

Worldview Overview:

What is a Worldview?

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1.1 **What is a Worldview?**

Everyone has a worldview that directs the way they think about the World and their place in it. Every worldview is both a vision *of* and a vision *for* life and reality. For this reason it is important to understand what a worldview is and how it works.

Key Definition: Worldview.

A **way of seeing** the world that is developed from the **core commitment** (at heart level) to a **way of worship** that is guided by a set of **ideas** and **beliefs** (whether true or untrue), most often set in the form of a **Master Story**, which directs the way we understand **reality** and **live our lives together *with others***.

A Worldview is a way of seeing. We are all trying to make sense out of our life *experience*. A worldview is first a *view*—a way of trying to see the “big picture”, the “frame of reference” for life.

A Worldview is a core commitment. This first issue is very important to understand: *we think, feel and act the way we do because we have committed ourselves to a certain way of thinking, feeling and acting*. We are usually not even aware that we have made this commitment because it begins and is largely formed at an unconscious level. *Everyone lives out of a worldview even if they are not aware of what that worldview is*. For every human this commitment is first formed by the family and culture that we are born into; it is *given* to us.

This commitment is a *heart level* issue. The heart (spiritually speaking) is not just the place of your emotions as it has come to be understood in popular culture; *the heart is the very core of your soul, your entire being*. As Jesus taught, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). He also said, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

At this heart-level, we have already committed ourselves to a certain way of *belonging*. There is always a relational factor that shapes your worldview. This relational factor is defined by your “In Group” that we will discuss shortly. You can think of this commitment in terms of the questions, “Whose side am I on?” and “Who’s on my side?”

A Worldview gives shape to a way of worship. As David Foster Wallace observed, “There is no such thing as not worshipping. *Everybody worships*. The only choice we get is what to worship” (*This is Water*). Our lives are defined by what we consider most worthy to give our adoration and praise to. This reality has largely been suppressed in our times by the deceptive influences of secularism. But you don’t have to worship a “god”—in the traditional sense of that word—to worship. *We worship whatever it is that we love most.*

A Worldview begins as an act of belief, faith, trust. *Everyone lives their lives by faith.* Everyone, whether Saint or Scientist, is living his or her life by *trusting* in someone or something to give the answers to life’s questions. Whether it is believing in God, or just believing in yourself, we all live by a set of beliefs. Although your worldview is not *just* a belief system or a set of ideas, these are both essential parts of your worldview.

Another significant point to keep in mind here is that beliefs and ideas may be *true* or *untrue*. They may line up with reality or they may be out of touch with reality. Just because we believe something does not make it true. One of the most important things that we do in processing and evaluating our worldview is making sure that is lines up with reality.

A Worldview is given coherence by a Master Story. A Master Story is a “story of all things.” It answers our critical life questions: 1) Where did we come from? 2) Where are we heading? 3) Why are we here? and 4) How should we live? If you think about it for a minute, you will realize that you need a large narrative (a big story) in order to answer those questions. We simply do not live our lives by following a list of facts; we generally organize the facts and ideas about life into a Master Story that makes sense out of the large issues of life and all the details.

A Worldview is the way of processing and understanding reality. Ultimately your worldview helps you make sense out of life. It helps you understand and comprehend why things work the way they do. At the core of every worldview is the key question: “**What is really real?**”

A Worldview shapes our values and so the way we actually live. Even if we have never really thought *about* our worldview, we always think and act *with* and *because of* our worldview. Everyone has some definition of right and wrong, good and evil. This distinction is a product of our worldview. Jesus said, “You will know a tree by its fruit...” (Luke 6:44) meaning *the way a person acts reveals who they really are*. In a similar way, your *actual worldview* is revealed in your behavior.

What we really believe is also linked to what we really love. In fact, our desires, our passions and love in some way precede what we believe. *We believe what we want—or choose—to believe.* It is important to realize that *what we say we believe* can in some cases be in conflict with *what we do* in pursuing *what we really love*.

Our worldview is reinforced by our “In Group”—the people that we are most attached to and share a set of beliefs and values. As we develop this aspect of our worldview, we define both how we will live together with those we are closely connected and with those how are “outside” our closest circles of relationship and belonging.

What are the Common Elements of a Worldview?

All worldviews share a common set of components or categories. These categories are filled by the knowledge and understanding that each world view has developed to answer life's key questions. Along with each description, there are a few Key Questions to help us analyze our own worldview.

1.2.1 An Ultimate Source Of Truth That is Consistent with Reality.

“...the truth is in Jesus...” (Ephesians 4:21)

We all must deal with the question, “What is really real?” *Truth describes what we believe to be really real.* Everyone is submitting to some final or ultimate source that defines both reality and truth. This source becomes an Authority for knowledge and wisdom. The source answers our major life questions—The Big Questions of Life—and is the foundation of the Master Story.

In the Ancient world, this source was always a “god.” For Christians, this source of Truth is God the Father who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ His Son through the Holy Spirit in creation, in history and especially in the Bible.

In our modern world this source may be Science for some or the individual themselves. Whatever the case, everyone is *submitting* to someone or something that tells them what is really real, what is true.

KQ 01 What is Consciousness?

KQ 02 Is knowing possible?

KQ 03 How do I know what I think I know?

KQ 04 What is really real?

KQ 05 What is Truth?

KQ 06 Is there Transcendent Truth?

KQ 07 Is There A God (Gods, gods)?

KQ 08 What is the nature of the World (material, spiritual, etc.)?

1.2.2 A Master Story Which Makes Sense Of Life And Should Give Hope.

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1–2)

Life has a beginning, a middle, and an end; Life comes to us as a story. Every worldview is summarized in a Larger Story, a Master Story that seeks to fill out the basic answers to our Big Questions. This Story will define the **Setting**, the major **Characters** (the good

guys, the bad guys, the Hero/Savior, The Enemy/Villain), and **the Plot** (Beginning > Middle > End) that defines *the Story of Life on planet Earth* (Past > Present > Future).

This Larger Story produces a **Tradition** which produces the **Vision** and **Mission** of the people who believe and affirm this Master Story. The major worldviews have different answers to the Big Questions of Life. It is important to figure out which worldviews give the best answers.

In our time, some are living in The Story revealed in the Bible, some are living in the Story of Evolution, some are living in the Story of Self, some are living in the Story of Islam, etc. Everyone is living life directed by a Master Story that answers 1) *where we have come from* (**Origin**), 2) *where we are heading* (**Destiny**) and 3) *why we are here* (**Meaning & Purpose**) and 4) *how we should live* (**Ethics**).

KQ 09 Where has everything (the universe, life) come from (Origin)?

KQ 10 Where have we come from (Origin)?

KQ 11 Where is everything heading (Destiny)?

KQ 12 Is there any meaning in History?

KQ 13 What is the meaning of History?

KQ 14 What is the meaning or purpose of Life (Purpose)?

KQ 15 What happens to me at Death?

1.2.3 **Trusted Media Which Records And Transmits The Ideas And Images Of The Master Story.**

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the Sacred Writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14–15)

The Master Story is remembered, recorded and passed on to others through some form of media. For some this medium is a Sacred Text like the Bible or the Qu’ran. For some it is the scientific books and journals which record and spread the word about all the latest discoveries. For some it is *Vanity Fair* or *Cosmopolitan* or *Field and Stream*. In our times, Television and Internet are a powerful way that Worldview is spread. Whatever the case, *The trusted media always reinforces the Master Story and the Ultimate Source of Reality that it is submitting to.*

KQ 16 Who Should We Trust?

KQ 17 Where or to whom do I go to get my knowledge of the world?

KQ 18 What sources of knowledge do I trust to learn about the world?

1.2.4 **A “Priesthood” Which Is Honored, Respected And Trusted.**

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

“Priesthoods preside over the origins of a culture and guard its character.”
(Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*)

Every Worldview has a *small number of men and women* who are considered to be the *experts* or the *masters* of the system. This “Priesthood” exists to keep the “in-group” in order and to spread both the Master Story and the Values that lead the group to submit to the knowledge and wisdom of the Ultimate Source of Reality.

The Priests/Experts/Masters are “Cultural gate-keepers”—the group of experts that explain what is “in / acceptable” or “out / unacceptable” based on their deeper understanding of the ultimate source of truth revealed in the Master Story.

The “Priesthood” also interprets the Trusted Media for the group to help everyone understand and commit to the *core ideas* and *images* of the Worldview. This Priesthood is trusted because we all need help to figure out the difficult issues of life.

KQ 19 Who have been the most influential teachers in my life?

KQ 20 When I need help, who do I turn to first?

KQ 21 When I have a hard life choice, who do I turn to for advice?

KQ 22 Who do I trust most in helping me navigate life?

1.2.5 **A Set Of Values That Are Practically Lived Out.**

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.
(Galatians 5:22–23)

The three things above all work together to define what is True and what is Un-True (Lie) in the Worldview. These values define what is good and what is evil, what is ugly and what is beautiful, what is just and what is unjust, etc. This set of values is usually gathered together in some set of principles or laws that define the people of that worldview (A Code of Ethics that defines Morality). These Values are always worked out and spread through the retelling of the Master Story and all of the “smaller stories” that make up the Master Story.

For centuries, philosophers and theologians have recognized three “transcendentals” that orient our thinking about values and virtue. These are Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

Many times, the stated values of the group that holds a particular Worldview are not the practical, lived-out values of the group. An example would be someone who says that taking care of the poor is very important and the right thing to do, but never helps in taking care of the poor. Another would be someone who believes that praying is

important but never prays. Some would believe that lying is wrong and yet lie multiple times in a day. *What we actually do reveals our practical values.*

- KQ 23 What is Right?
- KQ 24 What is Wrong?
- KQ 25 What is True?
- KQ 26 What is Good?
- KQ 27 What is Beautiful/Glorious/Praiseworthy?
- KQ 28 What is a healthy outlook? (Hope)
- KQ 29 What is a healthy mindset? (Faith/Trust)
- KQ 30 What is a healthy posture? (Love)

1.2.6 **An “In-Group” Which Connects Those Of “Like-Mind.”**

“... so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another.” (Romans 12:5)

Every worldview, has an “in-group.” These are the men and women who are bound together by the first four issues that we have discussed. Those who do not adhere to the same answers are part of the “outside”—the “out-group.”

The “in group” are the members of a family, club, organization, or institution that gathers together to support and encourage one another as they navigate life together. In your real “in-group,” you usually feel the freedom to be who you really are without putting on a “mask” or pretending to be who you are not.

- KQ 31 Who is a “Good Person”?
- KQ 32 What is the “Good Life”?
- KQ 33 How Do You Live the “Good Life”?
- KQ 34 What is “Being” vs. “Doing”?
- KQ 35 Who Do I Belong With?
- KQ 36 How do we live with those with whom we are most closely connected?
- KQ 37 How do we live with those on the “outside”?

1.2.7 **A Way of Worship Which is Guided by Awe and Wonder.**

“Great you are, O Lord, and greatly to be praised... And man desires to praise you, for he is a part of your creation ... You have prompted him, that he should delight to praise you, for you have made us for yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you.” (Augustine, *Confessions*)

“...in the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshiping.
Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.”
(David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*)

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At it's most basic, every worldview is a way of worship. Worship is a choice of 1) what/who to make *centrally important in life*, 2) what/who to value most highly, 3) what/who is worthy of praise, adoration, etc., and 4) what to delight in, take greatest pleasure in.

As the “in-group” gathers and The Master Story is told and retold, *the source* or *Author* of that Master Story becomes the focus of more and more awe and wonder. Because we believe that our Worldview is worthy of our time, we will give our resources to support the spread of the Vision through the Mission of our “In-Group.” Ultimately, every Worldview believes that its source of Ultimate Reality should be honored by all and that it is worthy of praise and devotion.

KQ 38 What are the central habits of my life?

KQ 39 Who or what do I spend the most time thinking about?

KQ 40 Who or what do I consider most worthy of my time and effort?

KQ 41 Who or what do I talk to others about most?

KQ 42 Who are what makes my life meaningful and worth living?

KQ 43 Who or what creates the most joy in my life?

KQ 44 Who or what could I not live without?

1.3 **The Final Analysis: Evaluating a Worldview:**

The following questions help us evaluate a worldview to see if it is “livable”:

1. Is it comprehensive, large enough to explain life and answer the hard questions?
2. Does the Worldview make sense of the actual facts of reality?
3. Does the worldview make logical sense according to its own beliefs and commitments? or Is it internally coherent and consistent (at peace with itself)?
4. Does it encourage humility? Is it open to correction?
5. Could you actually live your life according to this worldview? or Does this Worldview provide a satisfying view of the world and your place in it?

1.4 **Some Suggested Resources:**

*Anderson, Tawa J., W. Michael Clark, David K. Naugle. 2017. *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World*. If you are only going to read one book on worldview, this is the one I would suggest.

*Anderson, James N. *What's Your Worldview?: An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions*. 2014. A book that is actually a "test" to figure out your real worldview.

Huffman, Douglas S. *Christian Contours: How a Biblical Worldview Shapes the Mind and Heart*. 2012. Deals with more spiritual issues of worldview.

Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. 2002.
This is a standard reference for worldview. However, it is a dense book that would only appeal to those who want to take the "deep dive."

*Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door*. 2020.
The standard for Christian worldview studies. Not only discusses the elements of worldview, but also explains 10 major worldviews and their differences.

Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*.
This book is a bit more "philosophical" but an excellent exploration of some key ideas related to worldview development and analysis. For those who want to "dig a little deeper."

Walsh, Brian J. and Richard J. Middleton. *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View*. 1984.

! The next books I recommend because Worldview is linked with character development and these are the two books that I consider to be absolutely essential reading on those topics.

Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ*. 2012. I can think of no other book outside of the Bible that has affected my spiritual growth more than this book.

Wilder, Jim. *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church That Transforms*. 2020. In many ways, this book completes the work Willard began in *Renovation of the Heart*.

Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. 2016.
Everything I have ever heard or read by Smith is well worth the time to interact with. This one is especially powerful.