

# The Quest to Know God

## Introduction

It was C. S. Lewis who reminded us that even though someone's hunger is not proof that food exists or that the person will get a meal any time soon, yet hunger is a powerful indicator that a person has a capacity to eat. Spiritual hunger works in much the same way within us humans. A spiritual hunger is a powerful indicator that there is something beyond ourselves that we can, and need to feed on. We all apparently have a built in yearning to be more than just bodies and brains.

This universal quest for the meaning outside of ourselves is the most important journey we can make. The truth is that every other question in life is secondary to this one, and depending on how we answer it, will unfold our life in radically different directions. It was Stephen Evans in his book *Quest for Life* who wrote, 'The Loch Ness Monster is merely 'one more thing'. God however, is not merely 'one more thing'. The person who believes in God and the person who does not believe in God do not merely disagree about God. They disagree about the very character of the universe. It was Blaise Pascal who said, 'to get the best out of life, great matters have to be given a second thought.' So let's do that in this study about God.

## Session 1

### Is anybody out there?

For centuries great minds have argued various positions hoping to settle the issue of whether or not God exists. Today the topic is quite intense. Listen to Norman Mailer writing in 1997. 'If God is all-good, then he is not all-powerful. If God is all-powerful, then he is not all good. I am a disbeliever in the omnipotence of God because of the Holocaust. But for 35 years or so I have been believing that he is doing the best he can.' Mailer is an angry atheist.

The God of his childhood didn't fit into his adult world, and so he has redefined God, or rather abandoned him. There are many like him today. The purpose of this session is to try to help us have some thoughtful contemplation to answer Mailer's observation, and for those who are like Mailer today.

1. Think back to your childhood. What did you believe about God during those years? Describe some ways your views have changed since then?
2. What are some factors that have influenced your current beliefs about God?
3. The following are the positions, which people today say about the existence of God
  - o Atheist says, there is no gods or god
  - o Agnostic says, it is not possible to know if there is a god or not
  - o Deist says, God created the universe but he left it alone ever since
  - o Theist says, God exists and is involved with creation, and continues to have an active participation with it.
  - o Polytheist says, many gods exist.
  - o Pantheist says, that God exists in and through everything in the universe.

Which of the above positions represents the most common belief amongst the people you work with?

4. How do you think people decide what they're going to believe about God?
5. Which of the above views can you begin to understand, and why?
6. Frequently we place our trust [that's all that faith means] in people or things, even though we cannot know for sure they are trustworthy, such as when we board an aeroplane. What other specific examples can you give of 'everyday faith'?
7. During those times when absolute proof is impossible [there is no guarantee a plane will arrive safely], what factors help you determine if you'll place your trust in something?
8. Since it is possible to doubt anything, and therefore impossible to prove absolutely the existence of God [or anything else], what factors would help you get to a reasonable certainty concerning God's existence?
9.
  - a. Describe if you can your reaction to people who are outspoken about their beliefs, especially if it clashes with your belief?
  - b. What conditions cause you to dislike, or conversely enjoy talking with them?

## Session 2

### How can anyone be sure that God exists?

Our senses are very important to us, they give us valuable information about the real world. Many things aren't available to our world of five senses, but are still dependent on these realities. Microwaves, television and radio waves. Even something as basic as love is impossible to touch, taste, see, smell, hear, but who denies love exists or that it is necessary for human survival?

God too eludes our senses, and for some, God's failure to connect with our senses for them settles the issue he does not exist. Unlike mathematical proofs, nothing in the realm of experience can be proven with absolute certainty, even an atheist will grant that. In the legal world we talk of 'reasonable doubt and reasonable certainty'. As long as we are humans that level of certainty will have to do, and when it comes to being sure of God, it's also what we must strive for. We cannot prove God's existence beyond reasonable doubt, but we can look at the ponderance of evidence, and end up with a reasonable certainty about God.

1. What is one thing you don't believe today that you used to believe when you were younger?  
What changed your mind?
2. Share some of the reasons you have now for your belief, or disbelief, in the existence of God?
3. Proving something using the scientific method requires that the occurrence be repeatable [someone has to check your finding, and duplicate them in laboratory conditions]. Therefore it is not possible, using the scientific method, to prove or disprove the existence of God. How does this reality impact your ability to believe or not believe in God?

Some arguments against the existence of God are:

Self-creation- The universe came into being spontaneously, with no known causal agent. Quantum motion and a combination of space, time and chance eventually produces the structures we observe today in the universe. Everything can be explained in terms of a known process.

Spontaneous generation- Life came through a series of natural forces working together without the assistance of a supreme being. Changes, which have occurred in living beings over, time give strong evidence that life evolved rather than was created.

The presence of evil-the existence of evil in the world implies that a loving and all-powerful God cannot exist.

4. What other arguments other than those above might people give against the existence of God?
5. To what extent do these arguments and other factors influence your thinking about God? Explain.

Some arguments for the existence of God:

Cosmological- The fact that there is something needs an explanation. There must be cause behind a corresponding effect, the universe is an effect, and so something must have caused it. By definition God is not an effect, rather he is eternal. Matter does not display this quality but rather is dependent, changeable, and according to the current scientific theories had a beginning [big bang]

Romans Ch 1 v20

Theological- The complex nature of the universe implies that there must be a designer behind the structure, if you have a watch there must be a watchmaker. If there is order there must be a designer. Psalm, 19 v1-4

Moral- All people seem to have a conscience that sends a signal of right and wrong. A generalisation can be made that transcends all cultures. A moral creator who put this standard in all humans best explains the universality of this trait. Romans Ch 1 v19 Ch 2 v 14-15

Experiential- Lots of rational, reasonable people believe in God. They claim that he answers prayer, guides them, has given them hope, and radically altered their behaviour towards their fellow human beings 2 Corinthians 5 v17

6. From the list above, or others you can come up with, select the argument that for you is the strongest to support the existence of God. Which is the weakest argument? Give reasons for your selection.
7. Do you think most people consider these arguments when drawing a conclusion about the existence of God? Should they? Why or why not?
8. There probably isn't a person who hasn't had doubts about the existence of God. When have you experienced these doubts, and how do you deal with them?

WE also need to know about God's character as well as His existence. After all if God does exist but is some kind of monster, who would want to relate to Him?

9. What are your fears about what God might be like? How do you think those affect your confidence in His existence or in His reliability?

A group of students on a bus trip decided to have a debate about the existence of God. They split into two groups, and used the bus to divide them up. Whoever believed in God sat on the right, those who didn't sat on the left. There was an even split between the 20 students. For the rest of the trip each student took it in turn to debate the for and against existence of God.

10. Which side of the bus would you have sat on in your Secondary School days?  
What about now?  
When would you have changed?  
How readily would you have joined in the debate?  
What guidelines would you have suggested to keep the spiritual discussion on track and beneficial?

### Session 3

## What is God really like?

Imagine you were being invited to a meal with your Boss. If that person had a reputation for being insensitive, loud-mouthed, you would probably not be looking forward to the meal. However if they were thoughtful, and took a personal interest in others you might be looking forward to such an event.

The same is true of our view of God. We all have our concept of God, which is often shaped by a wide variety of factors, which either encourages an encounter with Him, or discourages us from going any further in a relationship.

Our images of God most likely fall into one of these three broad categories.

God is a kind-hearted grandfather. A simple old guy, who smiles and laughs and delights to give good gifts to his, loved ones. Others see God as a stern policeman. Strict, killjoy, who has a long list of rules to enforce. Others see him as cosmic mechanic, a repairman whose task is to come affix life's problems.

Christianity encourages us to have a relationship with God, and to have that relationship, we must know who He is, and what He is really like.

1. Imagine you are taking a survey asking people what they think God is like. What from your experience of other people, are the most common characteristics they would mention?
2. Which of the three images of God, mentioned above [grandfather, policemen, mechanic] most closely resembles your understanding of God? What circumstances of your past contributed to that image of Him?

The Bible describes God in a variety of pictures, symbols and words. Below is a list, which explains in simple terms the attributes of God and their meaning

Omnipresent- always near

Omnipotent- can do anything.

Omniscient- knows everything.

Sovereign- ultimate ruler

Eternal-always has been

Immutable- doesn't change

Infinite- unlimited

Holy- pure

Wise- skilfully uses His knowledge

Good- has no evil

Just- is fair

Love- sacrifice is His nature

3. Which of the attributes listed above grabs your attention more than the others? Explain why those characteristics stand out for you
4. As you examine the list, are there any attributes that surprise or confuse you? Which one and why?
5. Given the list does God seem appealing to you? Why or why not? To what degree would you like to get to know God better?
6. You've probably heard someone say 'My God is not like that at all He's..... They could say 'more loving', 'more judgemental,' 'more tolerant'. Fill in the blank with words you have heard yourself. What's your reaction to the thinking behind such statements

7. Comment on the following statement ' Our opinions of God are like feathers caught in the gust of wind, which can neither alter nor direct the force of the wind. Our task is to discover God's true nature, to see what He's shown about Himself, regardless of our preferences.' Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
8. Go back and look at the attributes of God. Take few minutes to silently think about them.  
Now using the categories below, explain what your life could be like if you really allowed God to demonstrate those attribute towards you in your.  
Home  
Finances  
Life passion  
Friendships  
Recreation
9. The Bible says (James 2 v19) that event the Devil believes in God. What do you suppose is missing from the Devil's theology? What is the difference between the Devil's beliefs regarding God and your beliefs?
10. Expand on what you think is meant by the following statement 'It's one thing to believe that God described in he Bible exists, and quite another to let that belief impact your life.'  
Do you agree with this statement?  
Why or why not?
11. What is your greatest fear about what God might be like? What is your greatest fear about you'd be like if God was leading your life?
12. Describe if you can your early experiences of praying to God. What do prayers teach us about the beliefs of the person praying?

## Session 4

### How can rational people believe in miracles?

The God of the Bible is a miracle-working God. But did all these stories really happen? Did a flood really kill all but those people and animals placed in the Ark? Did Moses really part the Red Sea? It is undeniable that the Bible does claim miracles happened. Christianity without miracles is nothing more than a list of how to be a better person. With no power to become one, and no forgiveness when you're not. So if miracles don't occur, if the reports in the Bible are either exaggerations, simple-minded stories, or worse out-right deception, if God doesn't exist or, if He does exist but didn't do the things attributed to Him, then Christianity is not true. It is a false religion, a pious fraud. In this session we hope to answer the question "Could miracles occur?" Ruling out miracles before even looking at the evidence is irrational.

1. Consider the following list of events. A spectacular sunset; the birth of a child; the healing of a broken bone; a complete cure from cancer without medical treatment; a man walking on water. Which of these events would you label as a miracle?
2. Why do you suppose many people find it difficult if not impossible, to believe in miracles?

For the purpose of this discussion the term miracle we will define as. 'An event that cannot be given a natural explanation but must be attributed directly to God, who has acted in a special way in the natural order.' (C Stephen Evans)

3. What do you think of the following statement. 'If God doesn't exist, by definition miracles don't happen, because a miracle is an act of God. If, on the other hand, God does exist and He is the creator of the universe, miracles are possible because the God who created everything has all this power to choose to do something else.'
4. Read 1 Corinthians Ch 15 v3-8. Why would Paul make a point of noting the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus back from the dead? Why would the mention of five hundred people who simultaneously saw Jesus be a powerful piece of evidence?
5. Have you ever had a personal experience you believed to be a miracle? Tell your group about that experience.
6. What is your emotional reaction to the thought that God might do something in your life that you couldn't explain? What about the idea that He could do something miraculous for you but hasn't?
7. Read John Ch 2 v23 and 10 v24-25. According to these passages, what is the value of Jesus' miracles? Even though they were twenty centuries removed from the events, how is His point still valid?
8. Read Matthew Ch 12 v24. What insight can you gain into human nature from this irrational reaction to Jesus' miracles?
9. What specific questions have you struggled with in the past or now, that relate to the issue of miracles?
10. Do you agree with the statement. 'If miracles never happen, Christianity cannot be true? Explain.

## Session 5

### Does God care what happens to people?

Imagine you're in an aeroplane flying at 35,000 feet, Looking down, roads and buildings look very small from such a distance. Now go higher, and picture yourself seeing earth below, then go higher still, and allow your mental camera to ascend into the outreaches of our galaxy. Then realise that our galaxy is only one among billions of other galaxies. As you contemplate the vastness of the cosmos, it's hard to find much significance in one human life.

This session will be looking at the how God can invest in any one of us with significance, and how our own life has a unique contribution to make. The truth is that we are mere specks in the eye of the universe, but Christianity claims that we can also become cherished children of a Heavenly Father. So if there is evidence that God exists, cares about us?

1. Describe a situation in which you misplaced or lost something very valuable. How did you react when you finally discovered the valuable for which you were looking? (If you never did find it, how did you react when you realised it was gone for ever?)
2. Read Luke Ch 15v1-7. What attitude is Jesus responding to when He begins to tell this parable?
3. Read Luke Ch 15 v 8-10. Do you suppose this woman was greedy? What additional motive could have been behind her frantic search?
4. Read Luke Ch 15 v11-24. The same two main elements are represented in each of the following parables. What is the common thread that binds these parables together? What do you suppose the two main elements in each parable represent?  
Shepherd and sheep  
Woman and coin  
Father and son
5. Describe the reaction common to all three stories when the valuable was finally found.
6. According to Jesus, what do these three stories teach concerning how much God values lost people? How then would you suppose God reacts when lost people come to Him?
7. Think back to you description of how you felt when you lost something very valuable. How does your reaction in that situation compare to how God must feel towards those who are not yet part of his family?
8. How do you feel about the idea that God hosts a heavenly celebration when a single person comes to Him?
9. Read Matthew Ch 6 v25-26 and Matthew Ch 10 v29-31. What points are easy for to accept, and what points are difficult for you to agree with?
10. How difficult is it for you to really sense God's love for you? What factors influence this sense? Describe times in your life when you have felt loved by God?