

Science & Faith at the Crossroads of Creation: Four Views Examined

September 24, 2006©, by Ken Wilson

Jim Collins the business writer, in Good to Great, talks about the hedgehog concept. The hedgehog is not the best speedster when chased or the best fighter when attacked, but it is the best at protecting itself when caught, rolling into a ball so the attacker can't reach any vital organs. So when a hedgehog is in trouble it knows what to do--what it does best. Collins says every organization needs to know what it can do best, and the really good ones are the ones that can do one thing better than anyone. It got me thinking, within the Vineyard as a whole (there are about 600 Vineyard churches in the United States) what do we do best? I asked Dave Workman, the pastor of one of the best Vineyard churches I know in Cincinnati what he thought our "hedgehog" concept was. Without hesitation Dave replied, "We make things doable for people!"

In the 1980's when Vineyard began as a movement, it appealed to people not drawn to traditional churches because we made church doable. You didn't have to dress up or know much lingo for Vineyard to work for you. The style of worship music was accessible, with words projected on a screen for easy use. Healing prayer, which had been the province of only a few, and often those with great theatrical talents, was broken down into doable steps, so anyone with a little nerve could give it a try, at least. Same thing for serving the poor. People used to think it takes social work expertise to help the poor, but Vineyard churches brought effective, local church based ministries down the people--and I don't just mean the people in need, but to ordinary people who had a heart to serve the poor but didn't know how. I'd guess that in any given month, at least 15-20% of our average adult weekend attendees serve in one of our compassion ministries on monthly basis. We make things doable for people.

We're not done making things doable for people either. When I stumbled into the ancient discipline of prayer at intervals through the day (a.k.a. "fixed hour prayer") my first instinct was, "how can we make this doable for people?" Since then, I'm convinced there are many practices once reserved for the monasteries that convey a deep connection with God, that we could all profit from. It's time to make what used to be called "mysticism" doable for people.

This series on science and faith is about making Christianity doable for many who find it undoable because they think that in order to follow Jesus you have to bristle at the word "evolution" or be very suspicious of mainstream science. We're not on a head trip tackling this topic, we're just doing our hedgehog thing, making it doable for those people who identify with the story of science as their own story.

Though I think we've been a pretty friendly place to people who love science, we're still in ground breaking mode on this one, because the tribe we're associated with, the evangelical tribe, has done such a poor job at making Christianity doable for people who love or identify with science. Many years ago, we were in ground breaking mode for other things. I can remember when our Sunday morning worship dress code was men in suits, women in skirts (or at least nice slacks.) When we moved the church to Milan, though, I learned that many in that community didn't attend church simply because they didn't have the church wardrobe. So I encouraged people to dress down. A few did. But still we didn't draw those people. Then it dawned on me: this ain't going to change until I dress down, and I have to be the most dressed down. I've since learned that the leader has to lean the most toward the outsider or the church becomes an insider's club. So I put on my Sunday best blue jeans and tees. This, understandably, led to some objections: "Where's the reverence in that? Is this the way to respect the dignity of the pulpit? For years I told our kids that blue jeans were off base for worship because we want to show respect for God at church. Now you're wearing blue

jeans! Can't you at least put on a pair of Dockers and a collar shirt?" The concerns came from good people with biblically informed values. A few years earlier, I might well have been among them.

Today, I know for a fact that there are many people who are friends with God who wouldn't have been if we hadn't changed the culture of the church to make people without a church wardrobe feel comfortable. When I left Milan behind to come to the Vineyard here in Ann Arbor, I was secretly hoping people would tell me how much they appreciated my preaching or my great pastoral wisdom, but the most common comment went something like this: "Ken, I'd like to thank you for something. When I first came to church, I saw you up there with blue jeans and a tee shirt, and I knew that this was a place I could be myself."

All this to say: making church doable for people who identify with mainstream science is God's work and our hedgehog task.

Today we will review the four most common views Christians take on science, faith and the creation texts in Genesis. I'll give my candid assessment of each.

We've already considered how each of the four views agrees or disagrees with mainstream science. Today we will consider the underlying assumptions of each. Assumptions determine positions; but often assumptions go unexamined. Until you decide what you think about the assumptions of each, your head will spin as you hear the various views.

The two most important assumptions to consider, in my view, are these:

1. What is the nature of these biblical texts? Are they literal accounts designed to be read as scientifically accurate? Are they something else: allegory, epic poetry, truth-bearing story?
2. What is the nature of science? In particular, is the lens of science designed to detect God's action, presence, and involvement in the world?

I said it before, but in case you missed it: I hope when we're finished with this series, you won't feel the slightest obligation to agree with my particular leanings on how science and faith intersect. I do hope you'll love Jesus more, have a deeper appreciation for his book, and a wider love for the world he loves; so that together, we'll be more useful to Jesus in his passionate pursuit of the world his father made and holds in being still.

Right, then. Let's dig in. Most of us, if we have a view, just inherit it. We don't take time to explore science; we don't examine the assumptions behind the Christian views of how science and faith intersect when it comes to the creation texts of the Bible. Instead we tend to simply absorb our perspective from circles we swim in. Today, I'd like us to broaden our horizons a bit by looking at all four of the views at the level of assumptions.

Young Earth View

The Young Earth view, you recall, says that Genesis 1 is a literal account of creation in six, twenty-four hour days. Each species was separately created in one of those six days. No new species have emerged since then, and certainly not by any evolutionary process, which is strictly disallowed. The age of the earth in this view is six to ten thousand years old (rather than five billion years old.)

A major Young Earth writer says explicitly: "The Bible is a textbook of science." (Dr. Henry Morris.) Young Earth advocates something called "creation science," an alternate science to give explanations

for the Young Earth view. It tackles issues like how plants might have appeared on Day three of creation, before the sun was created on Day four. Or why it is that we see some stars millions of light-years away....how could this be if we are in a young universe?

The following quote is from an Young Earth view book, speaking to this latter question: "Despite all the biblical and scientific [evidence for a young earth/universe](#), this has long been a problem [the stars in the sky today whose light took a much longer time to arrive]. However, any scientific understanding of origins will always have opportunities for research—problems that need to be solved. We can never have complete knowledge and so there will always be things to learn. ([How can we see distant stars in a young universe?](#) by Don Batten, editor, Ken Ham, Jonathan Sarfati, and Carl Wieland)

It's clear from this quote that the Young Earth view sees this as a question of science, not simply biblical interpretation.

As you might expect, since the Young Earth view assumes the creation texts of the Bible are scientific, it also assumes that science, when executed properly, can detect God's action in the world.

It's important to realize that in a 2004 Gallup Poll, 45% of Americans held the Young Earth view. If you have heard the issue of science and faith addressed systematically in a church setting, it's likely been in a "creation science" seminar promoting the Young Earth view.

Here's what I like about the Young Earth position. It's a sincere attempt to take the Bible seriously. Anyone in this "latest is greatest" culture who desires to take the ancient text of the Bible seriously has my respect and admiration. The Young Earth view addresses the question of how the Bible fits with science seriously, and that is something else that gets my respect. Finally, the Young Earth view is willing to swim against the mainstream (though in the "red states" it is mainstream) and there are times when we must swim against mainstream in order to be faithful to Jesus.

Now for my concerns. First, I think the Young Earth view gives science too great a place, by assuming that every way of telling the truth has to be scientifically accurate. Secondly, though I am not a scientist, I have a love for science and studied science on my way to a bachelor in science degree (nursing) and I must say that I simply don't find the scientific explanation of "creation science" to be convincing. It seems to often to start with the answers rather than arriving at the answers, wherever the evidence leads.

But those are minor concerns. My real concern with this view is with those who write the Young Earth books and host the Young Earth websites, who seem to me to invariably insist that this view is the only way to be faithful to God and his book. It's hard to find a major proponent of the view who is willing to admit that it's a "debatable issue." The effect of this is spiritually dangerous. It becomes a considerable stumbling block for many who would otherwise be open to the gospel. I'm very pleased that the people I know who lean toward or are convinced by the Young Earth view, don't do so dogmatically. (They put up with me, very graciously, as a matter of fact!)

Because this view is so influential, and it's major advocates hold it so dogmatically however, I want to press my point just a little. Dr. Henry Morris (quoted earlier) has this to say: "There's another very important factor to keep in mind. As Christians, we out to be more concerned with winning souls for eternity than getting a hearing in the public forum. And even more important than winning souls for Christ is unreservedly honoring God's word, forever "settled in heaven" (Ps.119:89) Henry Morris Institute of Creation Research.

I couldn't agree more that we should be more concerned with winning souls than getting a hearing in the public forum. But Dr. Morris' second statement bears a closer look. "Unreservedly honoring God's word" in context, means "adopting the Young Earth view" and this, he says, is more important than winning souls for Christ? I beg to differ. This is an indication of a tendency in fundamentalism-- a very conservative form of Christian faith, to treat the Bible, almost, if not as, an end in itself. Jesus specifically warned against treating the Bible as an end in itself: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (Jn. 5: 39-40)]

The Bible bears witness to Christ so that people may be drawn to him. That is the point of the Bible! The Bible is a means to the end of connecting lost humanity with the seeking God. When our attempts to honor God's word keep many from finding Christ, we should wonder whether or not we're on the right track and not simply take rejection of the gospel as confirmation of our faithfulness.

Old Earth View

The Old Earth view says the earth could be as old as mainstream science says because the six days of creation are not literal twenty-four hour days, but six eras of great length. Otherwise, the assumptions are the same as the Young Earth view, as far as I can tell: that the creation texts are intended to be read as scientifically accurate and that science is able to detect God's action in the world.

What I like about this view may be obvious: it doesn't require people to believe the earth is six to ten thousand years old.

My concern with the Old Earth view is this: The Genesis creation text says "and it was morning and evening, the first day." The story is about six, twenty four hour days.

Intelligent Design Theory (ID) View

"Intelligent Design" (I use quotes to indicate a particular view) strictly speaking, is not a Christian view, according to ID experts. But it's confusing, because most who advocate it are Christians including those who hold Young Earth and Old Earth views. (Especially in the public debate about teaching evolution in schools, the Intelligent Design perspective is often advocated by those who are much more suspicious of evolution than ID theory, itself, is.)

To make sure we understand this important new perspective, I quote directly from one of the primary Intelligent Design view websites, maintained by the Discovery Institute. (in italics below)

1. What is the theory of intelligent design? The scientific theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause [not an undirected process such as natural selection. Note: Intelligent design theory does NOT claim that science can determine the identity of the intelligent cause. Nor does it claim that the intelligent cause must be a "divine being" or a "higher power" or an "all-powerful force."] All it proposes is that science can identify whether certain features of the natural world are the products of intelligence.

2. Is intelligent design theory the same as creationism? No. Intelligent design theory is simply an effort to empirically detect whether the "apparent design" in nature acknowledged by virtually all

biologists is genuine design (the product of an intelligent cause) or is simply the product of an undirected process such as natural selection acting on random variations. Creationism is focused on defending a literal reading of the Genesis account, usually including the creation of the earth by the Biblical God a few thousand years ago. Unlike creationism, the scientific theory of intelligent design is agnostic regarding the source of design and has no commitment to defending Genesis, the Bible or any other sacred text.

3. *Is intelligent design theory incompatible with evolution? It depends on what one means by the word "evolution." If one simply means "change over time," or that living things are related by common ancestry, then there is no inherent conflict between evolutionary theory and intelligent design theory* Top Questions and Answers About Intelligent Design Theory, The Discovery Institute

At the level of assumptions, ID makes no assumptions at all about Genesis, whether it's scientifically accurate or not. But it does assume science is able to detect intelligent design (in fact, this assumption is the heart of the theory.)

Here's what I like about the ID view: ID is great at sniffing out and objecting to the tendency within the scientific community to draw theological conclusions not based on science but on unexamined philosophical assumptions. (Like Richard Dawkins who says that evolution shows us there can be no purposeful creator.)

It should be noted that many mainstream scientists vigorously disagree with Dawkins.

As a Jesus devotee, lover of the Bible, and pastor, I find myself very remote, and now that I understand it, uninterested in ID. It doesn't care about Genesis and I do. It's not committed to a personal God revealed in Jesus and I am!

More to the point: I'm unconvinced by ID's fundamental assumption that the scientific method, by itself, can "empirically detect" intelligent design. The Intelligent Designer I know and love is within and beyond the natural order and so I think it's quite possible--likely even--that such a God is too intimately involved and too infinitely beyond for detection by the lens of science. How could a human devised methodology like science ever have the wherewithal to definitively detect the biblical God's action in the world? I can't get over that stumbling block when I consider the very appealing claims of Intelligent Design.

The biblical Creator God is intimately involved in a mysterious way that defies "pinning down." "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Ro. 11: 36) "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 8) Science is about isolating things so as to understand and master them. How do you isolate a factor like God who is over all, in all, through all? Science-knowledge is mastery-knowledge but God can never be mastered. This is where I lean into faith, as the means by which we discern God's action in the world: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Heb. 11:3, NKJV).

Science can lead us to wonder and awe. And wonder and awe opens the door to faith, a different kind of knowing than science, and faith leads to surrender and worship of the Intelligent Designer! But the scientific method alone cannot reveal him, cannot settle the issue. In fact, strictly speaking, such a Creator is not discoverable by our merely human efforts. Such a Creator can only be known to the extent that he chooses to reveal himself and this revelation must ultimately be received in an act of trust (faith.)

I'm not an expert in the field of science, but as a layperson in that realm, I'd have a caution about ID as science. Microbiologist Michael Behe, author of Darwin's Black Box, argues that the bacterial flagellum--a little tail that propels the bacteria like a screw-propeller is an example of "irreducible complexity" meaning, as far as I can tell, that as a microbiologist, he can't see how the complex bacterial flagellum could have developed in a sequence of intermediate steps. At this point, he declares the bacterial flagellum to be "irreducibly complex" which means a product of intelligent design, presumably by an intervention beyond the natural processes. Wouldn't such a conclusion keep him, as a scientist, from looking further for the little steps? But I want him using his skills as a microbiologist to keep at it, to keep knocking his head against the brick wall, until something gives or his head hurts or he passes the baton to a younger scientist who backs up and hits the wall at a different angle and breaks through. This is how good science gets done, it seems to me. If there are more steps that lead to the bacterial flagellum, it's the job of science to find them, and that helps me as a worshipper because I believe God is at work in and through all the steps and the more the merrier, his wonders to perform!

Theistic (God-directed/involved/and/or influenced) Evolution

Theistic Evolution says that God works through evolutionary process to create the heavens and the earth, the universe and all that dwells therein, including humans. (As someone said to me recently, "God created evolution, then, right?" Right indeed! according to this view.)

Theistic Evolution is a religious perspective, rather than a scientific one. Of course, there are many varieties of Theistic Evolution depending on one's theological perspectives. For someone like myself who holds a high view of Scripture, Theistic Evolution assumes the creation texts of the Bible are inspired, reliable, authoritative truth in a truth bearing vehicle not restricted to the narrow path of the scientific method.

Theistic Evolution, from my theological position, assumes the biblical God--intimately involved & infinitely beyond--is a being whose action would not be detectable by the scientific method. This does not make him any less real, just more awesome!

You've probably figured out this is the view that most interests me, since all the other views rest on assumptions which I cannot accept. At the level of assumptions, I find theistic evolution most compatible with my reading of Scripture and science.

Since Genesis is a "pre-scientific text" not to be read as conveying truth scientifically, what is the nature of Genesis 1 as a sacred text? (Note: this is an essential question to ask of every biblical text. How has God chosen to speak to us in this text? Through the language of poetry, parable, historical narrative, apocalyptic, proverb, epistle, Law, prophecy, wisdom, etc.?)

As a Jesus freak who loves his book--and Genesis was one of his favorites, so it's mine too--when I read Genesis 1 carefully, there are signs in the text itself that suggest that we're not to read it literally, in the scientific sense. By a plain reading of the text, the sequence of creation in Genesis 2 is different than Genesis 1. This is the text itself telling us: the details of the sequence aren't important. (In science the details of sequence are always important.) From a theological perspective it's only important God comes first, humans come last, and we're connected with all other creation in a creation process that binds us together to our Creator God.

This approach makes sense to me since God speaks in the language and thought forms of the time, and science had not yet been invented when Genesis was written. Why should we impose a scientific

view of truth on a pre-scientific document? We don't do that with the texts of Scripture that are based on the ancient worldview that literally thought of the earth being built on "foundations" or that understood the earth to be stationary, with the sun revolving around it. That does not show proper respect to the text.

How, then do I read the text? As poetic narrative. People freak out when you say it's "poetic" because we have a very low view of poetry as a conveyor of truth. How many people make a living writing poetry (other than a few song writers?) Poets now write poetry knowing it will be read primarily by other poets, because so few people are buying poetry. But the Bible (especially the Old Testament) uses poetry all the time to convey truth. It can't be a bad conveyor of truth. It's as if we bought the modern lie that science is the best, or maybe the only way to tell the truth. If it doesn't measure up to science, if it doesn't bow down to science, it can't be true, seems to be the feeling.

When I became a Christian, I came in with that view. I surrendered to Jesus after reading the gospels. Within the first week, I started reading the Bible from the beginning. When I read Genesis 1, I saw, six, twenty-four hour days of creation. I saw the sun created after the vegetation. I saw Adam and Eve's children having to mate with each other in order to keep the species going. At this point, I went into a profound and intense spiritual crisis. I went to bed in the afternoon and assumed the fetal position. Nancy knew something was wrong but couldn't get me to talk. It's the closest I've ever been to nervous breakdown. I knew that my encounter with Jesus was real, and trustworthy. Did that mean I had to believe things that I couldn't about how old the universe might be or how life appeared on earth? I was in a clash of worldviews and the storm internally was intense.

As a modern person my whole view of truth was scientifically oriented. I simply assumed that "truth" always meant "scientific truth." Even though I'd never think of telling the truth of my love for my in scientific language--"baby, you elevate my endorphins and later, my oxytocin"--no I say, "I love you," a scientifically unverifiable statement, and because I like words, I've even written her a few poems, and if I do say so myself, they got the message across pretty well.

You know what I needed? I needed Don's sermon last week about Genesis 1 as prophetic challenge to the existing creation myths of Babylon and Egypt. I needed to step back and realize that there are other, sometimes better ways to tell the truth than scientifically.

The "translators preface" to the New International Version of the Bible says this about poetic passages in the Bible: "Poetical passages are printed as poetry, that is, with indentation of lines and with separate stanzas. These are generally designed to reflect the structure of Hebrew poetry. This poetry is normally characterized by parallelism in balanced lines. Most of the poetry in the Bible is in the Old Testament and scholars differ regarding the scansion of Hebrew lines. The translators determined the stanza divisions for the most part by analysis of the subject matter. The stanzas therefore serve as poetic paragraphs."--The Committee on Bible Translation, June 1978

When you turn to Genesis 1 in the NIV, you will see that it's indented to convey the poetic nature of the text. The NIV translation committee is highly regarded among evangelical Christians and they obviously felt the original Hebrew text of Genesis 1 is speaking in poetic language.

Most creation texts in the Bible (there many more than Genesis 1) are poetic.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they display knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens,
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth"
Psalm 16: 1-6

In times past this was taken to mean that the sun literally revolves around the earth. That's what got Galileo in trouble. Cardinal Bellarmine wrote to Galileo and charged him with "injuring our faith and making the sacred scripture false" (as quoted in [God's Universe](#) by Owen Gingerich, p. 92) by stating that the earth is not fixed, with the sun revolving around it (as the authors of Scripture assumed in many places, including in this psalm.)

We all know better now: this text is a poetic rendering so we are not to impose a scientific worldview on it. The fact that it's not scientific does not mean it's not true. It's speaking truth in a different language than the language of science.

Theistic Evolution, to be honest floats my boat as a worshipper: God, the subtle and intelligent and powerful and mind-boggling, awe-inducing, unmasterable Designer God working through the process of evolution, his wonders to perform.

But it also presents me with a pastoral dilemma. Nearly half the population, doesn't accept the mainstream scientific story of the age of the universe and the emergence of life. Speaking more about theistic evolution means speaking as if a purposeful God and evolution are OK together. Which could rock the boat if you think evolution is a topic that shouldn't be mentioned in church without condemning it.

So what do I do? It feels very much to me like the blue jeans-tee shirt dilemma all over again. Many years ago, I had to dress down the most to reach people who didn't have church clothes, knowing that would be viewed as lacking reverence by some.

If someone doesn't accept evolutionary science, it doesn't hinder them at all being faithful to Jesus. That's what I'm about, so my motivation to convince anyone of evolutionary science is low. But then, what about those people who do accept evolutionary science and think they can't be faithful to Jesus at same time? How do we signal to them that to be a Christian does not require adopting a posture of protest toward mainstream science?

Do we just say, "They're on their own--let's not rock the boat talking about something so controversial in the Christian club"? Of course, there are many in our congregation who wouldn't be at all troubled by a vibrant faith in Jesus and an acceptance of evolutionary science, but I'm concerned now with those who might be.

So I have options to give you, tell me what you think. I can leave it at this and not go any further. Maybe have a class for those interested on how theistic evolution would understand the Genesis

creation texts at the intersection of faith and science. Maybe you've had enough of this, and don't want any more.

Or next week I could do a role play: I could pretend the room is filled with evolutionary biologists, and model how one might teach them the creation text without demanding they abandon evolutionary science. Those who don't accept evolutionary science could just watch, like one might observe a missionary bringing the gospel to an unreached people group with very different stories, ones that don't resonate with those observing the missionary. And those who accept evolutionary science could really get into it.

Before you decide: consider the story of one of our young leaders here at the Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor. This is from Emily, in her own words:

The long and short of my story is this: I grew up a devout follower of Jesus, I strayed in college, and then reconnected with my faith in my mid-20s.

I was an evangelical wunderkind. I loved the Bible growing up; I read it constantly and was very familiar with it. I was a natural leader in our church youth group. My mom was on the worship team and my dad taught Sunday School, so I was at church every week, sitting in the front row with the rest of the kids worshiping (we raised our hands and danced). So I had great parents who truly love and serve the Lord. I couldn't ask for better...I had a rich prayer life, I'd spoken in tongues since I was 12, I'd been allowed to develop a prophetic gifting, and I'd seen miracles.

The part that makes me cringe looking back is that I was also the militant evangelical kid who fervently argued against evolution in science class....If you didn't vote Republican, I pretty much wrote you off as being on the path to hell. Environmentalists were weird -didn't they know Jesus was coming back soon and it wouldn't matter if the earth was trashed? So, you have a picture of me as I entered college...

In college I was presented with things that caused me to wrestle. I sat in anthropology class my freshman year thinking the professor was an idiot, but she did teach some things that didn't add up with my worldview. So I began thinking. Same thing in chemistry. And history, and English. Linguistics pointed to languages older than the 5000 year span I'd grown up understanding, and I took an interest in astronomy and physics - both areas where 5000 years of history gets you nowhere.

My worldview began to crash. I decided the earth was more than 5000 years old, and if what I'd believed and argued for on this end was wrong, why should I believe the rest? I'd heard the argument against evolution that, "Well, don't you think God could create the world to look more than 5000 years old when it isn't?" Why would he do that? So I began a quest. I read everything I could get my hands on that I thought might point me in the right direction: "Chaos" by James Gleick; Stephen Hawking, Fred Adams. I read anthropology, physics, history, religious texts from Buddhism, Taoism, and others. Heavy stuff. I'd sit with a calculator for hours trying to keep up with the mathematics. I became, by turn, universalist, agnostic, and briefly atheist. I remember sitting alone at night outside on the college campus telling God I didn't believe he existed, and having my heart break (although I was still talking to him...).

I also began to care more about the earth in college. I started to lean toward pacifism, my heart broke for the poor both in this country and abroad, and I became active in groups that worked toward justice for racial and social inequities.

It was in a broken, lonely, agnostic state that I took my first post-college job and moved to Ann Arbor.

I had a fairly high-pressure business career working in public relations, and quickly grew depressed. I'd go to work, come home, ride my bike, eat dinner, drink two glasses of wine with a Tylonol PM, and go to sleep. I'd lay in bed, still hazy from the wine, and think about what it would be like to put a gun in my mouth and pull the trigger.

Some longtime friends of the family, who'd attended the Vineyard in Indianapolis with me growing up, also lived in Ann Arbor and were attending the Vineyard here. I'd occasionally go to church with them, just so they'd report to my parents that I was attending! (Didn't want to get in too much trouble with mom!) So I'd sit in the back with them, just absorbing. God was working on me. The sermons incorporated science in a way that I'd been taught was wrong. There was room for theistic evolution, and I found I'd read a lot of the same books as the pastoral staff: "Bowling Alone," "Chaos," books on Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. There was room for me to be an environmentalist, a pacifist, and social justice was an underlying thread.

One Sunday, someone had a word of knowledge that described me perfectly. I don't remember it exactly, but it was something to the effect of, "There's someone here who grew up a believer, you went away from your faith, and you're in deep depression right now." My friend turned to me and said, "You know that's you, don't you?" I did, so she went up with me. I don't remember much, but I remember crying my eyes out against someone's wool sweater. Then someone prayed that the spirit of depression would break and leave me alone. A literal weight lifted off my shoulders. If I can describe it as physical, it was. And I haven't experienced that depth of depression since. I went home, and at some point I got on my knees in my living room and told God he won. He was real, he could have me for anything. Forever. Since then, it's like he's had me in fast-forward getting me back on track.

I know he had his hand on me through everything. When you decide to be agnostic, it seems like easy license to do as you please. That wasn't the case with me; I still lived according to the virtues I learned growing up. He preserved me, and I'm thankful to him for that.

So that's my story. The breathing room I found at our church was instrumental in my return to Jesus. Without it, I'm not sure where I'd be.

Blessings.

Emily Swan, Ann Arbor Vineyard

I'm thankful that we have a church with a diverse range of views on this subject.

Being in a "blue state," and a University town like Ann Arbor, I doubt we have the same concern with evolutionary science that the nation as a whole seems to. But to those of you who grew up with or absorbed (or perhaps you are sincerely convinced through careful study by) the notion that evolutionary science is not scientifically credible, and you are convinced of this view for religious reasons as well, I wish to personally thank you for your willingness to be part of a church that allows for a wide range of views, and for your willingness to accept my own views which land in the "Theistic Evolution" perspective. Part of my motivation for this view, beyond my own reading of science, is the breathing room it creates for people like Emily. Her story is not unique. I'm concerned about the thousands upon thousands of people in our area who have kept away from the church and her savior for the reasons that troubled Emily, many of whom didn't have a loving Christian family like Emily had or a rich experience of God's love to come home to. Let's get rid of this obstacle to faith. Let's mobilize what we do well, our hedgehog concept, and "make things workable for people" like Emily. (If you don't accept evolutionary science, by the way, that doesn't mean you have to; it simply means you don't make it a requirement for faithfulness to Christ.)