

## Gunman Kills 26 and Wounds 20 at Small Texas Church

*The Wired Word for the Week of November 12, 2017*

### In the News

Last Sunday, during its 11:00 a.m. worship service, a Southern Baptist church in the rural town of Sutherland Springs, Texas, suffered the deadliest church shooting in U.S. history when a lone man walked in and sprayed the congregation with gunfire, firing about 450 rounds, killing 26 worshipers and wounding 20 others. Several of the dead were children.

The killer, a 26-year-old man, exited the church after the shooting. A neighbor, 55-year-old plumber Stephen Willeford, heard the shooting, grabbed his own rifle, confronted the murderer, and shot him, wounding him twice. The murderer dropped his rifle and fled in his vehicle.

Willeford flagged down a passerby in a vehicle, Johnnie Langendorff, and the two men followed in a high-speed chase, keeping in cell phone contact with the 911 dispatcher. The murderer lost control of his vehicle and crashed. Police found him dead with gunshot wounds, one of them self-inflicted. (Both Willeford and Langendorff have testified to their Christian faith when interviewed about their actions.)

According to some reports, the attacker may have been motivated in the shooting by some kind of domestic situation between himself and his in-laws who attended that church but were not present that day. One of the victims was his father-in-law's mother. Most of those killed and injured, however, had no known connection with him.

Pastors at other churches in the surrounding area, regardless of denomination, soon came to counsel and pray with people affected by the tragedy. Most of these pastors found that members of their own congregations were deeply affected as well, as many were acquainted with the victims.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and the Billy Graham Association also sent chaplains and response teams.

Sutherland Springs, a town with only one traffic light, has a population of fewer than 400. YouTube videos of the church's weekly service indicate that recent Sundays have drawn about 50 to 75 attendees, so the dead equal at least one-third of the usual attendance.

It happened that the church's pastor, Frank Pomeroy and his wife Sherri were away that day. The fill-in pastor was one of the first to be killed. The Pomeroy's daughter, Annabelle, 14, was there and was among those slain.

Sherri Pomeroy, read this statement to reporters on Monday: "Our church was not comprised of members or parishioners. We were a very close family. We ate together, we laughed together, we cried together, and we worshiped together. Now most of our church family is gone, our building is probably beyond repair. And the few of us that are left behind lost tragically yesterday. As senseless as this tragedy was, our sweet Belle would not have been able to deal with losing so much family yesterday."

The pastor added, "I don't understand, but I know my God does."

Mike Clements is pastor of a Baptist church in nearby Floresville. He told a reporter that the members of the Sutherland Springs church, "don't have a lot of money, but they are always willing to give. These people are merciful people. A lot of them will be forgiving with what happened."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Texas Shooting Kills 26 at Southern Baptist Church. \*Christianity Today\*](#)  
[Church Where Deadly Shooting Happened Was Center of Sutherland Springs Community. \*CBS\*](#)  
[Death Sweeps Across 3 Generations of a Single Family Gathered at Texas Church. \*The Washington Post\*](#)  
[Tragedy Comes to a Small Church in a Small Town. \*NPR\*](#)  
[The Particular Horror of Church Shootings. \*The Atlantic\*](#)  
['Worst Year Yet': The Top 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Be a Christian. \*Christianity Today\*](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

Violence in churches is not a new thing. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s mother was shot and killed as she played the organ at an evening service at his father's church 40 years ago, and sadly, violence and killings in churches can no longer be thought of as rare occurrences. According to church security expert Carl Chinn, the Texas tragedy is only the 14th mass murder at an American house of worship since 1963, but there have been more 1,500 deadly incidents at churches between January 1999 and August 2017. (Source: The first article in the links list above.)

Two thoughts occur to us immediately:

1. It's time for every congregation to think about the physical security of those who attend their programs and services. (See the For Further Discussion section.)
2. These incidents put us in a place to begin to understand what some Christians in parts of the world that are not friendly to Christianity are experiencing. (See the last article in the links list above.)

### **The Big Questions**

1. What did you think about and feel when you first heard about this church's tragedy? What other responses did you have, if any? Is there such a thing as a specific "Christian" response, and if so, what is it? If not, why not?
2. Did this attack seem more or less heinous, or neither one, because it occurred in a church? Explain your answer.
3. A pastor from a church near the Sutherland Springs church said that a lot of the people of the affected congregation will be "forgiving with what happened." Who has the "right" to forgive, and for whom is it not their place to do so? What other reactions besides forgiveness might be considered a Christian response?
4. Do persons who commit such monstrous acts as this shooter did forfeit their divine value as a human being God has created? Why or why not?
5. What do you suppose would happen at your church if you suddenly lost a third or more of your active members to a tragedy?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Psalm 84:10**

*... I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.* (For context, read 84:1-12.)

The psalmist was writing in praise of the temple as the "dwelling place of God," the location where divine worship took place. Apparently the psalmist was not able to be at worship in the temple as often as he would have liked, and so he longed for it, recognizing worship of the Lord there as the ultimate source of strength and joy. Such was the draw of this house of the living God that the psalmist said he would rather be there even in a position of service to the temple -- a doorkeeper -- than live in the self-serving way of the wicked.

The duty of the temple doorkeeper is described in 2 Kings 12:9 as "guarding the threshold" of the temple. Following the shooting last Sunday, some are suggesting that churches need to employ security staff or use armed church volunteers to literally guard the door of the church.

**Questions:** Ability to "provide security" does not appear in any of the New Testament lists of spiritual gifts that God places within various members for the good of the church. Should it be added? Why or why not? How might this practice affect the faith practices of a congregation, if at all?

### **Isaiah 11:9**

*They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* (For context, read 11:1-9.)

For ancient Judah, God's "holy mountain" was Zion, the hill upon which the temple sat. But here, the prophet Isaiah endows the term with a wider meaning, the dawning of a great new age when God's reign would be recognized by the whole world. Subsequently, Christians have taken this verse and the passage in which it occurs as a prophecy of the kingdom of God yet to come.

And "yet to come" are the crucial words here. In that kingdom, no security will be necessary because "they will not hurt or destroy" there. But that kingdom has not yet come, and thus, in the Lord's Prayer, we continue to pray for its advent: "Thy kingdom come."

**Questions:** Since we are still this side of the kingdom, how should we apply this verse to our churches? To our daily lives?

### **Matthew 10:28**

*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* (For context, read 10:1, 16-31.)

This verse is part of a passage where Jesus is preparing the Twelve to go out on a teaching and healing mission throughout Palestine. As part of their preparation, Jesus warns them about persecution they may encounter. Jesus assures them that those who, despite persecution, remain faithful to the end "will be saved" (v. 22). That is, though they may not be rescued from the persecution, their spiritual survival is guaranteed. That eventually leads to the comment in verse 28, that the disciples should not focus on temporal fears, but instead have an eye on eternity.

In the context of the text, Jesus' remarks are aimed at helping these disciples fulfill their mission of proclaiming the gospel. He did not want them to hesitate to speak out due to fear of bearing public witness. In essence, however, Jesus' comment is about preferring eternal security over temporal security when the two are in conflict.

In last Sunday's shooting, eight members of the extended Holcombe family died, in addition to an unborn baby a pregnant family member was carrying. All at once, Joe and Claryce Holcombe, who attend a Baptist church in another community, lost children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and a future great-grandchild.

"It's of course going to be difficult," Joe Holcombe said on learning of the terrible losses in his family. But, he said, "We are Christians, we have read the book. We know the ending, and it's good."

"They're in heaven," he added. "And they're a lot better off than we are."

**Questions:** In what ways do Jesus' remarks to his disciples speak to our fears about earthbound threats? Does knowing the outcome of the Christian story and about eternal life provide any real comfort when in the midst of grief? How do we know? How do our concerns for security in this life mesh with our Christian belief in eternal security?

Discuss these words of Pastor Hans Fiene on this tragedy: "When we pray these words ['deliver us from evil'], we are certainly praying that God would deliver us from evil temporally -- that is, in this earthly life. Through these words, we are asking God to send his holy angels to guard us from those who would seek to destroy us with knives and bombs and bullets. It may seem, on the surface, that God was refusing to give such protection to his Texan children. But we are also praying that God would deliver us from evil eternally. Through these same words, we are asking God to deliver us out of this evil world and into his heavenly glory, where no violence, persecution, cruelty or hatred will ever afflict us again."

### **Habakkuk 3:17-19**

*Though the fig tree does not blossom,  
and no fruit is on the vines;  
though the produce of the olive fails,  
and the fields yield no food;  
though the flock is cut off from the fold,  
and there is no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will exult in the God of my salvation.  
God, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
and makes me tread upon the heights. (No context needed.)*

The prophet Habakkuk had lots of questions about why God allowed unjust suffering and evil in the world, and he confronted God with them. God responded, not so much with answers as by providing the prophet with renewed vision and the promise that the righteous will live by confidence in God's trustworthiness. The outcome of the renewed vision is the prophet's readiness to wait in hope for the day of divine deliverance.

The verses above are the last words in the book and are from Habakkuk. He declares that no matter what happens, he will rejoice in the Lord, who is his strength.

**Questions:** In what ways do you can identify with Habakkuk's questions of God? Are there any ways in which you identify with the prophet's words above?

### **James 5:13-16**

*Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one*

*another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.* (For context, read 5:13-18.)

This text reminds us of the power of a faith community to help its members when they are suffering. A timely article titled ["Faith Helps Mass Shooting Survivors"](#) reminds us of this truth. Here are a few quotes from the article:

... recent research around mass shootings indicates that people of faith, particularly those who receive support from their churches and religious communities, fare better in their recovery.

"Finding comfort in one's faith and faith community is particularly important to helping mass shooting survivors hold onto hope amidst such horrible tragedies," said Jamie Aten, executive director of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) at Wheaton College. "Now is the time for First Baptist Church and surrounding churches to gather, pray, and lament in community." ...

After a mass shooting, people who felt supported by their religious communities ultimately experienced fewer symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and their faith didn't suffer as much.

...

But researchers found that after a mass shooting, similar to what studies show in the wake of natural disasters, "religious support buffers the deleterious relationship between resource loss and negative outcomes."

That means, even when the suffering is greater, survivors with high levels of support from their faith communities don't show the level of worsening symptoms experienced by people without such community.

**Questions:** Are you surprised that faith communities have this kind of power? Why or why not?

What might your church, regardless of its distance from Sutherland Springs, do this week for those suffering this great loss there?

### For Further Discussion

1. Read and discuss together the article ["Worst Year Yet": The Top 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Be a Christian](#) from *Christianity Today*. Does it add any perspective to the terrible act at Sutherland Springs? Why or why not?
2. What practices might assist Christians in developing a spirit of forgiveness? In other words, how can we be spiritually prepared to respond to difficult occurrences in our lives? Can one ever truly be prepared for such an event as what happened in Sutherland Springs last week?
3. If you wish to talk about gun ownership in the United States, you may find useful information [here](#).
4. One of the memorable acts following the Nickels Mine School shooting in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, over 10 years ago where eight young Amish girls were killed was the families of the victims forgiving the shooter and reaching out and consoling the family of the shooter. Do you think that if you were in that position you would be able to forgive the shooter and console the family of the one that took so much of your community away? What does the act of forgiving do for the families and friends of the victims?
5. In a [video interview](#), Willeford, the plumber who shot the murderer, spoke of his love for his community and his friends who were members of the congregation as the main motivating force in his response. He was an ordinary citizen, neither former military nor law enforcement, although he at one time had been a National Rifle Association instructor. He grabbed his rifle and ammunition and ran out of his house without taking time to put on shoes, knowing that his neighbors were being attacked and every second counted. He credits the Holy Spirit with moving him to notice a vulnerability in the murderer's protective armor, allowing his fire to be effective. The murderer fled, made no other stops, and, after crashing his vehicle, committed suicide.

Although many Christians today have trouble seeing God as aiding his people with violence, the Bible records this as happening more than once. Abraham, Deborah, Gideon, David: These are some of the names where God supported his people in violent warfare. Yet we are also told to "turn the other cheek" and that "blessed are the peacemakers." All this seems to indicate that things are more complex and muddled than we would like, rather than the simple and clear rules we often seek. No wonder that different Christian traditions respond in different ways and with different emphases!

Discuss your own and your denomination's views on these matters. Do you emphasize one side or the other, or strive for a middle ground, or something else? Discuss the influence your own culture has on the matter, and how different cultures might come to different conclusions.

6. Is there any balance between awareness of evils and trust in God for protection?

### **Responding to the News**

A current denominational slogan is "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." As we come to terms with the realities of church services being seen as "soft targets" by individuals with violent intentions, we may wonder whether "open doors" is a good policy. In any case, this is a good time to review your church's security arrangements. Here are some views:

TWW team member John Coulson said, "I heard in a podcast yesterday by someone who happens to be an Orthodox Jew in Los Angeles that his synagogue, because of threats, has had security guards on site for years. It opened my eyes to the reality that those who are Jewish have had to deal with for years. Should Christian churches adopt the practice of using security guards? Is it a good use of a church's resources to hire guards so that we feel safe and secure?"

TWW team consultant James Gruetzner (a federal firearms licensee and NRA instructor) writes: Coincidentally, our congregation's lay ministers ("elders") reiterated a few weeks ago our policy that any member holding a state concealed handgun license (i.e., having been certified by the state as proficient in handgun use and knowledgeable on the legalities involved) would be considered to be part of the elective security of our campus. He estimates that this runs to perhaps three to six armed members average on Sundays, and about half that during the school week. Gruetzner says, "We don't make a big deal of it -- we're talking about low-likelihood/high-consequence situations -- but the response from members and school parents who have learned of the policy has been uniformly positive.

We are fairly comfortable with this procedure for a congregation of our size. Other congregations may require different measures: We have seen the security plan for a mega-church in town, and their documentation is much more elaborate, including a chart on the use of force in various situations.

See also the article ["A Community Rebounds, Copes After Targeted Murders, Saying No to Hate."](#) by TWW team member Bill Tammeus.

### **Prayer**

O God, we ask that your comfort be given in abundance to the families of those killed by last Sunday's gunman. We pray for the recovery of those wounded in the incidents. We thank you for the courage of those who helped to stop the killer. We pray for the safety of all places of worship, but we also ask that you help us as congregations of believers to never let our fear of potential danger deter us from doing your will, sharing our faith, helping those who are oppressed or in need and loving our neighbor. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Other News This Week**

## **Why in the World Does the World Exist?**

## In the News

From the beginning of human existence, people have wondered how the creation came about, who the Creator is and why the creation exists at all. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures offer creation stories that seek to answer some of those questions. What they don't offer, however, is an explanation of the scientific details that could help explain what happened at the moment of creation, whether that was what's now called the Big Bang or something else.

For some inexplicable reason our universe, the new CERN study says, did not destroy itself the second it came into existence, even though that's what currently most accepted cosmological theory says should have happened. Why would it have self-destructed? Because there were equal amounts of matter and antimatter, and when that happens they annihilate one another. (The widely accepted concept of antimatter is based on the work of a 20th-century British physicist, the Nobel Prize-winning Paul Dirac. He asserted that for every particle there exists a corresponding antiparticle, exactly matching the particle but with an opposite charge.) Since Dirac's work, antiparticles have been created and examined experimentally.

The problem is that when scientists look carefully at the creation, all they see is symmetry, not an asymmetry that could explain why the universe is still around because the asymmetry would have prevented immediate annihilation. They have tried lots of different asymmetry possibilities about matter and antimatter. Maybe they have different mass or something else. But so far, they've found no difference that could explain why the universe is here.

"All of our observations find a complete symmetry between matter and antimatter, which is why the universe should not actually exist," explained Christian Smorra, the author of the new CERN study. "An asymmetry must exist here somewhere but we simply do not understand where the difference is. What is the source of the symmetry break?"

This is far from the only mystery about creation or about the universe in general. For instance, why, as current observations appear to indicate, is the universe expanding at an accelerating rate, meaning that one day the whole cosmos will be an amazingly spread-out cold wasteland, assuming that continues? Why is the universe full of so much dark matter and dark energy?

According to the currently most accepted theory, normal matter -- that is, everything we can see -- makes up just 5 percent of the universe. Most of the universe -- about 68 percent -- is dark energy, which is that unseen force thought to be driving the expansion of the universe. And the rest, about 27 percent, is dark matter. Dark matter does not absorb, reflect or emit light. Dark matter and dark energy theories were developed as possible explanations for the nature of the movement of galaxies.

Using theories of dark matter, dark energy and other concepts, cosmologists seek to form a coherent mathematical model of the development of the physical universe.

Religion, though interested in how all of this will play out, has different interests. It cares much less about the scientific details of creation and much more about creation's purpose for being at all and about how people are to treat it and treat each other in light of what faith tells us about the creator.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Universe Shouldn't Exist, Scientists Say After Finding Bizarre Behaviour of Anti-Matter.](#) *The Independent*  
[Our Universe Should Not Exist, CERN Antimatter Study Confirms.](#) *National Post*  
[A Parts-Per-Billion Measurement of the Antiproton Magnetic Moment.](#) *Nature* (The CERN study itself)  
[CERN's description of antimatter](#)



## The Big Questions

1. What difference does it make to you that scientists so far have been unable to figure out why the universe exists at all? Is that "why" question even part of science? Does the lack of an answer to that "why" question challenge your faith in some way?
2. If scientists eventually find some small asymmetry between matter and antimatter that could explain why the cosmos didn't annihilate itself in the beginning, would the surprising elegance of that tiny difference say something to you about God as creator? If so, what? Or do you not think at all about the ways in which God may have used -- indeed, may still use -- the technicalities of science in the process of creation?
3. If we say that God was responsible for creation, do we think that God's initial choices somehow limited God's future choices similar to the way that when we make such choices about building a house it means that we have foreclosed other possibilities? For instance, if we create a foundation of a certain size, it means we cannot build a home three times the size that such a foundation can sustain. Does the idea of a self-limiting God conflict with your theology? How?
4. Sir Arthur C. Clarke, British science fiction writer, science writer and futurist, inventor, undersea explorer and television series host, once said, "The universe is not only stranger than we imagine. It's stranger than we can imagine." What things about the universe do you find strange, and which of them nonetheless tends to increase your faith in a loving, creative God?
5. Author Annie Dillard, who has written a lot about nature, once wrote that the "Creator simply loves pizzazz" as her explanation for the wonderful complexity and mysteries of the cosmos. Is that a good enough explanation for you or do you need something more formal?

## Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### Genesis 1:1-5

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (For context, read Genesis 1:1--2:25.)*

There are two creation accounts in the first two chapters of Genesis, each with a different emphasis. Sometimes it can be enlightening to read those stories in several different translations.

**Questions:** How do the creation accounts in Genesis match up and how are they different? What, if anything, can we learn about why the creation exists at all from reading these two accounts? Are the accounts meant to tell us anything about science or are they more designed to tell us something about God and our relationship to God?

### John 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has*



*come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (For context, read John 1:1-18.)

This prologue to the gospel of John sometimes is considered a Christian creation story or the third of the gospels' birth narratives, the other two being found in Matthew and Luke. One of the obvious parallels to the Genesis 1 creation story is God's reliance on some kind of word (or Word) for creation. In Genesis God speaks the world into existence. In John, the Word itself (or himself) is the instrument of creation. Christianity identifies the Word (or *Logos*, in Greek) mentioned in John 1 with Jesus Christ. And this passage seems to say that the Word was the creator. And yet a standard description of the Holy Trinity -- in addition to Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer (or Sanctifier).

**Questions:** When we use the latter three words for the Trinity, are we backing away from or even denying what John says, which is that "all things came into being through him (the Word)", which is a reference to the "Redeemer" in that formulation of the Trinity? How does this passage from John complicate or clarify your thinking about the Trinity?

### **Psalm 8:3-4**

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?* (For context, read Psalm 8:1-9.)

Whether we can explain scientifically why the universe exists, we do know that the human religious impulse almost always finds its roots in awe and wonder, which this psalm expresses with soaring Hebrew poetry.

**Questions:** Does the inevitable feeling of smallness people sense when they gaze at the stars seem out of synch with the Christian teaching that God loves and cares for each one of us individually, indeed that we are precious children of God? Can we at once seem insignificant to ourselves and yet precious in God's sight?

### **Romans 8:22-23**

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.* (For context, read Romans 8:18-39.)

The apostle Paul here takes a long-term view of not just the creation but also the creative process, which can require painful effort and patience as the divine plan works itself out for the whole of creation, including humanity.

**Questions:** In what ways do you experience the creation groaning in labor pains? What is being birthed? What does it mean to "have the first fruits of the Spirit?" (The New Living Translation puts it this way in verse 23: "... even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory.") Can you begin to construct the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body from these verses in Romans?

### **John 10:10**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (For context, read John 10:1-18.)

Jesus offered several explanations of not only his mission but also the purpose of life itself. Here he says it is so that people may live abundant lives, which means not lives of wealth and privilege but lives full of joy and purpose.

**Questions:** In one of his books on systematic theology, the late Lutheran theologian Robert W. Jenson quoted Martin Luther this way: "God created us just in order to redeem us ...." Does that way of putting it make sense to you? Do Luther's words imply that God knew at the time of the creation that we would need redemption even though Genesis tells us that at the end of the sixth day God saw that "it was very good" ("it" included humanity)? Why would something "very good" need redemption?

### For Further Discussion

1. Peter Mayer's devotional song "Everything Is Holy Now" includes these words: "*Wine from water is not so small/but an even better magic trick/is that anything is here at all.*" Do you know of other examples from popular culture or the arts that raise the question of why the universe exists at all? Is that also what the song, "What's It All About, Alfie?" is asking?

2. Discuss this statement about the matter-antimatter story from TWW team member Frank Ramirez: "At the core we're dealing with a mystery. The universe exists. We perceive it. If God created the universe, there's a great mystery beyond everything we perceive. If there is no God, there is the great mystery of existence in the first place." And this from TWW team member John Coulson: "One of my favorite pastimes is visiting the national parks and marveling at the wonder of God's creation. I am always amazed that something that may have started out as a single 'spark' could develop into something as complex and wonderful as life and all of creation. The more I see, the more I have trouble conceiving how it could be a random occurrence and not the hand of God. Do the mysteries and complexities of the universe help or hinder your understanding of God and creation?"

3. The terms "creationist" and "creationism" have come to refer to people who believe in a quite literal view of the Genesis creation stories. There's even a Creation Museum in Kentucky (see <https://creationmuseum.org/>) that promotes this view, which it calls "creation science." Have you explored that view? What of it do you accept and what do you reject. And why?

4. Are you familiar with creation stories from other religious and philosophical traditions? Which of them, if any, do you find intriguing and which do you think are obviously just myths based on no science at all?

5. Discuss this observation from TWW team consultant James Gruetzner: "I'm a scientist, a physicist. I find it disconcerting when people make statements such as 'science says' or 'scientists say,' as if science provided some sort of ground truth instead of a system of explanations and predictions -- models of the physical world. Sadly, even many of us scientists often speak like that, and too often believe our own words. The reality is that science is never settled, but always subject to modifications, refinements and even totally different theories when the facts lead that way. Humility and a willingness to modify one's theories in the face of new data is perhaps one of the most desired attributes of a scientist. That's not always easy. And, of course, in the messiness and variability of the physical world, the precision and knowledge of the data themselves is often an issue."

6. Read God's response to Job, starting in Job 38 and see how you might respond to the questions about the creation that God asks Job.

7. Finally, just for fun: Discuss this famous story about William James (sometimes it's said to be about Bertrand Russell) that can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turtles\\_all\\_the\\_way\\_down](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turtles_all_the_way_down):

After a lecture on cosmology and the structure of the solar system, William James was accosted by a little old lady. "Your theory that the sun is the center of the solar system, and the earth is a ball which rotates around it has a very convincing ring to it, Mr. James, but it's wrong. I've got a better theory," she said.

"And what is that, madam?" inquired James.

"That we live on a crust of earth which is on the back of a giant turtle."

Not wishing to demolish this theory by bringing to bear the masses of scientific evidence he had at his command, James decided to gently dissuade his opponent by making her see some of the inadequacies of her position.

"If your theory is correct, madam," he asked, "what does this turtle stand on?"

"You're a very clever man, Mr. James, and that's a very good question," replied the lady, "but I have an answer to it. And it is this: The first turtle stands on the back of a second, far larger, turtle, who stands directly under him."

"But what does this second turtle stand on?" persisted James patiently.

To this the little old lady crowed triumphantly. "It's no use, Mr. James. It's turtles all the way down."

### **Responding to the News**

How can you honor and help protect the creation? Make a list and share it with friends. Read Brian Greene's books, *The Elegant Universe* and/or *The Hidden Reality*.

### **Prayer**

God of all creation, forgive us when we spend so much time questioning how we got here instead of listening to you tell us why we are here. We're grateful for the gift of curiosity, but would ask that you also would help us move through our many questions and find ways to live so that as Christ transforms us we may help transform the world. Redeem us, Lord, and help us point others to your saving love, for it's in Christ's holy name that we pray. Amen.