

In this energetic presentation, Pastor Edwin Vargas, considers how to plant churches where young adults lead and thrive. He shares 12 principles for planting, not a worship service, but a church!



<https://cspm.globalmissioncenters.org/>

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Front cover of *28 Fundamental Beliefs* page 19, 40, General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists

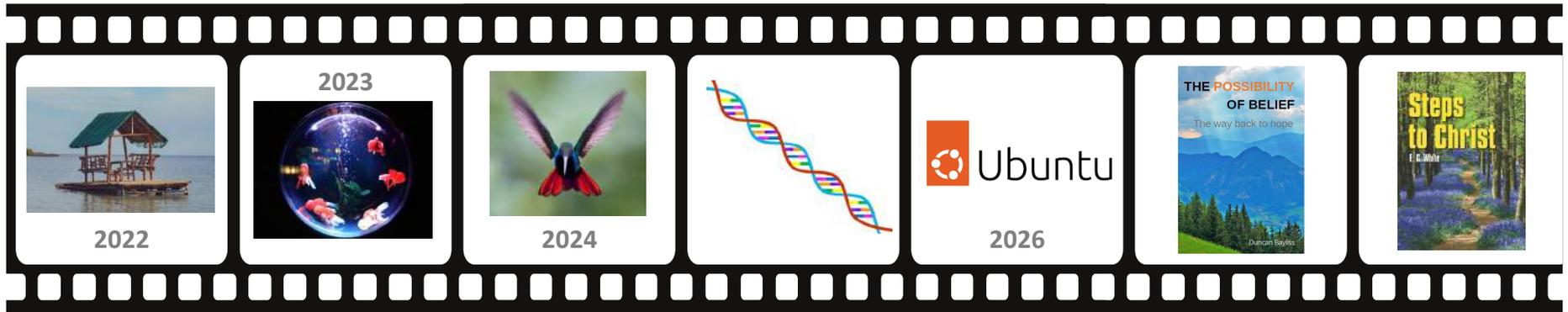
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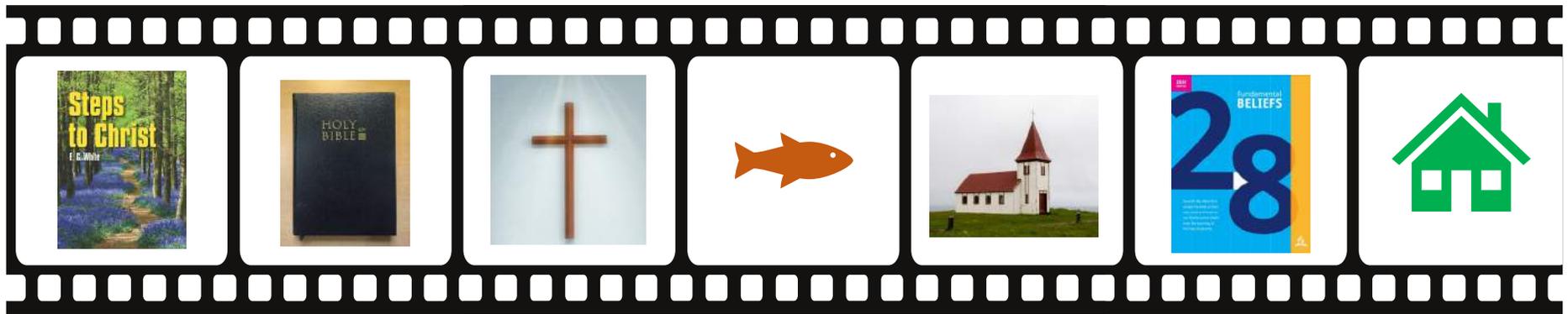
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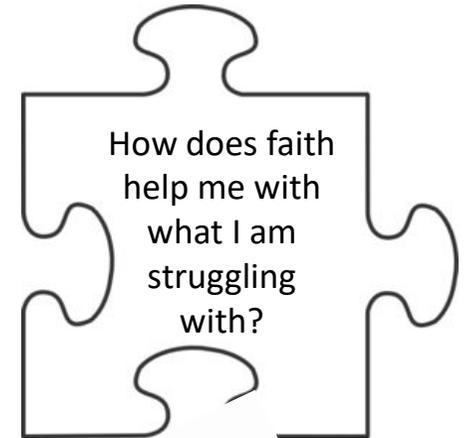
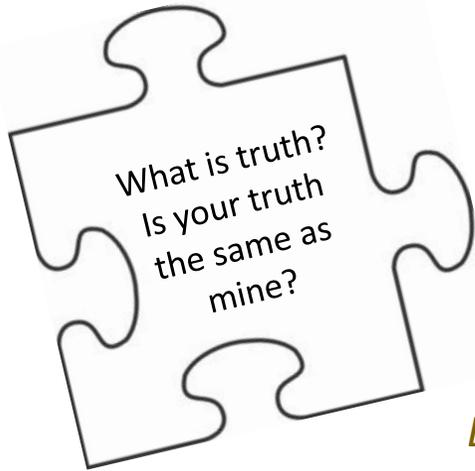


Every persons journey to faith is different, but Jesus is the destination

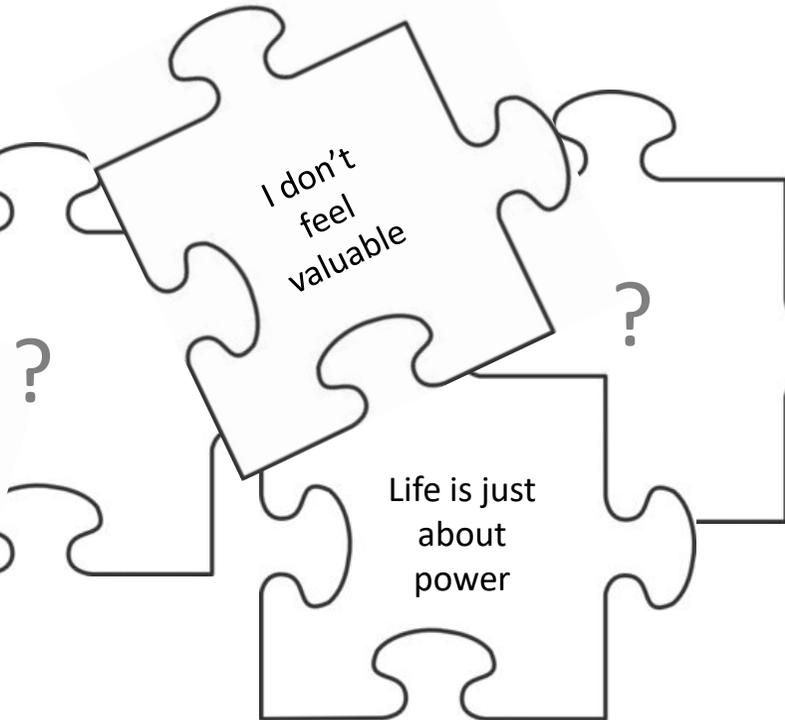


There is no set formula for reaching people, each person is an individual

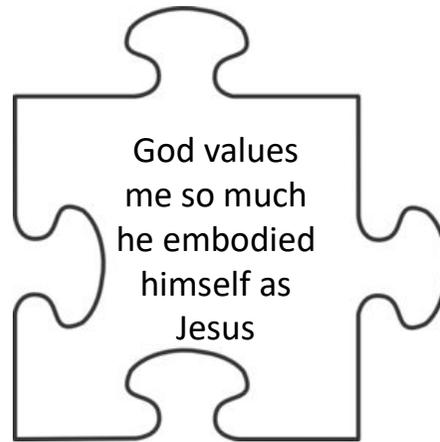
# Puzzling out faith in Jesus



*Bringing a confusing mix of questions and needs together into a coherent overall picture is difficult – Secularism offers no way to do this*



We need to help people find the frame of the puzzle  
With time they can see what are the most important pieces and where  
their life fits in with them



*The Truth gives  
you the pieces  
to build hope  
and meaning,  
and the frame  
that holds them*

