

SEARCH



# QUESTIONING GOD

Answers to Questions Worth Asking

JOHN HOPPER

## Discussion Guide

© 2026 by Search Ministries

All rights reserved. No part of this discussion guide may be reproduced without written permission, except for brief quotations in books and critical reviews.

Quotations found in the boxed paragraphs are taken from *Questioning God? Answers to Questions Worth Asking*

© 2021 Search Ministries

Unless noted, scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

**Find other Search resources at [reachothers.org](https://reachothers.org).**



## Life Is Good, So Why Be Concerned with God?

Many today give God little more than an occasional nod. Even if there is a divine being lurking in the background, people find talk of God boring, restrictive, or irrelevant. That's why they say things like, "Life is good, so why should I be concerned with God?" or more strongly, "Believe in God if you must, but don't think you're better than one who doesn't." Could it be possible, however, that there is more to be considered—that God's existence has greater implications than most have ever considered?

### Getting Started

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much would you say you concern yourself with God? What has led you to your place on the scale?

### Meaning Without God

If God is taken out of our world, we are left without any ultimate meaning to life. (19)

2. If our existence is the only result of chance, do you think life has any real meaning? Why or why not?

### Purpose Without God

Purpose is the kind of thing that comes about because of personal intention. It's not the kind of thing that comes about by chance . . . If purpose requires intention, however, what does that say about our lives if we are only here by a long string of random chance events? (20)

3. If there is no God, is it right to say there is no objective purpose and that our best option is to live a "noble lie"?

## Free Will Without God

“Free will is an illusion . . . We do not have the freedom we think we have.” – Sam Harris (22)

4. If free will is only an illusion, can we hold people responsible for their behavior?

## Justice Without God

If we remove God from “under the hood,” we are left only with competing preferences where the most powerful, the most fit, or best DNA-equipped win. And as history has shown us, that kind of justice can lead to fateful consequences. (24)

5. What makes God necessary if we are to truly call some behavior just or unjust?

## Love Without God

If . . . we are reduced to cosmic accidents, then the best we can say is that all we count as love is nothing more than a feeling produced by unavoidable chemical reactions. (24–25)

6. Do you think love is more than a chemical reaction? If it is only a chemical reaction, does it bother you that no one really chooses to love you?

## Reason Without God

If there is no God, we cannot trust our thoughts, even our thoughts about atheism. (27)

7. What if instead of being created by God, your brain was only the result of an unguided biological process. Could you trust your thoughts—even the thoughts you are having now?

## Your Identity Without God

We are people who define ourselves by the choices we make, the people we love, the purposes we pursue, the reasons we ponder, and the justice we seek. Collectively, it is these things that give us meaning in life. They are what shape our personal identity. And yet, if God is but a fantasy, then we are just the vast assembly of nerves and molecules Dr. Crick told us about, and all the other stuff that makes up the “real you” is a fantasy too. (28)

8. If we are only physical matter and chemical reactions, how should we think about human value and personal identity?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

I am the one who made the earth and created people to live on it.  
(Isaiah 45:12a)

9. The Bible doesn't explain how God made things, only that God made us in his image to be people who love and reason and seek justice just as he does. Is that something that is easy or difficult for you to accept? Why?

## Wrapping It Up

10. If there is a lot at stake when it comes to God's existence, what would it look like for you to take the question of God more seriously?



## Why Should I Believe God Exists?

As children we were told about things we could not see. Some of them, like the Tooth Fairy, we found out later to be make-believe. Other things, like gravity, we discovered to most certainly exist. So, when it comes to God, what are we to make of an all-powerful creator who can see all we do? Should we just assume God is merely a make-believe creature fabricated to give people comfort or keep them in line? Or is there evidence that God is as real as the gravity that keeps us stuck to planet Earth?

### Getting Started

1. When it comes to the existence of God, where would you place yourself today: belief, disbelief, or still seeking? What evidence or experiences led you to where you stand today?

### Clue #1: We Are Here

If the universe has always been here, it wouldn't need a cause. But as we've seen, the evidence tells us it hasn't always been here. This means . . . there must be a cause behind it. (37)

2. If space, time, and matter did not exist before the universe came into being, the cause of the universe must exist outside of space, time, and matter. Is God a good explanation for such a cause? Is there a better explanation?

### Clue #2: Our Fine-Tuned World

"The laws of nature form a system that is extremely fine-tuned, and very little in physical law can be altered without destroying the possibility of the development of life as we know it. Were it not for a series of startling coincidences in the precise details of physical law, it seems, humans and similar life forms would never have come into being." – Stephen Hawking (40)

3. Stephen Hawking describes the astonishingly fine-tuned universe as a "series of startling coincidences." Do you agree with him, or do you think it is more reasonable to believe it to be the work of a powerful, super-intellect, commonly referred to as God?

### Clue #3: Math's Uncanny Applicability

In mathematics, we have abstract entities that would have existed before our universe came on the scene, so why is it that once we discover these entities . . . they apply so well to the physical world we are seeking to understand? That's like finding plans for a highly effective heart pump that predates any living organism coming on the scene. (43)

4. Nobel Prize winner, Eugene Wigner, repeatedly called the uncanny applicability of mathematics a "miracle." Would you call it a miracle, and if so, in what sense?

### Clue #4: Right & Wrong

Without a personal God, objective morals and duties do not exist. (44)

5. For morals to be more than individual or group preferences, is it necessary for there to be a God who sets the standard?
6. Let's say we are "a decaying piece of matter in a decaying universe and nothing more significant than that" (45). What right does one piece of matter have to declare to another that murder or rape is unjust?

### Clue #5: All Those Other Senses

Maybe the reason that a deep-seated sense of meaning and purpose is so important to us is because God has made us with an objective meaning and purpose in mind . . . Maybe the reason we feel adamant that someone pays the price for vandalizing several local businesses is because God is concerned with justice and has an objective standard with which we resonate. Maybe the reason we are overwhelmed with a feeling of love when we hold a newborn child is not because of some hormonal charge but because God has made the child lovable and has given us the capacity to love. (48)

7. Does the sense that we have meaning and purpose, that justice is important, and that love is real, point to a God who made us? If not, how do we account for these deep-seated feelings and should we trust them?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. (Psalm 19:1)

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. (Romans 1:20)

8. These verses claim that we can infer God's existence by looking at the marvelous universe in which we live. How does that idea connect with today's discussion?
  
9. How might God give evidence of his existence more directly than through creation?

## Wrapping It Up

10. Of the five clues in this chapter, which do you think represents the best evidence for God's existence? Does the evidence give you any more confidence in the existence of God?



## Can We Know the Truth about Anything (Especially about God)?

I am not sure when people started losing faith in truth or in our ability to know it when we see it, but somewhere along the way a wave of skepticism rolled in. This is especially so when it comes to the topic of God. We might feel comfortable in our ability to discover the truth about aerodynamics or aerobic fitness, but we have become uncomfortable saying there is anything we can truly know about God.

### Getting Started

1. When someone says, “That may be true for you, but not for me,” how do you typically respond? Do you think truth is something objective or something personal?

### Living As Though Truth Exists

We are creatures who cannot get away from confidently affirming truth. (55)
---

2. Can you think of a decision you made today that was based on an underlying belief that something objectively true and not just a personal preference (for example, you may have confidently driven over a bridge today because you had an underlying belief in the structural integrity of the bridge)?
3. If you lived as though you could not know the truth about anything, how would it affect your life?

## What Is Truth?

Truth, if it is truth, must correspond with reality, and that goes for footballs or flowers, which we can see and touch, and gravity or God, which we cannot. (55)

4. How would you define truth in your own words?
5. Do you think truth is something we discover or something we create?

## Arriving at Truth

Discovering truth is not about picking and choosing any *possible* conclusion; it is about looking at the evidence and arriving at the *most reasonable* conclusion. (58)

Maybe absolute certainty is not what we should be aiming for when it comes to knowledge. Maybe we should aim for something much more reasonable. (60)

6. What kind of evidence could help us come to a reasonable conclusion about God?

## Truth or Consequences

Some people struggle to embrace the reality of God not because the evidence for God is weak but because the thought of God makes them rather uneasy. (65)

7. Have you ever found yourself resisting what is true? Why do you think you were resistant? Did you experience any consequences because you were slow to embrace the truth?
8. If a person is uncomfortable with the idea of a God who is all knowing and all powerful, why is that discomfort unimportant when it comes to the truth of his existence or his character?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

9. If truth can set people free, what does that say about the importance of embracing truth versus ignoring it?

## Wrapping It Up

10. What would it look like for someone to honestly pursue truth about God?



## How Can a Person Believe in God in this Scientific Age?

When the scientific age began, few had any concerns about the compatibility of God and science. Over the last 150 years, however, science and belief in God seem to have been at war. On the one hand there are those who say, “I am all about reason and science” and on the other hand, there are those who say, “The God of the Bible is real and made everything.”

### Getting Started

1. Do you think science and belief in God are in conflict, supportive of one another, or unrelated? Why?

### What Scientists Think

When Elaine Howard Ecklund, an expert in the relationship between science and faith, completed an extensive survey of 1,700 elite scientists at the nation's top research universities and personally interviewed 275 of them . . . she found that only 15% of scientists see science and religion fundamentally at odds with one another. (70)

2. What surprises you about the fact that many elite scientists do not see science and religion as fundamentally opposed?

### God and Science as Explanations of Our World

My wife and I just finished a kitchen renovation project. We put in new floors and countertops, painted the cabinets, and installed two new appliances and a sink. . . . At the same time, however, it could be argued that we did not renovate the kitchen at all. . . . It was the general contractor and the various subcontractors who were the ones who did the work . . . But, of course, none of it would have happened without our direction. In other words, just because the completion of the project can be explained by all of the craftsmen, it does nothing to eliminate our involvement as the originator of it. We can still say that we renovated the kitchen. (73)

3. Why does understanding the scientific process for how something came about not cancel out the possibility that God was also involved?

### Examining the Limits of Science

“Science is limited in that its tools are only appropriate for the exploration of nature. Science can therefore certainly never discount the possibility of something outside of nature.” – Francis Collins (74)

4. What makes science ill-suited for determining whether the supernatural exists?

Consider the life of William Shakespeare. We might look to certain writings by or about him, but that falls very short of scientific evidence of his existence. Yet, I think many people are more certain of Shakespeare's existence than the reported effectiveness of a new cancer treatment. (75)

5. How is scientism (the belief that the hard sciences are the only or most reliable source of knowledge) a faulty assumption?

### Belief in God Fits Well with Science

Given the far-reaching losses that occur when we remove God from the scientific endeavor, maybe the God assumption is not outdated scaffolding but necessary structural support. And maybe this is why when compared to belief in God, atheism “isn’t particularly well-suited to helping science achieve its aims.” Whereas Christianity provides a framework that undergirds the general trustworthiness of our cognitive skills, the existence of enduring value and purpose, the impetus for research of yet understood biological functions, and an objective source of ethical behavior and accountability, atheism does not. (82)

6. Some people believe atheism fits better with science. Why might that not be the case? (see p. 81)?
7. In what ways might belief in God create a better framework for the scientific endeavor than atheism?

### What’s the Bible Have to Say?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
(Genesis 1:1)

By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he  
created the heavens. (Proverbs 3:19)

8. Are there any ways in which your understanding of science makes you doubt the existence of a God who created the universe?
  
9. If God did make the universe, how might the study of science increase your awe of God?

### **Wrapping It Up**

10. After this discussion, do you see science and belief in God as more compatible or less compatible? Why?



## Don't Christians Use Their Faith As an Emotional Crutch?

Life can be hard, even devastating. No wonder people are looking for ways to cope, and in many cases, turning to religion to do so. But if belief in God or Christianity is just an illusion designed to make us feel better, then perhaps we should come to terms with reality and dispense with giving homage to the Divine. Then, again, if Christianity is true maybe the comfort and strength found from it is exactly what we need.

### Getting Started

1. When you hear someone say, “Christianity is just an emotional crutch,” what do you think they mean? In what ways do you find that claim persuasive or not persuasive?

### Turning the Question Around

Too often the beliefs of Christians in particular, and the religious in general, are dismissed out of hand. Tough-minded intellectuals . . . claim that Christians . . . should not be taken seriously.

Christians simply believe what they believe because of their upbringing, because of the meaning or comfort a mythological God gives them, and because of the personal gain they derive from holding on to their beliefs. But cannot these same defeating statements about Christian faith be applied to those who hold onto atheism as well? (95)

2. Is it possible that rejecting God could also be emotionally motivated?

### Comfort and Truth

I might take comfort in the hope that one million dollars will find its way into my bank account by month's end, but that wish says nothing about whether or not the funds will actually appear. In contrast, you might take comfort in not finding a million added to your account, because you don't want the family attention it would bring . . . Clearly, then, the psychology behind believing in the existence or nonexistence of a million dollars is irrelevant when it comes to the truth of those beliefs. (96-97)

3. Why is it important to separate the question of truth from the question of emotional desire?
4. Can you think of things that are both comforting and true?

It is not that most self-proclaimed nonbelievers have ardently looked at the evidence and have found it to be insufficient. Rather, they have rejected Christianity without examining it at all. (100)

5. How well would you rate your own examination of the evidence for Christianity? Is there any evidence that has convinced you one way or the other?

### **Where Are Our Emotional Needs Leading**

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy [like for peace, purpose, hope, acceptance, or forgiveness], the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” – C.S. Lewis (103)

6. How might our deepest needs be a sign that there is something beyond the physical world?
7. If Christianity is true, should we expect to find at least some emotional value to our belief in it?

Atheists may feel no need for God and see themselves as getting along just fine without embracing Christianity. But if you find yourself in that camp, it is valuable to remember that my brother certainly felt no need for chemotherapy [before he was diagnosed with cancer]. He felt as healthy as ever. But his lack of felt need was not a reliable measure of truth. (101)

8. Why is a lack of felt need at any given moment (I don't feel sick) not a reliable measure of reality (I have cancer)? How does your answer speak to any present lack of felt need you might have for God?

### **What's the Bible Have to Say?**

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

9. Are the comfort, hope, and peace offered in these verses just an escape from reality, or is Jesus really able to provide these to us if we trust in him? How would you support your answer?

### **Wrapping It Up**

10. After this discussion, how would you respond to someone who says, "Christianity is just a crutch"?



## Haven't Christians Caused More Harm Than Good?

Whether it's a modern-day pastor stealing from the church, sexual abuse at the hands of priests, or a sordid past of Crusades and inquisitions, it's not hard to find plenty of harm done at the hands of those who call themselves Christians. Add to that the hypocrisy we see from friends who call us to live like Jesus but fall way short themselves, and it's no wonder so many have chosen to steer clear of Christianity.

### Getting Started

1. When you hear the claim that Christianity has caused more harm than good, what examples come to mind? How has that shaped your view of Christianity?

### Exploring Hypocrisy

Christianity . . . is about Christ and his words and actions. If Christ is found wanting, then you can go on your merry way and dismiss Christianity altogether. If, however, there is a ring of truth to Jesus' words, then maybe you ought to give Christianity a good hearing even if some of Jesus' words are being repeated by people you do not respect. (112)

2. If we dismiss the teaching of everyone who does not live up to their word, what should others respond to what we teach?
3. Why should truth, even from the lips of a hypocrite, not be ignored?
4. What makes it strange to blame Jesus for the hypocrisy of others and to reject him when he hated the same hypocrisy?

## More Good Than Harm?

It is in fashion to bash Christianity as being repressive and backward and contributing little that's positive to society, but such a conclusion doesn't measure up to history. Although Christians have at times done harm along the way, they also have greatly shaped our spirit of charity, the healthcare we've come to expect, the educational opportunities we take for granted, and the arts we have long enjoyed. In other words, Christians have created much of the world we enjoy today. (123)

5. In what ways has Christian thinking positively impacted the world in which we live?
6. Do you believe Christians have done more good than harm? What experiences have shaped your thinking?

An abundance of research indicates that those who attend religious services on a regular basis not only live longer but also have "lower blood pressure, better cardiovascular function, less coronary artery disease, better immune function, better endocrine function, better social support, greater marital stability, greater purpose in life, and overall higher levels of happiness and subjective well-being. (124-125)

7. Recent research suggests that religiously engaged people live healthier happier lives. Do you find that research surprising? Does it make you any more apt to pursue Christianity?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. . . . Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. (Matthew 7:17,20)

8. Is everyone who claims to be a Christian actually a Christian? If not, could some of the people who give Christianity a bad name be "imposters"?

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! (Matthew 23:25)

9. What do you find comforting—or uncomfortable—about Jesus' words to hypocrites?

### **Wrapping It Up**

10. Has this chapter impacted your willingness to consider or pursue Jesus even if Christians have failed to live up to his teachings?



## Why Should I Trust What the Bible Has to Say?

One of the longest standing and most prevalent conspiracy theories has to do with the Bible. On one hand, the Bible is the world's best-selling book and revered by many as an accurate account of historical events and, perhaps more importantly, God's word to humanity. On the other hand, some have concluded that the Bible is a grand hoax written to prop up political and religious leaders and control the masses. For many, it is somewhere in between.

### Getting Started

1. What is your estimation of the Bible? Is it full of made-up stories? Does it provide an accurate account of history? Is it a book from God?

### The Authenticity of the Bible

The authenticity of the Bible is well attested. There are many available copies. The copies date back close to the original date of authorship, and the copies compare well with one another. Why then do people dismiss the authenticity of the Bible? (138)

2. In what ways is the handing down of the biblical text over the centuries not like the telephone game?
3. Is there anything about the number, date, and consistency of the early Bible manuscripts that gives you more confidence that today's Bible reflects what was originally written?
4. Do you think it is right for people to be more suspicious about the Bible's authenticity than about the authenticity of other ancient works? Explain your position.

## The Accuracy of the Bible

A large chunk of Scripture is telling us that this or that happened between this person and that in such and such a place. I find this particularly helpful, because it gives us plenty of data points to fact-check its authors and evaluate its historical accuracy. If there is little to no evidence of the people, places, and events mentioned in the Bible, or, more importantly, if there is evidence to the contrary, we can dismiss it as a hoax. (141)

5. Is there anything in the Bible that makes you question its historical accuracy? If so, what is it?
6. How does the fact that many details about Jesus' life and death are mentioned by ancient, non-Christian writers impact your view of the historical accuracy of the Bible?

## The Authority of the Bible

It's one thing to say the Bible we read today has been copied well and is historically accurate, but it's quite another to say that it is humankind's clearest insight into God himself and that it is a definitive source on how we might enjoy a relationship with God. . . . So even if the Bible is historically accurate, why should we say that it is the "word of God," and thus more worthy of our attention than any other book? (149)

7. Many people say they want God to prove himself. Do you think that miracles and fulfilled prophecy provide enough evidence that the words of those who wrote the Bible are from God?
8. Have you experienced putting into practice anything the Bible has to say (for example, forgiving others) that gives you greater confidence in the authority of the Bible?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.  
(2 Timothy 3:16)

9. Do you believe the Bible finds its source in God and should shape what we believe and how we live? How did you arrive at that view?

### **Wrapping It Up**

10. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much would you say you trust the reliability of the Bible? Is this different than where you would have placed yourself on the scale before reading the chapter? If so, what changed your position?



## How Can a Rational Person Accept the Miracle Stories in the Bible?

Many people can swallow what the Bible says about loving your neighbor, but when Jesus starts making the paralyzed walk or raises the dead, it is easy for doubts to arise. Sure, there might be some historical characters and events recorded in the Bible, as we saw in the last chapter, but shouldn't miracles—especially the resurrection of Jesus—undermine the Bible's credibility in the mind of a rational person?

### Getting Started

1. In this chapter, miracles are defined not just as rare occurrences but as the result of supernatural intervention. What makes you believe or disbelieve that the supernatural can intervene in human affairs?

### Are Miracles Possible?

If God does exist, then miracles move into the realm of possibility. Or, as some have said, "If there is a God who can act, acts of God are possible." (161)

2. If evidence for the existence of God is convincing, does that give us reason to believe in the possibility of miracles? What leads you to that conclusion?

### Have Miracles Actually Happened?

In this chapter, these criteria for identifying a miracle are proposed:

- A well-observed "before" condition
- A well-observed and dramatically improved "after" condition
- No plausible natural process that can explain the improvement in condition
- A specific command or prayer spoken with the purpose of supernatural intervention is made just prior to the improved condition (164)

3. If an event meets these criteria, would you be open to calling it a miracle? If not, what additional evidence would give you greater confidence?
4. Have you ever experienced a miracle or know of someone who has?

## Miracles & Jesus

If the miracles recorded in Scripture really happened, then there is added reason to take notice of the words of those who performed them. This is particularly true of the words of Jesus, who not only is the central figure in the Christian narrative but also performs more miracles than any other person in Scripture. (166)

5. Do you think the miracle stories about Jesus are historical, symbolic, or legendary? What leads you to that conclusion?
6. If Jesus did perform miracles, how would that impact your trust in what he had to say?

## The Resurrection of Jesus

When looking at the evidence, is it possible to arrive at a conclusion other than a bodily resurrection? Of course, it is. But the more important question is: Does an alternative conclusion better fit the evidence? I don't think so. The historical resurrection of Jesus is the most plausible explanation of the evidence. (175)

7. What evidence for the resurrection is most compelling to you? Which is the least compelling?
8. If Jesus did rise from the dead, would that be enough to make you want to follow Jesus?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. (1 Corinthians 15:14)

9. Why do you think Christians believe the resurrection is so central to their faith?

## Wrapping It Up

10. If someone asked you today whether you believed in miracles—that God occasionally makes things happen in our world that would not happen on their own—what would you say?



## Isn't the Bible Out of Step with the Times?

No one likes to feel out of place, so it's no surprise when people are concerned that the Bible often finds itself at odds with the consensus position on the most pressing issues of the day. In fact, maybe you've found yourself saying, "There may have been a time when the Bible made sense to people, but haven't times changed? Don't we know better now?"

### Getting Started

1. In what ways do you think the teaching of the Bible is old-fashioned or outdated?

### Old Isn't Always Bad

If we are quick to dismiss voices just because they are old or don't meet the standards of today, what will the people of tomorrow do? Will they not dismiss the positions we are claiming today and say that our take on issues is unworthy of consideration—and perhaps even worthy of disdain—because our stance is out of step with their times? And if they do, it won't be just the Bible that is out of step with the times but the purveyors of today's moral standards as well. (180)

2. What is an old standard of doing things that may be better than what is often encouraged today?

### Examining Progress

"We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man." —C.S. Lewis (183)

3. Humans keep crafting a new set of moral codes and obligations, and yet war and genocide and oppression remain. Why do you think this is the case?

4. If humanity isn't making progress—at least moral progress—what is the about-turn we must make to get back to the right road?

### **The Value of a Steady Plumbline**

Having a consistent plumb line like the Bible can . . .

- keep you from the exhaustion of calling your own shots
  - give you direction and confidence in the midst of competing voices
  - keep you from using power to hurt other people
  - give you dignity when others think little of you
  - help you find your true identity (184-189)
5. Which of these potential advantages to having a biblical plumbline are the most and least compelling?

### **Inescapable Constraints**

When people say the Bible is outdated, what they often mean is that they no longer want to be subject to constraints. At best, they see the Bible as cramping their style; at worst it is spreading dangerous ideas. I wonder, however, if in leaving the Bible behind we really free ourselves from constraints. (189)

6. Do you think we could be similarly impacted if we don't embrace what the Bible says about other issues like greed, care of the poor, human sexuality, parenting, selfishness, trust in God?

### **What's the Bible Have to Say?**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

7. Why might it matter to seek God's will in every area of life—not just the parts we agree with?

8. What reservations do you have when it comes to trusting what the God of the Bible has to say instead of trusting contemporary views regarding right and wrong, good and evil?

### **Wrapping It Up**

9. What thoughts or ideas in this chapter make you more or less likely to learn more about what the Bible teaches?



## If God Is Real, Why Is There So Much Evil and Suffering?

Evil and suffering are out there everywhere, dressed up in every kind of uniform. And while we each have experienced the pain of it to different degrees, no one has been untouched. But how are we to explain an evil and pain-filled world if God is both loving and all powerful? Being loving, wouldn't he want to stop the carnage, and being all-powerful, wouldn't he be able to do so?

### Getting Started

1. This question of this chapter can be very personal. What difficult things have you seen and experienced that make you question God or doubt his existence?

### The Compatibility of God and Suffering

Despite my love and power, I still chose to have my children vaccinated. In fact, it was because of my love and with my power that I made sure that it all happened. Why? Because I had overriding reasons that were more important than preventing the suffering they would experience that day. (199-200)

2. Do you find it impossible for a good and all-loving God to exist given all the pain and suffering in the world? Or do you think God could have overriding reasons for allowing pain and suffering?

"I left the church in part because I was mad at God about human suffering and injustice. And I came back to church because of that same struggle. I realized that I couldn't even talk about justice without standing inside of a theistic framework." – Andrea Dilley (201)

3. Rather than disprove God, how can our sense of injustice at the suffering we see in the world confirm the existence of God?

## The Risk of Real Relationship

The biblical story says that God made people so that he might enjoy relationship with them. He could have made them like Mr. and Ms. Wonderful Dolls and preprogrammed them so they always did and said just what God wanted. But if he did that, God would not enjoy real relationship with them, because love has to be freely given and not coerced. So instead of creating robots, God took a risk. (204)

4. Would you rather be loved by a robot programmed to love you or by a real person who freely chooses to love you? How does your answer speak to why God chose to create us with free will rather than as robots?

## How Good Are We?

Comparing myself with other people had me thinking I was doing just fine; in fact, it seemed God probably owed me a thing or two. But once I saw that throughout my life, I had done something way worse than hit a teacher or police officer, I found it harder to call God unjust for any pain and suffering that came my way. (210)

5. Have you ever considered your wrongdoing not just an offense against other people but an offense against God himself? Does that make you less comfortable with your own moral failures?
6. By our own admission, we fall short in many ways. If that's the case, why do we feel we deserve a world that is void of pain and suffering?

## Pain & Suffering as a Warning

Maybe the reason God allows us to feel pain and suffering in the world is to alert us to the fact that something has gone awry inside each of us. If so, God is not uncaring by allowing it but instead after what is best for each and every one of us. (205)

7. We often put pain and suffering in the category of "bad." In what ways can pain and suffering be good for us?

## A God Who Knows Our Pain & Does Something About It

Jesus is one who can sympathize with the very pain and evil we are experiencing, and even welcomes us crying out to him . . . But if Jesus were only a shoulder to cry on, God would still fall short in addressing the hurt that fills our world. . . . [So,] he promises to all who trust in him a pathway forward—a pathway to a place that is free of evil and suffering. (214)

8. Does the fact that Jesus experienced pain and suffering as well as evil and injustice give us more reason to follow him? What makes you say that?
9. How does the prospect of an eternity absent of pain and suffering provide hope in the midst of the pain and suffering found in our present world?

## What's the Bible Have to Say

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief. (Psalm 22:1-2)

10. When David wrote this psalm, he felt like God had abandoned him. Why do you think verses like these were included in the Bible?

## Wrapping It Up

11. What did you find most helpful in this chapter, and what questions about evil and suffering remain?



## With So Many Religions, Why Say Christianity Is the Only Way?

One of the great advantages to living in a multiethnic city is the incredible diversity of people who represent a broad variety of beliefs and backgrounds. Many are the most caring people you could know. So if kind and gracious people come from every religion, why should we say that any one religion is better than another? And why should Christians ever suggest that Jesus is the only way to God?

### Getting Started

1. In your opinion, are all religions equally legitimate ways to discover God or do one or more religions have a better handle on the truth?

### Aiming to Be Right-Minded

If all religions are equally true and I say only one is true, I am not being right-minded in my exclusive thinking. However, if only one way is true and I claim that all religious roads are equally valid, I am not only errantly open-minded but heading down a path that has no good end. (221)

2. What kind of claims have you found to be too exclusive (for example, “Only a *man* could build that.”) or not exclusive enough (for example, “*Anyone* could build that.”)?
3. What advice would you give someone to help them avoid being either too open-minded or too narrow-minded? Would that same advice apply when examining different world religions?

### The Limits of Sincerity

Sincerity may be a venerable trait, but it does not ensure truth or a good outcome. (222)

4. When have you seen someone who was very sincere in their beliefs experience a bad outcome because their beliefs did not match truth or reality?

### **The Exclusive Claims of Jesus**

If we are to form our view of Christianity from the words of Jesus and his early followers, we must come to the conclusion that Jesus was God himself, and it was his life and death and resurrection that paved the way for all who trust in him to be made right with God now and throughout eternity. (225)

5. What are some of the exclusive/narrow claims of Jesus that stand out to you?

### **Lord, Liar, or Lunatic**

Jesus' teaching, however, does not afford us the option of merely calling him a good moral teacher. Jesus presented himself as God and said that our only way to eternal life is to trust in his sole authority to forgive our sins. If Jesus was wrong about this, then he was not a good moral teacher. Either he knowingly lied about himself, or he was severely deluded as to his own identity and led his followers astray. (224)

6. Based on Jesus' claims, would you say Jesus is the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic? Why?

### **The Exclusive Claims of Other Religions**

Jesus made exclusive claims about himself and about the way to God. That, in and of itself, might make you wince. But making exclusive claims is not unusual among religions. A quick review of major religions indicates that exclusive claims are par for the course. (225)

7. Are you surprised to hear that every religion makes exclusive claims? Why can't they all be right?

## Why Christianity?

So why not go with the one religion that puts Jesus front and center, the one religion that is supported by the historical record? It's the one religion that deeply recognizes our own failings and yet offers God's mercy, no strings attached. And it's the one religion that offers not just principles and rules but a person—Jesus Christ—to worship and follow. (237)

8. The author mentioned the following reasons to place your trust in Jesus:
- Jesus was a real person whose life could be examined. (231)
  - Jesus made one-of-a-kind claims. (232)
  - Jesus authenticated his claims through miracles including his resurrection. (232)
  - Jesus treated people with great compassion and care. (234)
  - Jesus lived a sinless life. (235)
  - Jesus offered a means to be made right with God to everyone through his own sacrificial death. (236)

Which reasons are most compelling to you?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

9. Many people want to be in good standing with God. Jesus says that cannot happen unless you trust in who he claims to be. Do you agree with him and why?

## Wrapping It Up

10. What is your biggest takeaway from this chapter?



## I'm a Good Person—Isn't That Enough?

Ask people what qualifies someone for heaven, and you'll likely get a reply that has something to do with being a good person. But what is a good person? And how do we know if we've been good enough? If we can't answer questions like these, it's hard to be confident that we'll enjoy anything good on the other side.

### Getting Started

1. Why do you think so many people hold to the idea that good works are the key to getting right with God and enjoying a heavenly future?

### Why the Good Works Model *Doesn't* Make Sense

Even if we knew what counted as good works, we are still left guessing as to whether we have done enough. (245)

2. Have you ever wondered whether you have done enough good things to be right with God? What would be counted in your favor and what would be counted against you?
3. In *Questioning God*, the following five reasons are given for why the “good works model is problematic. Which of the five stands out to you?
  - We don't know whose standard we are to use when deciding what is good and what is bad.
  - We don't know what percentage of our actions must be good.
  - We don't know if our different deeds (good or bad) are weighted differently when calculating just how good we have been.
  - We don't know if we will be judged by the outcomes of our actions or our intentions.
  - If God does not provide us clarity on how we measure up, he certainly doesn't seem just or loving.

## We Aren't Good Enough

I was watching a film that had a man standing in front of a large white wall. On the wall were all kinds of words like selfishness, lust, rage, gluttony, arrogance, and bitterness. There were also words that mentioned good things left undone, like the time you could have helped some people but purposely ignored them. The presenter in front of the wall said that if all his thoughts and deeds of the last month were publicly displayed on a wall like the one he was standing in front of, he would be utterly ashamed. He would leave town, change his name, and make sure no one ever connected him to that wall of shame. When he shared this, I knew exactly how he felt (248)

4. If all you shouldn't have done and said but did anyways (and everything you should have done and said but didn't) were posted on the internet for everyone to see, what would you do? What does your answer say about your own goodness?

## The Standard Is Perfection

Imagine an endurance swim race that starts on the shores of Los Angeles and ends in Honolulu. In addition to its absurd distance, it also requires participants to be fully committed. That is, once you hit the water, it's literally do or die. There is no turning back. On the beach are Olympic greats like Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky as well as your neighbor next door who walks with a cane. The gun goes off and everyone enters the water. Some make it just a few feet, others like Phelps and Ledecky endure for miles, and a few little-known endurance athletes make it 100 miles before petering out. But as you might guess, no one makes it to Hawaii. Not even close. (250)

5. Is it possible to be a better person relative to others and yet still fall woefully short of God's perfect standard?
6. If God doesn't measure us by how well we compare with others, but by how well we compare with his own character and ways, what does that say about our standing with God?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment. (John 3:36)

They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?" Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29)

7. The Bible tells us that the only way we can be right with God is to believe that Jesus' death paid the price for our shortcomings and that his resurrection opened the door for us to have new and eternal life with God. Do you agree with this? If not, what reservations do you have?
8. What do you think it means to believe in Jesus—the One God sent?
9. How does the call to trust in Jesus address our inability to earn our way to God through good works?

## Wrapping It Up

10. Suppose you were at the entrance to heaven and were asked by an angel guarding the gate, "Why should I let you in?" – would your answer be the same as it was before you read this chapter or would it be different?



## If God Is Loving, Why Would He Send Anyone to Hell?

Of all the things that Christians believe, hell might be the belief that is the hardest to swallow. You may be okay with the idea that God exists, that miracles might happen from time to time, or even that Jesus may have even resurrected from the dead. But then there is hell—that horrid place Christians say people go if they do not trust in Jesus. For many, this is where Christianity has gone too far. How, it is asked, can a loving God possibly send people to hell for eternity?

### Getting Started

1. Do you believe in hell? If so, what do you think it is like and who goes there?

### Jesus & Hell

You won't find any character in the Bible who speaks more about hell than Jesus did. Sometimes he spoke of hell rather directly . . . At other times, Jesus developed stories with the very moral being the judgment of hell. (262-263)

2. What surprises you about the fact that Jesus spoke about hell so frequently?

### Love & Hell

If God simply ignored the hurt and pain we did to others and others did to us, it would be difficult to describe God as particularly loving. . . . So one way to answer the question of how a loving God could send anyone to hell is by saying that “true love cares enough to punish wrongdoing,” and that hell is a place where punishment is properly executed for those who are unrepentant and do not seek the forgiveness found in Christ. (267)

3. Do you find talk about hell consistent or inconsistent with a loving God?

## Love Provides a Warning

When we look at Jesus' words about hell, we consistently see that he speaks of hell as a warning . . . That's what love does when danger is lurking; it warns people emphatically of what harm will come if action is not taken. What would not be loving would be for Jesus to know of hell and provide no warning at all. (269)

4. Which would have been more loving of Jesus—to warn us about hell or to gloss over sin's true impact?

## Love Provides a Way to Safety

Jesus said hell was real and that people could be sent there, but it is difficult to sustain the idea that Jesus' position was unloving when he offered his own life so that we can avoid all that hell entails. (269)

5. Would it be fair to call Jesus unloving, if he warns of hell and provides a way around it but those warnings are disregarded?

## Love Excludes the Disinterested

If we reject Jesus and believe ourselves in no need of his forgiveness and his life, we will be left outside of heaven. Not because God doesn't want us to enjoy heaven but because letting us in would ruin the party for everyone who readily accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. (271-272)

6. How does it demonstrate love to exclude those who find Jesus unnecessary, uncomfortable, or unworthy from an eternal party centered on Jesus?

## We Should Never Be Comfortable with Hell

Hell is a difficult notion for anyone to swallow because it is so very hard to *feel* good about it, even if it does not conflict with God's love. But maybe the reason we don't feel good about it is because God does not want us to feel good about it. That is, maybe God doesn't want us to be at peace with any human rebellion (as tame as it may seem) that ultimately leads people to hell. (277)

7. Even if we believe in hell, should we still be uncomfortable with it and what should that discomfort cause us to do?

### **What's the Bible Have to Say?**

As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. (Ezekiel 33:11a)

The Lord . . . does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. (2 Peter 3:9)

8. God has given us an opportunity to be with him forever. If we don't take that opportunity and heed the warning of hell is that reflective of God's wishes or our own?

### **Wrapping It Up**

9. At the end of this chapter, some specific questions about hell were answered. What further questions do you have about hell?



## Will God Judge People Who Have Never Heard of Jesus?

Christianity claims that to end up on the good side of eternity, you must recognize your own waywardness and trust that Jesus Christ is the only means by which you can be made right with God. But it is natural to wonder what happens to those who have never heard of Jesus, because it seems terribly unfair for people to be judged by God for not trusting in Jesus if they have never heard of Jesus in the first place.

### Getting Started

1. Is the question of this chapter one with which you personally struggle? Why or why not?

Believing “there are no worries if there is no knowledge” puts Christians in the odd position of endangering the eternal destiny of others if they speak of Jesus. (283)

2. What is problematic about concluding that those who have never heard of Jesus won't be judged by God for their unbelief?
3. What is a problematic about concluding that those who have never heard of Jesus will be judged by God for their unbelief?

### Clues That Lead Us to God

[God] has created a beautiful world for us to live in that speaks loudly of his power and creativity to people everywhere. . . . and he has given us a conscience that, at least in part, lets us know that we have not met it. (289)

4. If we consider the beauty and structure of our universe, what can we deduce about its maker?

5. If our conscience lets us know that we fall short of our own standard (let alone God's), what should we seek from God?
6. Do you think the grandeur of the universe and the voice of conscience are clues that could possibly lead us to Jesus?

### Where Jesus Shows Up

“O children and grandchildren! If we repent of our sins,  
And cease to do evil—restraining our passions—  
And pray to Y’wa, he will have mercy upon us again.  
If Y’wa does not have mercy on us, there is no other one who can.  
He who saves us is the only one—Y’wa.” –Karen Hymn (291)

7. How does the hymn of the Karen show us about what God can reveal about himself to all people?
8. Are you surprised to hear that in places where there is little public information about Jesus many have reported having dreams and visions of Jesus? What does this say about the restrictions we place on where the message of Jesus may and may not be heard?

### What’s the Bible Have to Say?

If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.  
(Jeremiah 29:13)

9. What does it say about God if he desires to reveal himself to all who honestly seek him? Can you think of a situation in which God would be unable to reach someone with a message of Jesus who is seeking him?

### Wrapping It Up

10. Reading through *Questioning God* has provided lots of information about Jesus. That means that while we may still be unsure of what others know about Jesus, we remain responsible for what we know. What do you want to do with the information you have about Jesus?



## If Christianity Is True, Where Do I Start?

The aim of *Questioning God* has been to provide you with facts and reasons and information for you to consider about God, the Bible, and Jesus. Every person requires a different weight of evidence to be convinced of the truth, but maybe you're at a place where it's starting to make sense. In that case, you might just be asking, so where do I start?

### Getting Started

1. Has *Questioning God* given you enough evidence to want to follow Jesus? If not, what other kinds of evidence are you still looking for?

### Look to Jesus

If what Jesus says is true, and if what Christians have been declaring through the centuries is true, then the right place for you to start is by humbly acknowledging that your own sin has put you in a desperate state. And then, having done that, to look to Jesus as the only means by which you can be saved. (305)

2. How does the illustration of Moses and the snake in the desert point to our need to look to Jesus?
3. Do you recognize you've been bitten by the "snake of sin"? Do you agree that Jesus is only one who can heal you?

### Love Well

Imagine waking up tomorrow and beginning your day praying, "Lord, today I want to love you well, and I know loving you well means loving the people you have made. So, help me, Lord, to love the people in my world today—my family, my friends, the people I work with, the people I live by, the people I bump into along the way." (307)

4. How does Jesus' love for you act as a motivation and model to love others? What is one way you can love someone better today?

### Learn and Do

[Jesus] knew his time with [his disciples] was nearing its end, and he wanted to make sure they clearly understood a few things. At one point he told them rather bluntly, "If you love me, obey my commandments." If Jesus had said it just once, it would have been important enough to note, but a few moments later, he repeated himself, saying, "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me." (308)

5. How might we go about learning the commands of Jesus? How could we do that with others?
6. If Jesus recognizes our love by the way we follow him and his teaching, what should we do when we discover one of his commands?

### Let Jesus into Every Room

Too often people see Jesus as an addition to their home—one more room among many that is visited on occasion (such as Easter and Christmas). But Jesus is never satisfied with that arrangement. His intent is to reshape the rooms in which we already live. (310)

7. What is a room in your life that Jesus may want to reshape?

### Tell Others

If Christianity is true, if Jesus is the means by which we can enjoy life with God now and forevermore, and if rejection of Jesus has no good end, it is the kind of truth that ought to be shared with other people. (311)

8. Good news is hard to keep to yourself. If you've found Jesus to be good news, who is one person you'd like to invite to consider Jesus?

## What's the Bible Have to Say?

And now, *just as* you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. (Colossians 2:6)

9. How is the way in which we first come to Jesus help us understand how we should follow him day by day?

## Wrapping It Up

10. What have you found most valuable as you've gone through *Questioning God*? What would be a good next step for you?