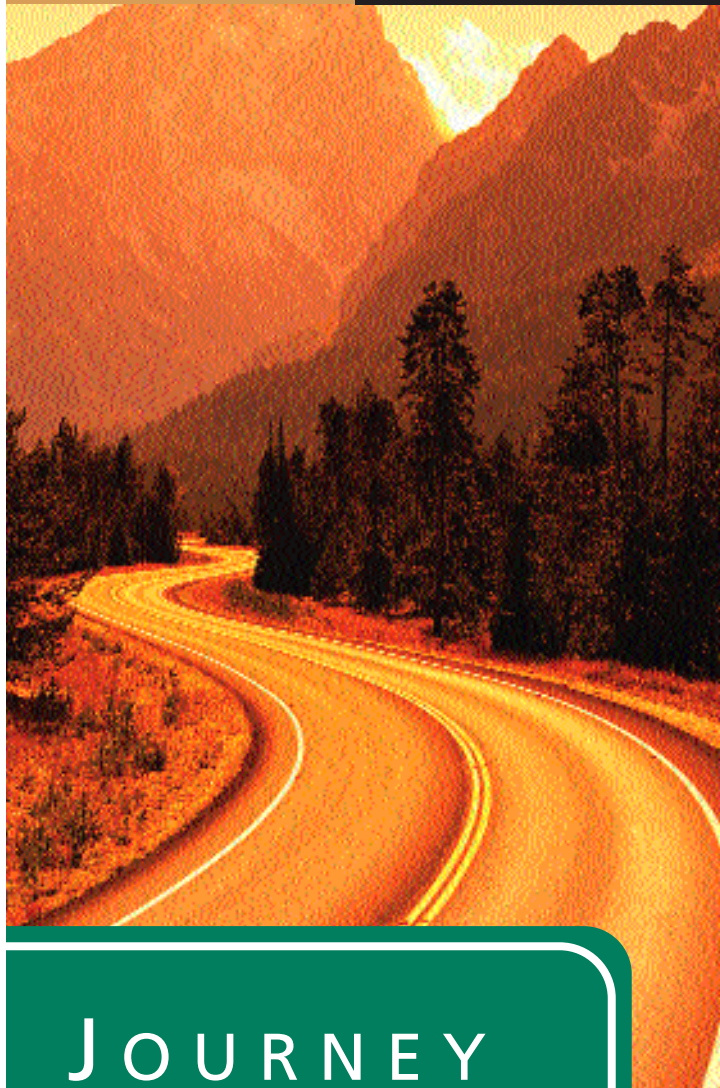


volume 1



JOURNEY TO FAITH

God...Who
Needs Him?

God...Who Needs Him?

The death of famous Beatle, George Harrison, rocked the music world. Though known as one of the “Fab Four” Harrison was never really comfortable with his role as a Beatle, or, it seems, life.

Though he had all that this world could offer—money, fame, power, the love and adulation of countless millions of fans—he was on a continual spiritual search. He often said, “Everything else can wait. But the search for God cannot wait.”

It is sometimes strange for those of us who can only dream of having the opportunities and successes that someone like George Harrison had to hear that despite all that, it just wasn’t enough.

His much publicized spiritual pilgrimage into Eastern religion at the height of his success reveals that even those with “everything life has to offer” find themselves looking for something else, something deeper, something that will fill the emptiness they feel within. It is a common experience, but strange for those of us who still feel that if we only had what they have, we would be fulfilled and our life would have all the purpose and meaning we needed.

The truth is that we are all seeking something—but we have difficulty identifying what it is we’re looking for. And for each of us the target of our search can be different.

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Plain Truth Ministries
Pasadena, California 91129
1-800-309-4466
www.ptm.org

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Money

For some, the promised land, the end of the rainbow, the fulfillment of all their dreams and desires, is money and wealth and the lifestyle it can buy. “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” fuels the idea that if we can just get enough money we can begin to have the life we’ve always wanted.

We see the rich and famous showing off their lavish lifestyle and their happy carefree expressions. And a desire begins to grow in us.

If we had that much money, then we could be that happy also. All we need to be fulfilled is enough money to do what we want to do. After all, isn’t that the American dream?

But if all it took was a lot of money to make you happy, then

those with the money and possessions we desire would consistently be happy, well adjusted and content. Perhaps it was heiress Christina Onassis who said it best when she said, “Happiness is not based on money and the greatest proof of that is our family.”

Far from being the wonderful thing that we imagine it to be, wealth, while it brings many luxuries, also introduces many pressures that can produce a much greater unhappiness than we had without it.

Howard Hughes was one of the richest men in the world in his time. Yet, as his wealth grew to enormous proportions, he began to experience greater and greater unhappiness. For the last fifteen years of his life he fled from one resort hotel to another—Las Vegas, Nicaragua, Acapulco—and his physical appearance became odder and odder.

Married for thirteen years to Jean Peters, one of the most beautiful women in the world, they were never once seen in public together.

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There is no record of them ever being seen together even in a photograph.

For a while they occupied separate bungalows at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Later, she lived in an opulent and carefully guarded French Regency house atop a hill in Bel Air, making secretive and increasingly infrequent trips to be with Hughes in Las Vegas. They divorced in 1970. Most of his associates reported their disgust for him after his death.

It is only natural when we hear such a story to dismiss it as an aberration, yet the familiar story occurs over and over again. Studying the lives of the Vanderbilts, the Gettys, the Rockefellers, the Kennedys, and others, you find the same thing—unhappiness, despite their great wealth.

Many of us have met someone who has a great deal of money or wealth, and if we’re honest we’ll realize that while they have more wealth than we do, they don’t necessarily have more happiness. An old Russian proverb says: “Money is like seawater. The more you drink, the thirstier you get.”

Those who chased money with wild abandon—believing that it would somehow make their lives the fulfilling experience they imagined—have reported...it doesn’t! A large house doesn’t make a real home. A huge portfolio doesn’t guarantee people will like you any more than they did before. An expensive car doesn’t solve your relational problems in life.

Fame

Actress Winona Ryder seemed to have it all. Discovered at an early age by a talent scout at San Francisco’s American Conservatory Theater, she soon began appearing in films like “Lucas,” “Square Dance” and “Beetlejuice.” Then came “Mermaids,” “Great Balls of Fire,” “Bram Stoker’s Dracula” and “Little Women.”

She was famous, making lots of money and was romantically involved with actor Johnny Depp. Soon, however, the pressures of the job and her newfound fame resulted in anxiety

attacks and depression. She tried to drown the fear in alcohol.

She relates an interesting insight on her life. “When I was 18, I was driving around at two in the morning, completely crying and alone and scared,” she recalls. “I drove by this magazine stand that had this *Rolling Stone* that I was on the cover of, and it said ‘Winona Ryder: The Luckiest Girl in the World.’ *And there I was, feeling more alone than I ever had.*” (“Winona’s Nightmare,” by Mark Kennedy, *Associated Press*, October 12, 2000, AOL). Finding the fame so many chase, she found herself feeling more alone than she ever had before.

Success often breeds fame, and with fame comes pressures that were not imagined when the person began their quest to achieve it. Olympic diver, Scott Donie, won his silver medal at the Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. No one had expected Scott Donie to perform as well as he did in his Olympic performance, least of all Donie. But on the day of the platforms, everything clicked, and Donie later commented, “That was such a perfect day for me. Everything came together at once.”

Expecting his newfound fame to bring him wealth, he was disappointed. His bank account didn’t grow, but his pressures did. Being an Olympic medalist meant that every time he stepped onto the pool deck, everyone was watching him.

No one ever bargains on the pressure that is part and parcel of fame. We imagine fame with no hangover, and imagine it meeting deep needs within us. Instead of meeting a deep need within him, the pressure of his fame drove him into suicidal thoughts.

As Donie remarked, “It’s ironic that all your life you know what you want to be and then you become it and you get all sad and depressed.... You don’t know why you’re feeling that way. *It’s a feeling that comes from nowhere. It seems like a chemical.*” (“Olympian Rises From His Despair,” *Orange County Register*).

If life could be made happy and fulfilled from simply acquiring fame, it would be a worthwhile quest. But the evidence in these instances and millions of others suggests otherwise. Even with fame, there is going to be something inside of us that is unfulfilled, longing for something...something else.

Relationships

If there is anything in life that promises to deliver fulfillment and meaning and purpose in life, it is meaningful human relationships. From our relationships with our parents to our relationships with spouses, children, friends, coworkers, mentors and neighbors, we are hoping to find that elusive “happily ever after” life we have heard so much about.

There are some who have not grown up in a loving home with parents who cared for them or loved them in a meaningful way. Maybe they were abused as children, or simply ignored or neglected. Maybe they never felt the love that they needed so badly.

So they seek meaning and fulfillment in human relationships. Maybe they are looking for a father figure, or a mother figure, or the family they never had. If they can find someone to plug that emotional hole in their life, they believe that they will finally be at peace.

They may try to find fulfillment in relationships with the opposite sex. After all, we are constantly told that “true love” will answer the deepest needs of our human hearts. Don’t all the best fairy tales end with the prince or princess finding their true love and living “happily ever after?”

There may be no place where we are more disappointed in our quest for filling the emotional ache and emptiness than in romantic relationships. The landscape is littered with divorces, angry and messy break-ups, and bitter, angry lovers.

They found love, but love disappointed them. Maybe the problem was that they just did-

n't find the "right" person. So they try again, and again, and again. Yet try as they might, they discover that their lovers fall short of being able to fill that hole. Elizabeth Taylor, beautiful, rich and famous, married again and again in search of true love. Her marriages and divorces are legendary, as are the marriages and public divorces of so many of our movie idols.

Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman were the ideal couple—beautiful, talented and wealthy. Surely here was a couple who would "live happily ever after." It didn't work, but it wasn't for lack of trying. It is so easy to put all our expectations for happiness in a relationship with someone else. Yet even among those who have found the true love of their life and are happily married, they often still feel a lingering emptiness. They are not unhappy in their marriage or relationship, but have discovered to their surprise, that the vacuum inside them has not been filled.

Something is still missing. In moments of great relational happiness the spiritual wasteland inside may not seem so desolate, but it always returns. Good relationships alone do not bring fulfillment and meaning to our lives.

Success

He had just led his team to a Super Bowl victory. On that night, while his teammates were celebrating at a party, he ordered beer from room service and sat alone in his hotel room for a couple of hours.

"I kept thinking back to the time when I was a teenager—how I thought that all my problems in my life would be solved the moment I turned sixteen and was able to get a car," he recalls. *"Well, here I was at the top of professional football, and I found myself thinking, 'Now what? Now what?'"*

The reporter who asked the former Dallas Cowboy quarterback, Troy Aikman, why he felt that way says that for several seconds Aikman just stared at him. He appeared dumbfounded that the reporter would even ask such an absurd

question. *"Well, isn't that what it's all about?"* he asks. *"To keep raising the bar for yourself?"*

Do you hear it? Isn't this what is supposed to fulfill me, isn't this how I find purpose, meaning and joy in life? We may each take different routes, but the ultimate goal is the same—to secure permanent happiness and fulfillment.

While the drive to succeed made Aikman a fierce competitor, it was also a curse. After a loss he would not answer the phone, even when close friends or family were calling to console him. He would lie in bed and replay each offensive play in his mind. ("The Real Troy Aikman," *Texas Monthly*, December, 1998).

Those who are not driven by money or sensual pleasure or fame can be driven by the need to succeed, to be victorious over others, the elements, or the odds. They can be mountain climbers, adventurers, athletes, or entrepreneurs. They think:

Maybe it is through a great accomplishment that I can find fulfillment. If I can just be the best at something, or the first to do something, or overcome some great obstacle to reach my goals, then I will feel fulfilled. Then I will have that mysterious need inside filled.

It is said that Alexander the Great conquered the entire known world before he was 30. Did he celebrate? No, he sat down and cried. He realized that there were no more worlds left for him to conquer. That is what he had lived for. How could he find the fulfillment he was seeking—the purpose for his life—when the only means he knew to find it had been removed from him?

As attractive as success is, as alluring as it appears, it cannot satisfy for long. In fact, as Troy Aikman demonstrates, it often brings up issues that were never considered before. *What happens if I reach all my goals? What is left to give my life meaning? What is the purpose of my life now?*

That is the problem with so many things we chase in life—in our search for fulfillment and meaning. We don't envision anything but fulfill-

ment when we finally reach our goal. The idea that getting what we always wanted won't satisfy us for long never really occurs to us.

When someone attempts something great in life, and is fortunate enough to achieve what they set out to accomplish, only to experience feelings of emptiness, they are bewildered. All the sacrifice, all the pain, all the discouragements and obstacles that were overcome to accomplish this great goal do not produce ultimate peace and fulfillment. In fact, the disappointment is more intense because the expectation of happiness after achieving the goal does not take place.

If you are chasing success and never achieve the success you envisioned, you may feel that the reason you are experiencing feelings of emptiness is because you did not accomplish your goal. But the truth is that those who do achieve their goals feel even worse at times than those who fail to achieve their goals. It is clear that ultimate fulfillment can't be found in either chasing—or even obtaining—success.

Searching For Happiness

We are drawn to “happily ever after” stories. We are attracted to the idea that we could accumulate enough, or experience enough, or achieve enough, or insulate ourselves enough to be able to corral personal fulfillment and always possess and enjoy it. But even if we have a great marriage and family, a pile of money, all the physical pleasures we could want—success, power, fame and beauty—our fulfillment balloon still continues to leak.

So we search. Maybe something else is the answer. Maybe more will do it, or less. Maybe if we change jobs, move, change relationships, or change our goals we can fill that spiritual desert inside us. But the experience of millions who have done these things and still come up empty is that fulfillment isn't found in change either. One empty relationship frequently leads to

another. Changing jobs, goals, attitudes, hair-styles, dress sizes, standard of living—all lead us back where we started.

The reason nothing we chase can fulfill us is because while many of these things are good in and of themselves, we were simply not designed to be fulfilled in this way. It's a tragic mistake to assume that true fulfillment is found by feelings, possessions, fame or wealth.

You may have failed in many areas in life and think that's why you feel so unfulfilled. Yet those who have been successful in life also experience emptiness, so there is more to this emptiness than can be explained by failure, or even tragic loss.

We try to put the wrong things into our lives to fill that spiritual wasteland. Someone once said that God created each of us with a God-shaped hole. Scholar and author, C.S. Lewis, once said that if we find within ourselves a desire, which no earthly thing can satisfy, chances are we were made for another world.

Why are we all seeking something more than we have? Why don't these things bring us ultimate fulfillment? Why can't we be satisfied? Why won't feelings of emptiness go away? Why does everyone have these feelings, regardless of race, sex, status or culture?

We are like the little child who runs into the toy store, disregarding his father's warning about straying and getting lost in the crowded store.

The child leaves his father's side, enthralled and attracted by all the alluring gadgets, toys,

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games and other enticements. For a time he forgets all about his father, being preoccupied with toys.

But eventually the child tires of playthings, and suddenly realizes lots of people surround him—but not the one he came with. He cannot see his father anymore and becomes afraid. He begins to cry.

Other people quickly gather around the crying child trying to cheer him up. One offers candy, another offers a big, fuzzy teddy bear, while another offers a talking mechanical puppy. Maybe these things will cheer the child up and make him forget about his father.

But, strangely, these very things which once drew him away from his father, no longer bring him the same joy. While these things had kept the child enthralled earlier, they no longer have the ability to hold his interest. Something inside of him suddenly yearns for *someone*, not *something*. There is now only one thing that will ease his fears and crying—the sight of his father again, and the security of his warm embrace.

Suddenly the child spots his father briskly walking toward him—beckoning the child to return to him. The boy races to his father, the toys now forgotten, and jumps into his arms. He suddenly experiences peace, joy, safety and contentment. His father's warm embrace and soothing words remind the child of how much he is loved, and how this relationship is so much more important than all the gadgets and games in the toy store.

We are all like the child in this story. Through a desire to go our own way, to find our way in life without our heavenly Father, we wander away from the One who made us for fellowship with him. We seek to fill our emptiness with things, instead of seeking the relationship with God that we were designed for.

We Need God

How many things in your life have you thought would bring you ultimate happiness—

and yet failed you? You may have even tried religion and found it empty. How can this be, you ask? Can't God be found in religion? Shouldn't that be a place to find fulfillment?

Too often, for many people, religion (or church) is unfulfilling as well. In need of a relationship, they encounter rules and regulations. While these rules may be very good and helpful, they don't fill that God-shaped hole; they are not able to fulfill us. Like the little boy, we realize that what we are looking for is *some-One*, not *something*.

Strangely, in all our activities designed to find fulfillment, we seldom think that our need may be for God. We are just so sure that those other things will fill our emptiness—that they will do all they promise—that we don't think of anything else.

Yet, when we think about it, the emptiness—the feeling that something is missing, the lack of fulfillment—is not a physical feeling, nor does it point to a physical need. This kind of a need is spiritual.

It has to do with the part of us that desperately wants to know *why we're here*, and *what life is all about*. In those quiet reflective moments when we're alone, we feel like something is missing. A part of our soul is restless and ill at ease. We yearn to find *the meaning of life*.

We are like a soldier who has fought many battles across the ocean. Miraculously, he has survived and is finally coming home. He misses his country and when he arrives back on American soil, he is so happy he can't contain his joy. But that soon wears off. He is restless again, to get back to his own hometown, the place he grew up, to see those familiar places again.

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When he finally arrives, he feels the rush of joy at being back. But being in his own hometown only makes him realize that what he wants more than anything is to be home. Feelings of restlessness return until he is standing in front of his home. A rush of excitement fills him as he looks at the warm, familiar sight.

Then, strangely, restlessness strikes again. He realizes that it is not the wood and cement, the doors and windows and rooms and yard he misses. He rushes to the door and knocks on it. When the door opens there stand his father and

God came looking for us, to remind us that what we needed was to be back with him. Jesus came to bring us back to our heavenly Father, to make us whole again.

mother who suddenly cry out in delight and hug their son tightly. Now, finally, the soldier is at rest.

In a way this story represents the experience of all of us. Except that many of us have never known that there was ever some *One* waiting for us, looking for us, wanting to bring us back home again.

The Bible tells us that 2,000 years ago God became a man named Jesus. God, our heavenly Father, the creator of all life, entered a world full of religion, but one that was a spiritual wasteland. If religion alone could have brought us back to God, he would never have come to earth.

Like the father of the child in the toy store, God came looking for us, to remind us that what we needed was to be back with him. Jesus came to bring us back to our heavenly Father, to make us whole again.

We can't find our way back to the Father alone. Like the lost child in the toy store, we had disobediently wandered away from him. Yet when he came looking for us, he wasn't angry. It was love that caused him to go looking for us.

This is the deepest need of the human heart—to find our way back to the God who created us. Finding God is the meaning of life. Until we do that, we will be restless. There will be a part of us that knows that we have not yet arrived home.

All our pursuits are nothing more than a desire to find that missing part of our life, the life we were created for. Who needs God? The answer is clear. We all do.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1) How can anyone ever hope to relate to an invisible God?
- 2) If imperfect people are our only source of information about God, how can we ever really understand him?
- 3) There are so many different ideas and teachings about what God is really like. How can I know for sure?
- 4) How can we find our way to God? Who could possibly show us the way?
- 5) How can God understand what we feel and experience in life, when he is so far removed from our world?
- 6) How can we know what God is really like, when no one has ever seen Him?
- 7) How can we know for sure that God loves us?

These and other questions will be discussed and answered in our next volume, *Journey to Faith, Volume 2: Jesus—More Than a Man*.

What PTM Is All About

Plain Truth Ministries (PTM) is all about leading people to Jesus Christ and authentic Christianity with the main, plain and sensible teachings of the Bible. We are dedicated to being clearly focused and centered on Jesus Christ. We combat the deadly virus of religion and legalism by identifying them for what they are and by pointing out pitfalls and potholes into which Christians can fall. In the process we call for a move away from religion in Christendom and toward the unity in the church for which Christ prayed the night before his crucifixion (John 17).

PTM warns against claims of spiritual superiority, and we seek to give hope to those who've been burned out by religion and religious legalism. We proclaim the true nature of God and his immense unconditional love for every person—a love that brings with it a wonderful liberty in Christ.

If you've been beaten up and left for dead by religion, or if you feel you've been cheated of a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ, you're not alone. Millions have suffered and others continue to suffer at the hands of religion. We have many resources to help you if that's been your story. Those resources are largely made available in a ministry within PTM, called "Recovering from Legalism" at our website, www.ptm.org. Be sure to check out the rest of the PTM website for many other helpful resources to understand the liberty Jesus offers you.

"Christianity Without the Religion"

Our ministry has attracted many who no longer attend a geographically located church. Many pleaded with us to offer worship services to them, so after careful investigation and planning, *Christianity Without the Religion (CWR)* was born in early 2006.

CWR is a place of grace—a place of resting in Jesus. *CWR* is a church without walls, a church that can be found only on the Internet. We are a cyber-church, our doors are open every hour and every day of the week. Jesus Christ is the absolute foundation and focus of our music, communion, prayers and sermons at *CWR*. Attend at your convenience—our services are 26 minutes from beginning to end. Attend while having a cup of coffee in front of your computer, or download our services so that

you can "go to church" while commuting to work, working out at the gym, or walking through an airport. Church, of course, is not primarily a place we go, church is what we are. Visit our worldwide *CWR* congregation at www.ptm.org.

For Further Reading— Three Books by Greg Albrecht *BAD NEWS RELIGION*

Christians have trouble accepting God's grace. Humans have substituted order, holiness, discipleship, regulations and a long list of things to avoid in the place of God's free gift. *Bad News Religion* is a convincing, liberating exploration of how we, in the name of religion, have shifted the focus from the work of God to our ability to become worthy of salvation. The result is bondage and defeat rather than experiencing the true richness of God's grace. You may order *Bad News Religion* by calling 1-800-309-4466 or online at www.ptm.org.

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