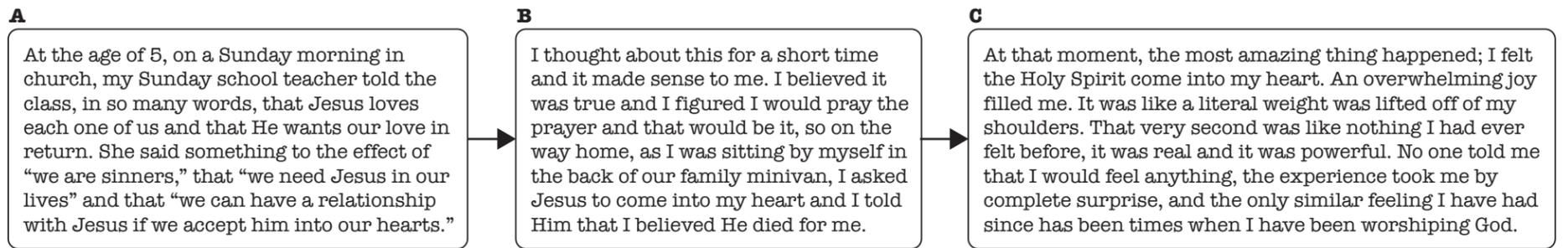


Clark Campbell's Salvation Testimony Deconstruction Flowchart

As a child, my salvation was an experience that was essential to my belief in the God of the Bible, this is a breakdown of that experience:

1. I had a personal experience that could either be adequately explained by a natural cause or by a supernatural cause.
2. My experience could not be adequately explained by a natural cause.
3. Therefore, the experience was probably supernatural.
4. If a supernatural experience best aligns with the Biblical account of God, then the Biblical God probably exists.
5. My supernatural experience best aligns with the Biblical account of God.
6. Therefore, the Biblical God probably exists.

This is the order of events (sometime around the summer of 1989 at Bethlehem Baptist Church)



I have ever since believed that my experience was due to the God of the Bible, but because my experience is at the core of what I believe, I wanted to deconstruct the order of events and see if the God of the Bible really is the most logical explanation. So consider the other following options:

Natural Explanations

1. Your experience happened because you were indoctrinated:

a. You were relieved you weren't going to hell.

For this to be a valid possibility, I would likely have had to have been fairly concerned about going to hell, but that wasn't something I even remember thinking about at that age.

b. You were relieved you were forgiven of the bad things you had done.

For this to be a valid possibility, I would likely have had to have been concerned about having done bad things, but as seen in step B, while I believed I needed forgiveness, I expected to say the prayer in private and that would be the end of it. I had no prior guilt to be relieved of.

c. You were subconsciously expecting to feel something (placebo effect).

This would not play a part in my experience. "A placebo is believed to occur due to psychological factors like expectations or classical conditioning." I had no expectations about what happened after accepting Jesus and was shocked at what happened after I did (step C). I believe I previously had heard of Jesus in the Bible but not about accepting Him as my savior so there was no conditioning.

d. You were trying to live up to the expectations of Christians in your life.

For this to be a valid possibility, I would likely have had to have been concerned with what other Christians thought, but as seen in step B, while I believed I needed forgiveness, I expected to say the prayer and that would be the end of it and I made the decision to accept Jesus on my own, alone. I was expecting it to be a private matter.

2. Maybe you were drugged.

It's true that certain drugs can make someone feel intense feelings, hallucinate or have experiences that didn't really happen. However, being drugged as a 5 year old child at church is a very unlikely scenario for several reasons: I don't recall being given a drug; there were no other signs I had been drugged (as many drugs have various symptoms or side effects); my parents would almost certainly have been alerted to their child being drugged; and lastly, I was in the back of my parents' minivan alone when I had the experience and certainly had no access to a drug there.

3. Your experience could have been some sort of extraterrestrial encounter.

First, extraterrestrial beings have never been proven to exist in the physical world. Second, an experience with such a being, while in such close proximity with others in a moving vehicle (both my parents were in the front seats and two of my sisters, 1 and 3 years old, were all present), would not be likely and lacks motive.

4. Your experience could have been due to a natural cause you haven't considered.

This is the ought-is fallacy. It occurs when you assume that the way you want things to be is the way they are, also called the wishful thinking fallacy. "Wishful thinking is believing what you want to be true no matter the evidence or without evidence at all, or assuming something is not true, because you do not want it to be so." If there is any other possible explanation, it needs to be actualized to be relevant.

Once all natural explanations are eliminated, being unlikely possibilities, the next logical step is to weigh the likelihood of all possible supernatural explanations. Objecting to this next step is usually rooted in the presupposition that the supernatural does not exist. While the supernatural IS beyond what can be empirically analyzed, it can still be known, as it is perfectly within reach of the laws of logic.

Other Supernatural Explanations

5. Your experience doesn't prove the God of the Bible, it could have been...

a. some other god from some other religion.

For this point, we will categorize religion as a worldview with a supernatural element to it. A well-rounded worldview will adequately answer questions of the origin of the universe, the meaning of life, morality, and human destiny. While there are different religions that have other gods, there is not good evidence to support most religious worldviews which also damages the evidence for their god(s) as part of their answers to the aforementioned four types of questions. One example, is that there is good evidence that the universe has a finite beginning, so any religions that teach otherwise are likely wrong about the origin of the universe while the Bible is clear that an eternal and timeless God created our finite universe. Some religions teach that god is not personal, so that kind of god would also not answer the question of a personal supernatural experience while the God of the Bible does. Christianity adequately answers the four worldview questions and the God described in the Bible aligns with what we know to be true in reality. Given, before my experience, I appealed to the God of the Bible who is described as a personal God, it is more likely to be Him until a better, specific god-option is presented.

b. an evil spirit.

The idea here is that I could have been tricked by an evil supernatural being into thinking I had an experience with the Biblical God. But if an evil spirit exists, objective good needs to exist. And if objective good exists, then God needs to exist which would need to fit the criteria of a maximally great being (as described in the Bible) and is logically supported by the Moral Argument for God. The logical motive of such a spirit to trick me would be to keep me from discovering the truth of the true God, so until a better, specific god-option is presented, it is still more likely for my experience to be the Biblical God than an evil spirit.

c. a ghost.

For the sake of argument, let's say that no God exists as creator of everything. Perhaps we are living in a cyclical reality where our life force can roam the earth either permanently or for a time after death. IF that were the case and IF it were also possible to interact with the dead, then it would be possible my experience could have been a ghost, although the motive for such an encounter seems to be lacking. Also a worldview for such a ghost would need to better explain our reality than the Biblical God does which until such a specific explanation is presented, the Biblical God is still a better explanation and thus, more likely than a ghost.

d. some other supernatural cause.

While an unknown or unconsidered supernatural cause is more plausible than a natural cause, it needs to be actualized to be relevant, or as previously stated, it is just wishful thinking to say it would be a better explanation. So until another, better supernatural cause is presented, the Biblical God is still a better explanation.

General Objections

6. You were too young to remember exactly what happened.

I had for multiple decades, thought my testimony was pretty insignificant (except to me personally) but only because of my age when I was saved. Despite this, I have a very vivid recollection of the experience and there were at least two witnesses (my parents) who knew about my experience from the day it happened because I told them.

7. People of other conflicting religions with different gods have reported similar experiences, so your experience is probably false.

It is true that conflicting religions cannot all be true. However, it is a fallacious belief that since conflicting religions cannot all be true, none of them are. It is a possibility that none of them are true but that does not follow logically. It is very possible and logical that one of them is true. With that said, each reported supernatural experience from any religion should be evaluated on a case by case basis to determine its validity. Unless a specific and compelling experience from a different religion is presented that is more likely than the experience being reviewed in this analysis, it logically follows that my experience was more likely supernatural.

8. If your experience were real, all people who genuinely accept Jesus would feel what you felt.

There are many reports of similar types of supernatural experience from people who accept Jesus but definitely not by all. I don't know why not all who accept Jesus have this type of experience. I remember as a kid, after my experience, expecting every person who accepts Jesus to feel what I felt and was surprised to learn not everyone does. This is surprising but not a logical defeater to the experience being a result of the God of the Bible. Every person is different so perhaps we all experience the Holy Spirit a bit differently. Or it's possible that having an emotional experience could simply be a gift God allows for some people but not for all which could be for any number of reasons.

Conclusion

So after careful analysis, the God of the Bible is the best explanation for my experience. If it were only my experience that supported my belief in God, this may not be very compelling evidence for others but it's not only that, the God of the Bible is the best explanation for the cause of the universe which cannot be a natural one as natural laws would not have existed apart from space and time. Abstract objects like numbers have no causal power so they can also be ruled out. The last option is a Personal God - an eternal, transcendent, unembodied mind that has freedom of will which is exactly how the Bible repeatedly describes God as being. To know, see, hear or feel someone is to experience that person in a personal way which is what God allowed me to experience when I accepted Jesus as the Lord of my life. God as described in the Bible fits the evidence, not only of my experience but more: the reality we live in is contingent on God's existence (The Contingency Argument), the universe relies on God first existing (The Cosmological Argument), life requires God to exist (The Teleological Argument), morality is invalidated if an absolute good God does not exist (The Moral Argument), consciousness has to be a product of an ultimate consciousness, God's existence is evident through physical evidence such as modern day miracles and information in DNA, man's ability to reason requires God to exist (The Transcendental Argument), and by His nature and by definition it is self-evident that God exists (The Ontological Argument). These are reasons I believe in the personal God of the Bible, who by His grace, saved me that day.