**THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS – Small Group Study** **[[[1]](#footnote-1) [[2]](#footnote-2)]**

A group of people

Description automatically generated with low confidence

The **7 Big Questions** series will help you explore some of the most common spiritual questions we all share. Questions such as:

* **Does Life Have Purpose?**
* **Is There a God?**
* **Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?**
* **Is Christianity Too Narrow?**
* **Is Jesus Really God?**
* **Is the Bible Reliable?**
* **Can I Know God Personally?**

This series is for people with spiritual questions and curiosities. Who has those? Just about everybody – including me. I believe exploration is at the core of spiritual growth. We are all made to be curious, and we all have big questions about God, our purpose here, and why bad things happen to us.

You will explore each topic through printed transcripts of the videos and will be provided with questions and prompts that will help you reflect on what you read. hear.

**Discussion questions will show up in red**. Use these to prompt your own thinking or share them with a friend or family member. Write down your answers as a kind of journal.

**PLEASE NOTE: This series was presented as a DVD study series, but, although we cannot present the videos, we are able to include complete printed transcripts of each video.**

March 30, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 4-9)

**“Does Life Have Purpose?”**

**A picture containing person

Description automatically generatedPart 1** of the series **“7 Big Questions: Small Group Study”**

**Scripture Reading**: **Jeremiah 29:4-14 NCV**

**Scripture Text: Jeremiah 29:11 NCV**

**“I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

April 6, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 10-15)

**Logo

Description automatically generated“Is There a God?”**

**Part 2** of the series **“7 Big Questions: Small Group**

**Study”**

**Scripture Reading: Exodus 3:3-22 NCV**

**Scripture Text: Exodus 3:14 NCV**

**“God said to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM*. When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, ‘*I AM* sent me to you.’”**

April 13, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 16-22)

**Text, whiteboard

Description automatically generated“Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?”**

**Part 3** of the series **”7 Big Questions: Small Group Study”**

**Scripture Reading**: **Job 36:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

**“But God saves those who suffer through their suffering; he gets them to listen through their pain.”** (Job 36:15)

**“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ. If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.”** (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

April 20, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 23-33)

**“Is Christianity Too Narrow?”**

**Part 4** of the series **”7 Big Questions: Small Group Study”**

**Scripture Reading**: **John 14:6**

**“Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. The only way to the Father is through me.”**

April 27, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 34-45)

**A picture containing text, plate, tableware, dishware

Description automatically generated“Is Jesus Really God?”**

**Part 5** of the series **”7 Big Questions: Small Group Study”**

**Scripture Reading**: **John 1-5, 10-14 NCV; 1 John 4:2 GW**

**“In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.**

**The Word was in the world, and the world was made by him, but the world did not know him. He came to the world that was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. They did not become his children in any human way – by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.**

**The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his glory – the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father – and he was full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:1-5, 10-14)

**“This is how you can recognize God’s Spirit: Every person who declares that Jesus Christ has come as a human has the Spirit that is from God.”** (1 John 4:2 GW)

May 4, 2022 Pastor Leigh Straiton (Pages 46-)

**A picture containing text

Description automatically generated“Is Jesus Really God?”**

**Part 6** of the series **”7 Big Questions: Small Group Study”**

**Scripture Reading**: **John 1-5, 10-14 NCV; 1 John 4:2 GW**

**Session 1: Does Life Have Purpose?**

A picture containing person

Description automatically generatedWe all long for a sense of meaning in our lives.

The *Pulse of the World* presents several points of view about the purpose of life.

The *Curiosity Collective* brings together thought leaders, authors, philosophers, and theologians to examine whether or not life has a purpose.

Pulse of the World (transcript)

*Why were we put here? I think everyone wants to know. Why were we put here? Why are we on Earth?*

* *My purpose in life is to, um, to live a normal life, to, to be, um, a citizen, a productive citizen.*
* *I don't fully know why I'm here, but I enjoy that. I enjoy knowing that, because then that creates endless possibilities for myself.*
* *I believe it's random, to be honest. I don't think there's a plan. I think you make your own destiny.*
* *I would like to make a difference, even if it's only in one life. I'd prefer to do more.*
* *Love, happiness, joy, yoga.*
* *I think oftentimes you, you realize what the purpose was more by looking back than, than looking forward in my way. Some people plan ahead and know exactly what their life is – uh, what their purpose in life is, in their mind anyway.*

Barna Survey: (The Barna Group)

Are you clear about the meaning and purpose of your life?

* 64% strongly agree
* 21% somewhat agree
* 15% disagree
* *I, I find direction in life by just meditating daily, um, just coming out here to the beach.*
* *Whether it be spending time with friends or family, or, uh, putting some gas in my boat so I can go fishing and catch a few fish, go home, have a fish fry . . . uh, I live day by day, and I like to take it like that.*
* *Society wants you to think that your life's purpose is all about work, and making money and, uh, moving forward from that direction, but, uh, I think that's wrong, and I'm still trying to figure out what's right for me.*
* *I'd say that because I think the meaning of life, in my opinion, is to find something that you're passionate about and use that passion to make the world around you a better place.*
* *I believe each person’s life has a purpose and that purpose can only be found in God.*
* *I mean, I think everyone has a reason to live. Everyone offers something to this world – whether it be bad, whether it teaches people to be good, or whether, um, they're good themselves – but I think everyone has a purpose on this planet.*

Questions

**Did you identify with anyone’s expressed views in the film?**

**If so, who and what resonated with you?**

**Even though the Barna statistics are American-based, Canadian statistics are very similar. Are you surprised to learn that 85% of people are clear about the meaning and purpose of their life (64% strongly agree and 21% somewhat agree)?**

**Why or why not?**

The Curiosity Collective (transcript)

Um, I, I feel like, for the longest time, my, my purpose was to convince people that I'm good enough, convince people that I'm really talented, convince people that they should like me, um, convince people that if they make fun of me, I will punch them.

*I think American culture teaches us to make it happen. I mean, if you're gonna’ be successful, you just got to make it happen. So it's all about your – the strength of your inertia moving forward or higher. I think that's exhausting.*

*We all wonder about our place in life. You know, maybe it's because we're different, or maybe it's because we feel like we're the exact same as everybody else.*

*I think that our world is becoming more and more complex. Um, and, and our lives are becoming more and more accelerated. I think we're all trying to find – as human beings – meaning in all of our technological devices and gadgets, how we spend our time. I mean, I'm, I'm amazed at how much time we Americans spend just watching television and screens. And, um, this larger question of, like, Does this have any purpose? Like, what are we, what are we here for?*

**Jon Tyson**, Church Planter | Author

There was a famous little book written – really short – called ***"Here Is New York"*** by E.B. White. And he said, "What makes New York, New York is three kinds of people." Number one, you get, like, a person who's from New York. They are natives, and they hardly even notice the city. You get locusts. They're people who basically live outside of the city but consume its resources. And then the last person is the person who moves here with personal ambition, because they need a world stage for their perceived greatness to be realized. Los Angeles, for the most part, is about the veneer of beauty, but New York is about the pursuit of power. People take – they reroute their longing for God, and they just channel it towards something else. They invest, with holy religious zeal – uh, the same things that Christians or religious people do into religion – they invest that into their careers or their relationships or their parenting or whatever else that is.

**Lysa Terkeurst**, Author | Speaker

One of the most popular rock songs of all time is Mick Jagger's song, "I can't get no... satisfaction," and, um, gosh, I really relate to that. For a long time, I just had this gnawing sense that if I could just discover the right thing, if I could just maybe get a better job or have enough financial blessing or find the right person that loved me or, um, maybe even have the right kids with the right accolades, so I could put the bumper sticker on the back of my car – My kid's a straight-A student. And then I'd feel satisfied.

**Makoto Fujimura**, Painter | Arts Advocate

The problem with answering, is there a purpose for our lives? is that the question itself is driven by what I call utilitarian pragmatism – where we have to define everything and reduce it to a manageable piece before we can begin to play and explore. And as an artist, I don't do that. I start with a question, and I leave it unanswered. Um, so many times, I don't have an answer for why I am doing a particular piece of work, or why I'm involved in, in a, in a particular way of approaching my community, or, um my marriage, or lives of our children. But I'm comfortable with the mystery, um, and, and the open-endedness of that question. So, um, I, I often work backwards, and um, I try to find that purpose at the end of the journey, rather than at the beginning.

**David Kinnaman**, Sociologist | Statistician

My son and I were working on a pinewood derby car over the last couple of months. We worked super hard. We sanded and, you know, cut the, the wood and painted it and polished the wheels and made the pinstripe and you know, you think about all the things that are wrapped up in that small, little 20-hour project. Um, you know, like, here's the goal, here's where we're headed, here are the tools we need to do this. The bonding and the relationship and the, the apprenticeship from, you know, me to him to use the drill press and to use the different tools – um, like, this idea of, like, having something – it, like, it, it brought us together in a way that was, was really cool. And when you think about, like, our larger purpose and you think about, like, how our lives are, are being lived, um, you know, is it possible that we're – like, God – it, it, like, like God's working with us to do some sort of project in the world, to, to, to do something good, to, to enjoy each other together during that process. It feels like, to understand even a small, little project like a pinewood derby car, you, you, you get the idea that our lives were made for some sort of purpose.

**Gabe Lyons**, Social Commentator | Author

You know, I think, I think we each have a role to play in the world and that part of that role, uh, is that we're supposed to be here kind of fixing things that are broken. That part of our purpose is to participate with God, who wants to see things that are, um, wrong made right, uh, that are injustice made just. Uh, and I think each of us have a pretty unique story to play out within that. Uh, and a, and a lot of it comes down to understanding our own story.

**Jennie Allen**, Author | Speaker

If we lay our life out, if we look at all the pieces of our lives – where we were born, the suffering that we've been through, the gifts that we have, the personality that we have, the, the places that, that God's led us now, the places that we work, the things we do with our free time – If, if you just lay all of that out, all of a sudden, you start to look really unique. And I think that God wants us to see the pieces of our lives that, that he's given us – that we have – that are unique, and in that time and place with our gifting with our personality, use us.

**Paul Ojeda**, Bishop

No man knows his purpose until he knows the person who created him. I think people can't be fulfilled in what they're doing in life until they find the purpose that God has for them.

**Lysa Terkeurst**, Author | Speaker

I had a friend in my life who I not so affectionately called, "my Bible friend." She was, all the time, giving me Bible verses, and honestly, it just – It got on my nerves. I thought, "How could one person have access to so many Bible verses?" Like, if I had a headache, she had a verse for that. But one day, she gave me this verse, and it was **Jeremiah 29:11**. It said, **“’For I, I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord. ‘Plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future . . .’"** and gosh, I remember reading that verse and thinking, "I've thought my whole life that I was a throwaway person, so this verse doesn't really apply to me," but I read it over and over and over, and something just deep down in my heart started stirring, and I read the verse again and just put my name in it, you know. "'For I know the plans I have for you, Lysa,' declares the Lord, 'Plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.'" And for the first time in my life, I thought, Maybe, maybe – even though I was a throwaway person to my real dad, maybe God looks at me a little bit differently, and maybe I should try this God thing. I didn't know the right words to say. I didn't know what to do, so I just lifted my hands up, and I just said, Yes, yes." And I guess, not to make it over-simple, but I've pretty much just been saying "yes" to God ever since, and I think, ultimately, that's my purpose.

**Questions For Discussion and Personal Reflection**

**In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*?**

**What did you find intriguing or compelling?**

**In the video, Lysa observed, “If I could just discover the right thing, a better job, financial blessing, the right person to love me, the right kids with the right accolades, then I’d feel satisfied.”**

**In what things have you sought satisfaction?**

**Did they satisfy?**

**Can you share both a time when life seemed like a random series of events and a time when it seemed like there was an intentional plan unfolding?**

**In what ways might someone’s view of eternity affect their sense of meaning and purpose?**

**If you believe we all have a purpose, what role does God play in that – if any?**

I would like to share some Scripture with you.

This is God’s promise to bring the children of Israel back into the land he promised them.

**Scripture Text: Jeremiah 29:4-14**

**“4This is what the Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says to all those people I sent away from Jerusalem as captives to Babylon: 5“Build houses and settle in the land. Plant gardens and eat the food they grow. 6Get married and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons, and let your daughters be married so they also may have sons and daughters. Have many children in Babylon; don’t become fewer in number. 7Also do good things for the city where I sent you as captives. Pray to the Lord for the city where you are living, because if good things happen in the city, good things will happen to you also.” 8The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, says: “Don’t let the prophets among you and the people who do magic fool you. Don’t listen to their dreams. 9They are prophesying lies to you, saying that their message is from me. But I did not send them,” says the Lord.**

**10This is what the Lord says: “Babylon will be powerful for seventy years. After that time I will come to you, and I will keep my promise to bring you back to Jerusalem.**

**11*I say this because I know what I am planning for you*,” says the Lord. “*I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.* 12Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13You will search for me. And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me! 14I will let you find me,” says the Lord. “And I will bring you back from your captivity. I forced you to leave this place, but I will gather you from all the nations, from the places I have sent you as captives,” says the Lord. “And I will bring you back to this place.”** (NCV)

This passage of Scripture, especially **verse 11**, talks about the future of these people who are in exile rests on the promises of God.

**Verse 11** highlights God’s “gracious promise” as plans God has for his people – good plans,

hopeful plans,

prosperous plans,

restorative plans.

Life for the exiles – far from their homeland – is not empty of hope, because of the presence of God in his blessing and in the answers to the prayers of his people.

We do need to understand that these promises satisfied, and these answers fulfilled come in God’s timing and not our own.

God carries out the plan to give them **“hope and a good future”** (vs/ 11) by giving them the blessing of fruitfulness,

protection from disaster,

and answers to prayer.

**Have you ever seen God bring good out of bad situations in your life?**

**What happened?**

**Could there have been an easier way to learn that lesson?**

God created, provides for, and directs every one of our paths.

The only way to walk God’s path is to walk it with him!

**How might you know if the path you are walking is led by God or led by you?**

**What do you need to do to know it is God directing you, and not yourself?**

**I say this because I know what I am planning for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future. Then you will call my name. You will come to me and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will search for me. And** **when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me!** (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

**“. . . when you search for me with *ALL YOUR HEART*, you *WILL* find me”** (vs 13)

**What do you think this means?**

**How do you seek to know him?**

**What do you need to build your relationship with God?**

We can look at the plans God has for us by looking at each letter in the word **Pl.A.N.S.**.

God has plans to **PROSPER** us.

**What does prosperity mean to Christians?**

God has plans to **ALWAYS** be able for us: **Ephesians 3:20** says,

**“With God’s power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine.”**

**What is God able to do?**

God has plans to **NEVER** leave us or forsake us.

**Hebrews 13:5** says,

**“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. God has said, “I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”**

**Can you think of a time in your life that was difficult and God was leading you, sustaining you?**

God has plans to **SEE** us through all of our trials and tribulations.

**John 16:33** says,

**"These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

**What does this verse mean to you?**

**Can you give an example of how God has SEEN you through difficulties?**

Let us pray: (Knowing Jesus, © Copyright 2011 - 2022 Retrieved March 21, 2022)

**Thank you, Lord, for the good plans you have purposed for me and for all your children.**

**Enlarge my vision of you and enable me to trust your word of truth through all the circumstances of my life, knowing that your thoughts towards me are only good continually.**

**Thank you, Father, that all things work together for good, for those that love you and are fitting into your plans and purposes.**

**Continue to keep and protect your people, Lord, and I pray that many would come to trust in Jesus, as their Lord and Saviour.**

**This I ask in Jesus' precious name and for his greater glory and joy,**

**AMEN.**

**Bibliography**

Explore God. (2021 Retrieved March 21, 2022, May 20). *IDEO SERIES: THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS.* Retrieved from exploregod.com: https://www.exploregod.com/series/the-7-big-questions

Knowing Jesus. (© Copyright 2011 - 2022 Retrieved March 21, 2022). *Prayer for Jeremiah 29:11.* Retrieved from knowing-jesus.com: https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Jeremiah/29/11

Thomas Nelson, Inc. (© 2005). *The Holy Bible, New Century Version® (NCV) .* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

**Session 2: Is There a God?**

Logo

Description automatically generatedWe can't prove or disprove the existence of God.

How can we even know if there is a God?.

The *Pulse of the World* presents several points of view about the question of whether there is a God or not

The *Curiosity Collective* includes perspectives from authors, pastors, theologians, and thought leaders from around the world on whether or not there is a God.

Pulse of the World (transcript)

* *Let me put it this way – I would like, I'd like to think that God is real, for one reason or the other.*
* *I don't believe in God because the idea that an omniscient, loving being would judge me, who is mortal and ignorant and tiny for all eternity, based on a few years' experience, I find to be rather a cruel thought.*
* *Look at everything around us, from the universe to our being, to the ability to have consciousness, I think that it can only be explained by God.*
* *All the power that God has, He, She, It has given to me. So we are definitely one.*
* *Yes, our God is alive and He wants to know you very well.*
* *Uh, I hope, I hope there's, there's something else out there. It'd be, It'd be fun to experience uh, whatever God has in store next, um. Either that, or we're all just evolved apes, um...*
* *There's so many things where it's just, like, that, that couldn't have just happened. Like, that has to have someone, something behind it, and I believe that something's God.*

Barna Survey: Do you believe in a God that is all-knowing and all-powerful?

Responders who said “Yes”

73% in 1991

62% in 2013

* *For all we know, there could be aliens out there. I, I have no idea, to be honest.*
* *I was raised atheist. I don't believe in a higher power. But, you know, I also don't claim to know everything about the world. And I think maybe it's a bit arrogant for people to try and believe they know the truth to anything.*
* *For me, yes, yes it's, it's obvious. There are, like, so many things, um for me personally, you know, so many things that I've been through, and after that, I'm like, "Well, that had to be God."*
* *The pat answer is that, "How can there be no God when there's all this beauty around us?", but I think about evolution and science and all that kind of thing and think, "How can you not just accept it the way it is?"*
* *God created all of us to do His will.*
* *I really don't know what to believe, to be quite honest, so it's kind of just really, just living it day by day and just trying to be a really good person.*
* *I don't know. I don't know if there is one. I just pretend, I guess, and hope that there's something else out there.*

Questions

**Did you identify with anyone’s views as expressed in this video so far? If so, who and what resonated with you?**

**To what do you attribute the 11% decline in the belief in God over the past twenty years?**

The Curiosity Collective (transcript)

**Andy Crouch** News Editor | Author

So it has, it has been amazing to be married to a physicist. One of the things that Catherine has said to me that I think is so striking, is we now know, for example, that there are these cosmological constants, these ways that the universe is tuned. Um . . . And, and it's, it's things – it's, it's these numbers that the physicists have to plug into their equations to get everything to work. For example, there's a constant relating to gravity – How, how strongly do things attract each other? Um— and you set that just a little bit differently, and the universe never gets stars, uh, and then never gets planets, because stars form, obviously, by gravity, and the universe just quickly collapses in on itself. Or if it's set the other way— if the dial is turned just too far the other way— it expands endlessly, and you never get the coalescing of matter that you get in the, in the galaxies, and, and in stars, and then in planets, and then eventually our planet. So the fact that these things are tuned, and there are, there's a doz— at least a dozen of these constants that have to be, the dial has to be set exactly right or you never get life of any kind on a planet like Earth. Uh... and scientists have realized, we have no idea why they're set the way they're set. I think when you start discovering those just givens of the universe— like, it just is this way, it didn't have to be this way, but it is this way— it leaves you much more open to the possibility that it is this way because someone, someone chose it to be this way.

**Earl McCLELLAN** Mentor | Pastor

I have a couple of sons that are the loves of my life, and it's fascinating how peek-a-boo is fun to them, from the very beginning. Uh... it seems there's something about being hidden and then something being revealed. I, I don't know if I can, you know, sum it up scientifically, but it is fascinating to me that in all of our hearts, seems to be this desire to, uh, to find out what's really going on.

**Michael Frost** Professor of Theology

I look at, uh— you, you go to the zoo— what animals do people want to see? They, they want to see the bears, and the, and the, the, the lions, and the tigers, uh... You know, in, in my country, uh, sharks are a big deal— sharks and whales. People want to be in a place where they're reminded of the fact that they are not the greatest or most important thing in the world. I mean, why are people drawn to mountains or to, to, to ocean vistas or to, to raging rivers or canyons? Uh, there is a yearning within the human psyche to be freed from the folly of imagining that the human experience is the highest or the greatest experience that there can be. We can't bear the idea that we are it, that this is as good as it gets, that, that the human experience is the highest evolution possible. Uh, we have to believe that there's something greater, something beyond, something more important to us.

**John Burke** Pastor | Author

I've, I've traveled around the world. I've been to about 24 different countries. I've spoken to people from every religious background. Um, I've, I've talked to people who grew up in 70 years of atheistic communism. And you know what is shocking, is that even in that environment, the majority of people, when you get them alone, uh, and you ask them, they say, "You know, deep down, I've always believed there must be a God, or a higher power, or someone up there who, who gave me life, who, who has purpose for my life." And, and you think about that. Like, why is that so common to humanity? Um, there's gotta’ be some reason, and, and doesn't it make sense that, that that's, like, this homing device in every human, pointing us back to the very source of life?

**Amena Brown** Writer | Poet

I think I have had some experiences in life that give me confidence to know there is a God. Some of it was the time I spent with my grandmother when I was very young. Sometimes I'd be in the house with her, and just, you know, just be the two us, and she might sing a hymn from church, or she might pray. And as a little girl— I don't know how else to explain it, except to say— I could, I could feel something when she would sing that way, that there was something very real and spiritual happening. You know, even though I was a little girl, I, I sort of felt like I'm looking in on something happening between my grandmother and God, maybe. And as I got older, you know, sometimes I'd be in a church service, and I might have that same feeling that I remember having sitting in my grandmother's house. But I think it's just been a lot of those experiences over time that sort of have lumped together to say to me, This is how I know that God is real.

**Eric Metaxas** Author

If you actually think it through, the idea that, let's say, "Okay, there's no God. Um... we just got here by accident. You know, we, we evolved out of the primordial soup over billions of years, totally, totally accidentally. God didn't guide that 'cause he doesn't exist. So we're here." So, you have— it logically follows that life has no meaning. Now people go, "Okay, well, no, life has no meaning." If you think about that, it is so bleak and horrifying that most people would know that can't be. The love that you feel for people in your life, that you have felt, according to the— if there's no God, then that love means nothing. It's not even love, it's just a chemical reaction designed to perpetuate the species, totally by accident.

**James Choung** Campus Minister | Author

All of us, all of us when we look at the world today long for a better world. I mean, we look at the events that happen on the news. When we see bombs go off in the middle of crowds, when we see children being abducted and then put into the slave trade, all of us have something in us that— we look at that— we know that's not right, and we yearn for a better world. There isn't something evolutionary about, uh, that. It, it doesn't necessarily help, uh, my survival to seek someone else's good. But it's there. It's implanted in all of us, and if we pay attention to that, uh, I think we get a sense of the heartbeat of God.

**Earl McCLELLAN** Mentor | Pastor

I, I remember when my first, my first son was born, and, uh, when I was growing up, I couldn't wait to be a father, and I couldn't wait to be a husband. Uh... So, so now I've got the wife, and we've married, you know. We were going on seven years at the time, and then, uh, we find out she's pregnant, and we've got our son. He's coming into the world, and, and I remember, uh, when that, that little guy came out, and he looked like he was 85 years old, and he looked— he had crazy amounts of hair, even on his forehead, and he wasn't terribly cute, in all honesty, from the, the first time that he came out. He has since grown into a, a beautiful, uh, young man, but, but when I saw him... I mean, explain it. Explain the connection, explain the love, explain the awe. Um... for, for me, I, I go back to— I go back to, God is love. Not that he has love, but is love, and any friends of mine that, that have experienced love, they, they've experienced that, that, that presence, that joy, that, that hope. Uh... I think it's all just a, you know, little, little sign, just telling us that there's something more here, there's something more.

**Corey Widmer** Pastor | Columnist

I, I think I realized that if there is a God, then I can't prove Him nor can I disprove Him with science. That, that, that if anything, God would have to prove Himself to us. God would have to overcome this enormous ontological gap that exists between us and Him, and actually reveal Himself to us in a way that makes sense.

**Amena Brown** Writer | Poet

A lot of it is just that experience, that sort of trying and seeing, and that when we want to know more about God, He wants us to know more about Him too, and I think He meets us where we are in that way.

**Questions For Discussion and Personal Reflection**

**In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?**

**What makes it easy to believe in God? What makes it hard to believe in God?**

**What role – if any – did God play in your family when you were growing up? How does your upbringing impact your beliefs now?**

**In the video, Andy shares that he’s convinced God exists because of “cosmological constants” and their impact on life. What has convinced you that God either does or does not exist?**

**What do you think of Corey’s suggestion, “If there is a God, I can’t prove him, nor can I disprove him with science”?**

**What do you think could convince you to change your current stance on God’s existence – be that belief or unbelief?**

I would like to share some Scripture with you.

I am sharing the story of Moses and the burning bush – about his very personal encounter with God.

**Scripture Text: Exodus 3:3-22**

**“3One day Moses was taking care of Jethro’s flock. (Jethro was the priest of Midian and also Moses’ father-in-law.) When Moses led the flock to the west side of the desert, he came to Sinai, the mountain of God. 2There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. 3So he said, “I will go closer to this strange thing. How can a bush continue burning without burning up?”**

**4When the Lord saw Moses was coming to look at the bush, God called to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!”**

**And Moses said, “Here I am.”**

**5Then God said, “Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. 6I am the God of your ancestors – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.**

**7The Lord said, “I have seen the troubles my people have suffered in Egypt, and I have heard their cries when the Egyptian slave masters hurt them. I am concerned about their pain, 8and I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I will bring them out of that land and lead them to a good land with lots of room – a fertile land. It is the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 9I have heard the cries of the people of Israel, and I have seen the way the Egyptians have made life hard for them. 10So now I am sending you to the king of Egypt. Go! Bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt!”**

**11But Moses said to God, “I am not a great man! How can I go to the king and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?”**

**12God said, “I will be with you. This will be the proof that I am sending you: After you lead the people out of Egypt, all of you will worship me on this mountain.”**

**13Moses said to God, “When I go to the Israelites, I will say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors sent me to you.’ What if the people say, ‘What is his name?’ What should I tell them?”**

**14Then God said to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM*. When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, ‘*I AM* sent me to you.’”**

**15God also said to Moses, “This is what you should tell the people: ‘The Lord is the God of your ancestors – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He sent me to you.’ This will always be my name, by which people from now on will know me.**

**16“Go and gather the elders and tell them this: ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me. He said, I care about you, and I have seen what has happened to you in Egypt. 17I promised I would take you out of your troubles in Egypt. I will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites – a fertile land.’**

**18“The elders will listen to you. And then you and the elders of Israel will go to the king of Egypt and tell him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, appeared to us. Let us travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.’**

**19“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go. Only a great power will force him to let you go, 20so I will use my great power against Egypt. I will strike Egypt with all the miracles that will happen in that land. After I do that, he will let you go. 21I will cause the Egyptians to think well of the Israelites. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people. 22Each woman should ask her Egyptian neighbor and any Egyptian woman living in her house for gifts – silver, gold, and clothing. You should put those gifts on your children when you leave Egypt. In this way you will take with you the riches of the Egyptians.”** (NCV)

God had revealed himself to Adam,

to Enoch,

to Noah,

to Abraham,

Isaac

and Jacob . . . and to many other people, before Moses had his historic meeting with the God of Israel in the burning bush at Mount Sinai.

To Adam he was the triune creator Elohim.

To Hagar he was the God who sees me.

Abraham discovered him to be the everlasting God and his gracious Provider.

God unveiled himself to Jacob as – God: the God of Israel.

Moses knew all about the God of his forefathers . . . and his promise to release his people from their 400 year bondage in Egypt.

And in this encounter with God on the slopes of Mt. Sinai, Moses knew instantaneously that this was the God of Israel in the midst of the burning bush.

But as his representative to God's people, Moses wanted to know God's character and his attributes and so he asked: what is your name?

And in the most profound yet simple way, Moses was to find His answer: ***'I AM WHO I AM*'**; and he was further instructed: **“say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'”** (vs 14)

In the simplest of phrases God had disclosed to Moses that as the self-existent God, he was all his people would ever need.

In disclosing this astonishing name to his servant, God was telling Moses that he could be depended upon to fulfil every requirement of his people Israel, for his faithfulness is never-ending and his mercy endures from one generation to the next.

God continued for centuries to unveil his name,

his character

and his attributes to his people, who were to discover the Lord to be their Banner;

their Healer,

their Peace,

their Shepherd,

their Rock,

their Redeemer

and their King.

But eventually God gave the greatest revelation of himself through the Person and work of his only begotten Son – Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus would continue to reveal to his people Israel and to his Church in this dispensation that ***HE IS WHO HE IS*** and that he is everything we will ever need, in this life and in the ages to come.

Jesus completed God's gracious revelation to mankind in many different ways, but perhaps the most memorable ways that Christ unveiled God's name,

God's character,

and God's attributes was when he said: I AM the good Shepherd,

I AM the Vine,

I AM the Door,

I AM the Bread of Life

I AM the Resurrection,

I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life -- no one comes to the Father but by me.

Christ is fully God and fully Man, and in him we have all we need for life and godliness.

Let us walk in the light as he is in the light and learn of him more and more with every passing day. (taken and adapted from KnowingJesus.com, © Copyright 2011 - 2022 Retrieved March 22, 2022)

**How do you see how God revealed himself – his name, his character, his attributes to Moses from out of the burning bush?**

**As we have been briefly looking at God’s Word, how can you answer the question: Is there a God?**

Let us pray: (KnowingJesus.com, © Copyright 2011 - 2022 Retrieved March 22, 2022)

**Heavenly Father, thank you that you are all I have ever needed.**

**You are all I will ever need in the days to come – and all I need today.**

**May I rest my soul in you and trust in your unfailing promises – both to your people Israel and to the Church, which is your body.**

**You alone are worthy of all my praise and thanks for ever and ever,**

**AMEN.**

**Bibliography**

Explore God. (2021 Retrieved March 21, 2022, May 20). *IDEO SERIES: THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS.* Retrieved from exploregod.com: https://www.exploregod.com/series/the-7-big-questions

KnowingJesus.com. (© Copyright 2011 - 2022 Retrieved March 22, 2022). *knowing-jesus.com.* Retrieved from knowing-jesus.com: https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/exodus-3-14

Thomas Nelson, Inc. (© 2005). *The Holy Bible, New Century Version® (NCV) .* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

**Session 3: Is There a God?**

Text, whiteboard

Description automatically generated

The question of today’s subject is a difficult question. Probably one of the hardest to answer. Why does God allow pain and suffering?

The ***Pulse of the World*** (first portion of this video) is a brief collection of questions and thoughts by various people – much like you and me.

***The Curiosity Collective*** (second part of this video) brings together thought leaders, subject matter experts, pastors, and theologians to explore this difficult question.

**Pulse of the World** (transcript)

* *Pain, pain's a part of life. You know, it's, it leaves a sour taste in your mouth. It's— you just have to learn from it.*
* *I think some people believe it's a test of your faith, but if you don't have a faith to believe in, it kind of makes you wonder why, why is there suffering in this world, and famine, and death? That sort of thing.*
* *It was a reason why he took them. Uh, maybe he needed some angels up there to protect, protect— to help him in the fight against the devil.*
* *A baby is a beautiful, wonderful thing. Why doesn't he want me to have this?*
* *I think that bad things are just the way that you see them. I think God's in everything we do.*
* *I don't think God does these things to people. I think he has a way of getting us through it.*
* *Why would anybody want to create people who do horrible things to each other each and every day? It doesn't make any sense.*

Barna Survey: “If you could ask God any one question, what would you ask?”

The top response: “Why is there pain and suffering in the world?” The Barna Group

* *People suffer because sometimes they put themselves into it. And others, just, it just happens to them.*
* *When my grandma died— she died of cancer, like, six years ago— and I remember, like, when she was, like, a few days before she passed away, she was like, No one would ever want to, no one would ever want to inflict this pain.*
* *Some of the best lessons I've learned in life and the best, um, feelings in my heart came from very painful times.*
* *I don't think God's sitting there and saying, "These people are hurting, and maybe I should help them," or... or "I'm gonna pray to this, you know, being, and he's gonna save me." I don't think that happens. Um, I think he's just there. I guess.*
* *I'm constantly struggling— I suppose I'll be brutally honest— with, uh, suicidal ideation, and I find it very miserable, often— despite the beauty of the world— to be made conscious in this form.*
* *Why? Why, why is there pain? Why was, why were the little kids shot the other day?*
* *I wanna know why this happened, but... he's showing me that he's here with me, so... I suppose the answers will come. It's just... I'm going through a journey right now that's painful.*

**Did you identify with anyone’s views as expresswed in the video?**

**If so, who, and what resonated with you?**

**Was it surprising to learn that the top question people would ask God is, “Why is there pain and suffering in the world?”**

**What would be some of the questions you would ask God?**

**The Curiosity Collective** (transcript)

*“My son has had severe epilepsy since he was born. For 15 years, he'd have 10 to 20 epileptic seizures every day, and, uh, our whole life was basically revolved around his disability, and yet I would pray for other friends who had sick children, and it seemed like their kids got better, um, but my son didn't.”*

*“The one moment that redefined this question for me was probably in 2004 with the tsunami that happened in Asia, and just the sheer devastation of a natural disaster just brought me to my knees and where I was at the television saying, "God, seriously, why?"”*

*“The question, "How can God allow these bad things to happen?" I think is a, it's a reality. It's a hard, hard question, in fact maybe the hardest question.”*

**Micahel Frost** Professor of Theology

God allows humankind to make their own choices, and ultimately they can lead to some magnificent things. I mean, you have a look at the extraordinary things— extraordinary things that human beings have been able to accomplish, uh, in the freedom and autonomy that God has given us. But the downside or the dark side of this autonomy or this freedom is that we can just create the most vile and contemptible and cruel and vicious outcomes of being human.

**Gideon Tsang** Teaching Pastor

A lot of what we see in the world— in my opinion, of what I've experienced— is, you know, you have generations of men, you know, women, father, mother, children. When they make the choice not to love— love God, love each other— you play that out, and um, there, there's a lot of pain that comes with that.

**Alan Hirsch** Philosopher | Author

The suffering that comes from nature, or, or earthquakes, or hurricanes, or things like that, I, I find harder to explain, and, uh, I guess you got to live with the mystery of it. Um... I think the Christian answer's the best one, but when you go out East into the Eastern religions, it doesn't make any sense of suffering at all. Uh, it's kind of like, "Suck it up." It doesn't make— it doesn't attempt to try and make sense of it or derive meaning. So the Buddhist answer, for instance— and I have great respect for Buddhism— the Buddhist answer says, "it's not real." Um... suffering has no reality. Well, I, you know, I, I think you tell that to a suffering person, and I don't think it makes sense to them. The Christian answer actually doesn't answer everything, um, particularly when you're suffering, um, but it is the best one around, uh, without a doubt.

**Angie Smith** Author | Speaker

About five years ago, I was pregnant, and I heard the words that no mother ever wants to hear: Your child is not going to live. Um... On April 7, 2008, I delivered a little girl who was alive when she was born. Her name was Audrey Caroline, and she lived for 2 1/2 hours. We loved her a lifetime's worth that short amount of time. Watched her get her first bath and little haircut. But later that night when everyone was gone, and it was just my husband and I alone with her, as time went on, we knew that we were going to have to call a nurse to come in and take her. Um... I had to hand my daughter to someone and watch her be taken away from me, knowing that I wouldn't see her again this side of Heaven. And as I lay in that hospital bed, and everything in me wanted to just bang on all the buttons and tell them to bring her back, I really called out to God in a way I never had before, and I just said, "I can't do this, and I need you to just be here right now. I just need you to hold me." He did. He did. I will tell you that, in that moment, I saw, um, a side of God that I've never experienced and I've never forgotten since then. Just His faithfulness to one girl in a hospital room who was devastated. And I just really felt that He was there. Sorry.

**Jo Saxton** Author | Ministry Director

When I talk to people about the stuff they've gone through, I— to be honest, the, for me, the best answer and the, the most appropriate response is— as a Christian, as a believer— is to cry too. To hold the hand and to weep too, and then to introduce them to someone who helps pull you out of a pit, and not in some weird, messed up, quick-fix kind of a way. I get really annoyed when we Christians propose it as an answer as, like, the quick, in a box, fix that changes everything. Um... But there's a, there's a phrase, I— it's in one of the books of the Bible— which talks about— I... and it's this, it says, "I know my Redeemer lives." And, um, and that part of the Bible has always won me, because it talks about this person who buys back all that's been lost, um, through your own helplessness, um, through violence, through your own foolishness. And, um, that's who I met: someone who, who helped me over, over years and blood, sweat, and tears, um, bring back that— what was lost.

**Hugh Halter** Author | Speaker

We have seen God use our son's sickness, um, in amazing ways, and people have found faith in Jesus through his life. And I guess maybe God does, uh, use some people and their disabilities and their struggles to help other people to find God. You know, I do think, like, if there really is a Heaven and if what is said about Heaven from the words of Jesus is true in that there— my son will never be sick again and someday I'll see him as this perfect body in this perfect form— and then Ryan looks at his life, and we all see the amount of people that have been influenced by his life, am I gonna argue with what God did? Probably not, I'll probably be thankful that he allowed our family, um, I guess, to, to struggle through, um, and yet why does he just help other people? I don't know, but I'm glad he does. I'm glad he just helps. I'm glad that, no matter what we see, apparently God has some plan for that.

**James Choung** Campus Minister | Author

We see that God actually comes to the planet, he actually lives among us so that he understands our suffering, our hurt, our pain. He understands it all. Then Jesus dies on the cross, and in the mystery of faith, all the junk of the world, all the junk that's in our hearts, all the junk that's in our relationships, all of that junk dies with him. So in the Christian world view, God doesn't leave our world in the state that it is but actually is seeking to heal it and bring us back.

**Mike Breen** Author | Entrepreneur

We feel as though we're in this battle, and, um, really what we need in the midst of that battle is a hero to step in for us. The hero obviously is, is God. I believe that God considers those who struggle with Him to be heroes also. In fact, I, I would go so far as to say that those of His children who struggle against all of these terrible things that we see in the world, um are cheered on by the population of Heaven. And, um, if they should die in their struggle, I believe they get a hero's welcome when they meet Him.

**In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*?**

**What did you find intriguing or compelling?**

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult is it for you to reconcile the existence of both suffering and God (1 = easy; 10 = impossible)?**

**Why?**

One of the *Pulse* speakers noted, *“Some of the best lessons I’ve learned in life . . . came from very painful times.”*

**In what ways might good come from bad?**

**Do you have any experience with this?**

**If there’s a God, why do you think he allows evil in the world?**

**In the video, what did you think of James’s suggestion that God *“understands our suffering . . .*** *[and]* ***is seeking to heal it”*?**

**Scripture Reading: Job 36:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

**“But God saves those who suffer through their suffering; he gets them to listen through their pain.”** (Job 36:15)

**“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ. If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.”** (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

**What preposterous things have you had people do/say to comfort you?**

**Describe nonsensical comfort you’ve received as an adult.**

**Do you wonder how God can allow so much evil and destruction in the world?**

**When you face challenges in your own life do you wonder if God is there?**

**Are there reasons that things happen the way they do?**

**Are you being cared for?**

It is important to understand that God doesn’t punish people.

God doesn’t will evil to anyone.

God doesn’t hurt people.(The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem), © 2022 Retrieved April 6, 2022)

# [ view video: Hope When It Hurts by Kristen Wetherell & Sarah Walton

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFf1e\_2P0x0&ab\_channel=TheGoodBookCompany**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFf1e_2P0x0&ab_channel=TheGoodBookCompany) **]**

The apostle Paul opens his correspondence by *“praising the God who gives so much mercy and comfort to the apostle and all believers.”*

We have the feeling that he knows by his own personal experiences just how great is the mercy and comfort of God.

*“The words all comfort in this passage come from the ancient Greek word* ***paraklesis****. The idea behind this word for comfort in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. The idea behind this word is communicated by the Latin word for comfort (****fortis****), which also means “brave.”* (Guzik, n.d. Retrieved April 6, 2022)

God of all comfort!

Paul considers God – our heavenly Father – a comforter,

a Paraclete (***paraklesis***).

We also know that the Holy Spirit is our Paraclete.

**“16I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper** [“Counselor” or “Comforter.” Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit.] **to be with you forever—”**

**“26But the Helper will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.”**

**“26I will send you the Helper from the Father; he is the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. When he comes, he will tell about me, . . .”**

**“But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away. When I go away, I will send the Helper to you. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come.”** (John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7)

And we know that Jesus Christ, God the Son is our Paraclete.

**“My dear children, I write this letter to you so you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have a helper in the presence of the Father – Jesus Christ, the One who does what is right.”** (1 John 2:1)

**“When God put everything under** [human] **control, there was nothing left that they did not rule. Still, we do not yet see them ruling over everything. *But we see Jesus, who for a short time was made lower than the angels. And now he is wearing a crown of glory and honor because he suffered and died. And by God’s grace, he died for everyone*.**

**God is the One who made all things, and all things are for his glory. He wanted to have many children share his glory, so he made the One who leads people to salvation perfect through suffering.**

**Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. He says,**

***“Then, I will tell my brothers and sisters about you; I will praise you in the public meeting.”* *Psalm 22:22***

**He also says,**

***“I will trust in God.”* *Isaiah 8:17***

**And he also says,**

***“I am here, and with me are the children God has given me.”* *Isaiah 8:18***

**Since these children are people with physical bodies, Jesus himself became like them. He did this so that, by dying, he could destroy the one who has the power of death – the devil – and free those who were like slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. Clearly, it is not angels that Jesus helps, but the people who are from Abraham. For this reason Jesus had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way so he could be their merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Then Jesus could die in their place to take away their sins. And *now he*** *[Jesus]* ***can help those who are tempted, because he himself suffered and was tempted*.”** (Hebrews 2:8-18)

**“In Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon who was a good man and godly. He was waiting for the time when God would take away Israel’s sorrow, and the Holy Spirit was in him. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to do what the law said they must do, Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God:**

***“Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace as you said.***

***With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you prepared before all people.***

***It is a light for the non-Jewish people to see and an honor for your people, the Israelites.”*** (Luke 2:25-32)

God – the Three in One – in every aspect of his being – is full of comfort,

strength,

and help for us.

**In what ways are the sufferings of Christ (Hebrews 2:9) applicable to your own life and in what ways are they not applicable?**

**Hebrews 2:18** is a wonderful promise and should be memorised.

The temptations are the same as they have always been.

**What are some of the areas in which we are being tested and how does Jesus help us understand and help us?**

**Would you have found it harder to trust Christ for help in any of these areas if he had not come to earth and suffered?**

**What do these passages teach us about God? About ourselves?**

**[ view video: Thabiti Anyabwile** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6muDhCXopQs&ab\_channel=TheGospelCoalition**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6muDhCXopQs&ab_channel=TheGospelCoalition) **]**

*“The Bible actually makes it quite clear that faith in Jesus Christ does not guarantee a good life, but a perfect eternity. Indeed, there is more prediction in Scripture of a struggle on earth for the believer than there is of gain and success . . . Most Christians believe that this life on earth is only the land of shadows, and that real life hasn't yet begun. So yes, bad things happen to good people.”* (Coren, 2012)

*“As to the specific issue of pain and suffering, C. S. Lewis, who watched his beloved wife die of cancer, put it this way: "But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God's plan is for us to return to him, and to lead the best possible life on earth; sometimes we need to be reminded of our purpose. Pain is a sharp, clear tool to achieve that purpose. A needle may be necessary to prevent disease or infection; nobody welcomes or enjoys the injection, but it prevents a far greater suffering, just as what may seem like even intolerable pain now will lead to far greater happiness later.”* (Coren, 2012)

**How might you think that God can use pain and suffering to bring you closer in relationship to him?**

**What are some of the things that we do to ourselves that bring on pain and suffering?**

Let us pray: (living-prayers.com, © 2013-2021 Retrieved April 7, 2022)

**Lord, please be in the hearts and lives of all those who are suffering.**

**Bring healing to those who are enduring pain.**

**Bring value to those who are disregarded.**

**Bring joy to those in great sorrow.**

**Bring hope to those that have nothing to live for.**

**Bring provision to those who are hungry.**

**Bring shelter to those without a home.**

**Bring community to those who are lonely.**

**And Lord, please use and prompt me to be your hands of love across a hurting world.**

**AMEN**

**Bibliography**

Coren, M. (2012, July 17). *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* Retrieved from Christianity Today/ChristianBibleStudies.com Retrieved April 6, 2022: https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/theology/why-do-bad-things-happen-to-good-people.html?start=2

Explore God. (2021 Retrieved March 21, 2022, May 20). *IDEO SERIES: THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS.* Retrieved from exploregod.com: https://www.exploregod.com/series/the-7-big-questions

Guzik, D. (n.d. Retrieved April 6, 2022). *2 CORINTHIANS 1 – THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT.* Retrieved from enduringword.com: https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/2-corinthians-1/

living-prayers.com. (© 2013-2021 Retrieved April 7, 2022). *Prayer for Suffering.* Retrieved from living-prayers.com: https://www.living-prayers.com/petitions/prayer\_for\_suffering.html

The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem). (© 2022 Retrieved April 6, 2022). *God doesn’t make bad things happen.* Retrieved from newchurch.org: https://newchurch.org/get-answers/life-issues/dealing-with-crisis-and-grief/god-doesnt-make-bad-things-happen/?gclid=CjwKCAjw9LSSBhBsEiwAKtf0n8b2qObb9VMG8tUyCxmjOK3ZSC3-yS2bPyG7tSDmvFU5aZW2TcmklhoCh2kQAvD\_BwE

Thomas Nelson, Inc. (© 2005). *The Holy Bible, New Century Version® (NCV) .* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

**Session 4: Is Christianity Too Narrow?**

A picture containing person

Description automatically generated

Christianity claims to be the only way to God. Isn't that extremely narrow and intolerant?

The ***Pulse of the World*** (first portion of this video) is a brief collection of questions and thoughts by various people – much like you and me.

***The Curiosity Collective*** (second part of this video) brings together thought leaders, subject matter experts, pastors, and theologians to explore this difficult question.

**[ view teaching video “Is Christianity Too Narrow?” ]**

**Pulse of the World** (transcript)

* *I think I'd be ignorant to say that Christianity is the only right religion. I don't know what the right religion is. It's just what I believe it is.*
* *I know that different religions, you know, have their different belief systems, but I think, at the end of the day, it all boils down to being one God, no matter what, over all of us, even though people put it in different, you know, terms and languages, et cetera, et cetera.*
* *Some people just, they need religion. They need Jesus, and they need something to believe in. And, uh, my response would just be, Good, good for you.*
* *I think there's, um— religion's a double-edged sword. It's, there's a lot of good, and there's a lot of bad that can come out of it. And I'm not sure if it's from religion that the bad or the good comes out of it or whether it's the people.*
* *Christianity is very important because we learn who we are, where we come from and where we are going.*
* *These days, I think too much religion's based around money when money has nothing to do with God. What the hell does God need money for?*
* *The fundamentals of Christianity, like, the values that are taught are important, and they all serve positive purposes.*
* *Some people that I've met, it's just— I've , I've had friends, and and the minute they find out about me or the minute that I, I do anything that doesn't follow their religion, um, they're— they don't want anything to do with me.*

Barna Survey:

Nearly half of U.S. adults believe it doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow because they all teafch the same lessons.( The BARNA GROUP)

* *There are as many ways as there are people in the world to God. Each person has their own path.*
* *My view on anyone who claims to have a monopoly on truth is that, you know, it's not— there is no one truth about, about anything. I think that a lot of religions say the same thing in different ways.*
* *I respect a lot of faiths, and I think that Christianity is a pillar that's influenced by the other great religions in the world.*
* *I think that a lot of it is intolerant, and I think a lot of the intolerant Christianity is used as a battering ram to try to either create or go back to something that doesn't exist anymore.*
* *I think, um, that people tend to confuse the word "religion" with, um, with Christianity and what the Bible actually says.*
* *I think there's some wonderful teachings in Christianity and wonderful sayings, um, and I find that there are many, whether it's priests or whatever relig— Christian religion, people who are really spiritual, but unfortunately, I find them the exception, not the rule. and I think, again, it becomes more enforcing a set of values rather than exploring truth with other people and trying to tell people what to believe rather than helping them find it.*

**Did you identify with anyone’s views as expressed in the video?**

**If so, who, and what resonated with you?**

**What do you think about the statistic that *“nearly half of U.S. adults believe it doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons”*?**

**The Curiosity Collective** (transcript)

**Is Christianity too Narrow in Our Culture?**

**Corey Widmer** Pastor | Columnist

Yeah, you know, I think that one of the hardest things living in, in a society like ours is, is that, um, there is such diversity, and there's, there's so many different beliefs and so many different religions around us that it's very difficult for us to imagine that any one of these religions, uh— whether it be Christianity or Islam or any, any, any worldview, really— would claim to have the market on the truth. A couple years ago, I was influenced by, uh, an author and, and a man who was a missionary in India, and his name was Lesslie Newbigin. And he told this parable: There's a story— there's an old story in India— about a king and a, and an elephant. And a king had an elephant, and he wanted to do an experiment, and so he brought in six blind men, and he asked them to tell him what the elephant was. And so the blind men, of course, begin to feel around, and the first one felt the elephant and— the side of elephant— and said, "Oh, it's a wall," and another man felt, felt the trunk and said, "It's, it's a snake," and the other man felt the, the, the foot and said, "It's a tree," and you get the point. He felt the ear, it was a fan, and so, and so of course, the point of the story is— and people often tell this, um, in India, and, and it's become a popular story in, in our society as well— that the blind men are like the religion, or like the various religions of the world. None of them see the elephant in whole, but they're all basically describing the same thing, uh, with different angles, but not one of them could ever say that they have the full knowledge of the elephant. Here's the problem with that, and this was— I was really helped by this, uh, because what this, what this man, Lesslie Newbigin, said is, "The only way that anyone can ever come to that conclusion is if you are in the position of the king." The only way that you can ever say that each of the individual blind men um, only have part of the truth is if you are the king and you are looking down and seeing the whole picture, seeing the whole elephant, and are able to judge each of the blind men accordingly, and so, the application to, to our time is this: It's that I think when people say, All religions are basically the same, that sounds really tolerant, and it sounds really humble, but in reality, it's, it's kind of an arrogant claim. It's, it's sort of like saying you're in the position of the king, that you can see the whole picture, and that each of the religions can only see a part of it.

When it comes down to it, I think what I've realized is that we're all exclusivists. All of us are making exclusive claims, whether you say that God is a trinity, like we say in Christianity, or whether you say God is one, the way they do in Islam or Judaism, or the way— or if you say God is many, the way they do in Hinduism, or if you say there is no God, as you do in secular humanism, or you say that all gods are basically the same, which is basically progressive, uh, sort of progressive self-made American religion, in every single case, you are making an exclusive truth claim that has the potential to exclude. You're making a statement about ultimate reality. So I think, I think one of the best ways to do it is just to admit the ways that you're exclusive, to admit that, yes, the Christian religion does say that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord. And let's just take all of our exclusive views and put them out on the table and have an honest, honest debate about them. I think that's a lot more honest than saying that all religions are the same.

**Propaganda** Hip Hop Artist

We think that "narrow" means "intolerant," right? And intolerance somehow is the, is the cardinal sin of our world, right? If you're playing a guitar, I mean, how many "G"s are there? How many notes? How many ways can you play a "G"? No, there's, there's one way to play a "G." You're either on-key or off-key. Is that intolerant? Is that narrow? Is that unfair? No, it's beautiful, 'cause there's a way to play this note. It's beautiful.

The step back is like, "Well, what's, what's wrong with that?" Right? And narrow in what way, right? Narrow in the way of being clear, in being concise, in being decisive, in being attainable, right? Right? Yeah, in, in that sense, absolutely. But that, isn't that a good narrow? Like, isn't that— aren't these good things? That, like— It's not like I'm just, I'm shooting up— I'm, you know, I'm throwing spaghetti at the wall and hoping that one of 'em sticks, you know what I'm saying? Like, that's broad, right? But that's— I mean, come on now, like, who's trying to live like that, that you just toss up stuff and hope that something stays on there? Like, nah, man, like, tell me the bull's-eye, you know? Tell me the target. How do I fix this? How is man made right with God? Don't be like, "Well, you know, you'll figure it out." Oh, no. No, I won't! Who has? Nobody's figured it out, right? No, I need you to tell me. What's, what's— how do we get this? So in my mind, I'm like "Man, why is narrow bad?"

Narrow's, in a lot of contexts, good, right? Doesn't mean it lacks grace. Doesn't mean it lacks love. As a matter of fact, it's the opposite.

**Alan Hirsch** Philospher | Author

I like the phrase that, "Truth is narrow." Um, it narrows your options, but grace is as wide, so you've got to hold to the narrowness of truth and the width of grace, and it's a tension you play between the two. That's how, kind of, Jesus looked. He was full of grace and truth, and he holds that paradox in himself. He says that, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except by means of me." Well, that's pretty narrow of you, Jesus. You're not being very embracing of other people's opinions. Well, I say, well, he's also extremely gracious, and he's provided for us in a, in a profound way. I mean, he saves us through his own life and death and resurrection and his return. We are caught up into his life. I mean, I, I'm held by that. He was very irreligious, and I kind of like him for that, because I don't like religion very much, and I don't think he did.

Religion seeks to kind of control— uh, often what happens, it's a dilemma, you see, because, uh initially the revelation of God is given to the human being or to a nation, in the case of Israel. And then what they have to do to kind of hand it on to the next generation is to create some codes, and rituals, and ideas and, um, things to try and pass that experience on meaningfully to the next generation. It's a dilemma. The very act of actually encoding the religion is the thing that kills it in the long run and actually makes people kind of nasty 'cause people get over-attached to the religion itself and lose what the religion is meant to point towards. And so religions, including Christianity, have always got to renew, go back to the originating encounter with God. So all renewal movements of returning to God, rediscovering what was given there, rediscovering God, and then going out again, and we— that's why we, you know, we maintain a, a rich relationship with God because without that, we become religious people— nasty, dangerous, don't understand grace, don't understand the grace that they themselves have received, and don't offer it to other people. Uh, which, really, is not— yeah, not exactly what we're meant to be living like.

**Corey Widmer** Pastor | Columnist

I think a lot of people struggle to believe because some Christians make it incredible, um, take away the possibility of making the faith beautiful and winsome and credible because of— because of the way that we live and the things that we do. Now, there is something funny, funny about that, and a little ironic. So Christians are hypocrites. Okay, yes, I am a hypocrite. Can I just say that? I'm, I'm a hypocrite. I, um— many of the things that I say that I espouse to believe, um, I don't live. And I am, and I know, actually, lots of, of people who aren't Christians who are, who are— who live better lives than I do. Uh, one of my closest friends is a Sikh, and he is a much more disciplined, uh, much, uh, more self-controlled person than I am. But see, the funny thing about Christianity is that hypocrisy actually does not undermine the credibility of the Christian faith, because in some ways, hypocrisy is necessary. Uh, because what it means— what is required to be a Christian is not that you're good and moral and squeaky clean and have nothing wrong with you. The first thing that is actually required to become a Christian is that you admit that you're jacked up and need help.

That's, like, the only thing that's required, is that you know that you are so messed up that you need grace. So in some sort of weird, kind of ironic way, it requires people who are messed up. It requires people who know that their lives are not put together. So this is why, when you go into a church, you find a bunch of people who are hypocrites, because we are. All of us are. We, we're all broken. We're all messed up. And now, that doesn't excuse Christians doing and saying stupid things by any means, but what I'm saying is that the stupidity of Christians does not discredit the reality of the Christian faith. If anything, it points to how important and necessary Jesus is. Uh, because Jesus is there, not to make squeaky clean, moral people. Jesus is there to save broken, messed up people, of which the church is full of them. Yeah. That's what I'd say to that.

**In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*?**

**What did you find intriguing or compelling?**

**Does the media represent Christianity accurately?**

**Do Christians represent Christianity accurately?**

In the video, Corey suggests, *“When people say that all religions are the same, that sounds really humble and tolerant.”*

**Why does he go on to say that those claims are actually exclusive?**

**How have people used religion for good? For bad?**

**What are some examples of situations in which most people believe that narrow ideas are good?**

**What exclusive claims do you hold?**

**Do you allow yourself to be vulnerable when discussing your views with others?**

**Scripture Reading:** **John 14:6**

**“Jesus answered, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** **The only way to the Father is through me.”** (John 14:6)

**Can you remember a time that you got lost? What happened?**

**In John 14:6, what do you think is the force of the claims that Jesus makes here?**

*“That is a great saying to us, but it would be still greater to a Jew who heard it for the first time.*

*In it Jesus took three of the great basic conceptions of Jewish religion, and made the tremendous claim that in him all three found their full realization.*

*The Jews talked much about the way in which men must walk and the ways of God.*

*God said to Moses:*

**"So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you, and follow the commands exactly. Live the way the Lord your God has commanded you so that you may live and have what is good and have a long life in the land you will take*.”*** *(Deuteronomy 5:32. 33)*

*Moses said to the people:*

**"I know that after I die you will become completely evil. You will turn away from the commands I have given you. Terrible things will happen to you in the future when you do what the Lord says is evil, and you will make him angry with the idols you have made."**(Deuteronomy 31:29)

*Isaiah had said:*

**"If you go the wrong way – to the right or to the left – you will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the right way. You should go this way."**(Isaiah 30:21)

*In the brave new world there would be a highway called the Way of Holiness.*

**“A road will be there; this highway will be called “The Road to Being Holy.” Evil people will not be allowed to walk on that road; only good people will walk on it. No fools will go on it.”**(Isaiah 35:8)

*It was the Psalmist's prayer:*

**“Lord, teach me your ways, and guide me to do what is right . . ."(Psalm 27:11)**

***The Jews knew much about the way of God in which a person should walk.”*** (taken and adapted from Barclay, 1956, revised 1975, pp. 157-159)

Jesus didn’t say that he would point us in ***a*** way; he said that he ***is the way***.

***“And Jesus said: "I am the Way.” What did he mean? Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for directions. Suppose the person asked says: “Take the first to the right, and the second to the left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third on the right and the road you want is the fourth on the left.” The chances are that we will be lost before we get half-way.***

***But suppose the person we ask says: “Come. I'll take you there." In that case the person to us is the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us: he strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not tell us about the way; he IS.”*** (Barclay, 1956, revised 1975)

Jesus didn’t tell us that he would teach us ***a*** truth; he said that he ***is the truth***.

*“Jesus said: “I am the Truth." The Psalmist said:*

**"Lord, teach me what you want me to do, and I will live by your truth. Teach me to respect you completely."** (Psalm 86:11)

**"I see your love, and I live by your truth."** (Psalm 26:3)

**“I have chosen the way of truth; I have obeyed your laws."** (Psalm 119:30)

*Many people have told us the truth, but no one has ever embodied it. There is one all-important thing about moral truth. A person's character does not really affect their teaching of geometry or astronomy or Latin verbs.*

*But if a person proposes to teach moral truth, their character makes all the difference in the world. An adulterer who teaches the necessity of purity, a grasping person who teaches the value of generosity, a domineering person who teaches the beauty of humility, an irascible creature who teaches the beauty of serenity, an embittered person who teaches the beauty of love – they are all bound to be ineffective. Moral truth cannot be conveyed solely in words; it must be conveyed in example.*

*And that is precisely where the greatest human teacher must fall down. No teacher has ever embodied the truth he taught except Jesus. Many a person could say: "I have taught you the truth." Only Jesus could say: "I am the Truth." The tremendous thing about Jesus is not simply that the statement of moral perfection finds its peak in him; it is that the fact of moral perfection finds its realization in him.”*

Jesus didn’t present us with some *secrets to* life; he said that he *is the life*.

Jesus said: **"I am the Life."**

**T**he writer of the Proverbs said:

**“These commands are like a lamp; this teaching is like a light. And the correction that comes from them will help you have life." (Proverbs 6:23)**

**"Whoever accepts correction is on the way to life, but whoever ignores correction will lead others away from life.”** (Proverbs 10: 17)

The Psalmist stated:

**“You will teach me how to live a holy life. Being with you will fill me with joy; at your right hand I will find pleasure forever."** (Psalm 16:11)

In the last analysis what any person is always seeking for is life.

Their search is not for knowledge for its own sake: but what will make life worth living.

A novelist makes one of his characters who has fallen in love say:" I never knew what life was until I saw it in your eyes."

Love had brought life.

That is what Jesus does.

Life with Jesus is life indeed.

And there is one way of putting all this.

**"The only way to the Father is through me."** (John 14:6b)

He alone is the way to God.

In him alone we see what God is like; and he alone can lead all people into God's presence without fear and without shame. (taken and adapted from Barclay, 1956, revised 1975, pp. 157-159)

We might be saying: *“I’m wandering about; I don’t know where I’m going.*”

Jesus is the way.

We might be saying: *“I’m confused; I don’t know what to think.”*

Jesus is the truth.

We might be saying: *“I’m dead inside and don’t know if I can go on.*”

Jesus is the life.

*“In light of* [forthcoming] *events, this declaration was a paradox. Jesus’ way would be the cross; He would be convicted by blatant liars; His body would soon lie lifeless in a tomb. Because He took that way, He is the way to God; because He did not contest the lies we can believe He is the truth; because He was willing to die He becomes the channel of resurrection – the life to us.*

*“Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth in which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope.”* (Thomas a’ Kempis, cited by F. f. Bruce) (Guzik, ©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022)

**If Jesus *IS* the way, do you feel that you are on a bumpy dead-end street, or on a four lane highway?**

**Why?**

**In light of John 14:6, how would you respond to someone who says, *“there are many ways to God”*?**

When Jesus stated, **“the only way to the Father is through me”** (vs. 6) and made this remarkable statement, he was claiming that he was the only way to God.

In this he left behind or shook off the temple and its rituals,

all the rules and regulations,

as well as other religions.

It was a claim to have an exclusive way,

truth,

and life – the only pathway to God the Father – the true God in heaven.

*“Understood plainly, this was one of the more controversial things Jesus said and the Gospel writers recorded. Many people don’t mind saying that Jesus is one legitimate way to God, but other religions and even individuals have their own legitimate ways to God. Many think it isn’t fair for God to make only one way.”* (Guzik, ©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022)

This idea that God – three in One – is a consistent theme throughout the Bible.

The Ten Commandments begin:

**“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves. You must not have any other gods except me.”** (Exodus 20:2-3)

Throughout the Old Testament God defeated,

denounced,

and mocked the supposed gods others worshipped.

In preparing to make a way for the people of Israel to leave the slavery of Egypt, every one of the plagues was in direct defiance and defeat of one of the gods of Egypt – until after defeating the great God “Ra” – the people left Egypt for the promised land.

*“Ra . . . the king of the deities and the father of all creation. He was the patron of the sun, heaven, kingship, power, and light. He was not only the deity who governed the actions of the sun, he could also be the physical sun itself, as well as the day”* ( Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, 2022 All rights reserved retrieved April 19, 2022)

**“The Lord says, “Present your case.” The King of Jacob says, “Tell me your arguments. Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen.**

**Have them tell us what happened in the beginning. Then we will think about these things and we will know how they will turn out. Or tell us what will happen in the future.**

**Tell us what is coming next so we will believe that you are gods.**

**Do something, whether it is good or bad, and make us afraid.**

**You gods are less than nothing; you can’t do anything. Those who worship you should be hated.**

**I have brought someone to come out of the north. I have called by name a man from the east, and he knows me. He walks on kings as if they were mud, just as a potter walks on the clay.**

**Who told us about this before it happened?**

**Who told us ahead of time so we could say, ‘He was right’?**

**None of you told us anything; none of you told us before it happened; no one heard you tell about it.**

**I, the Lord, was the first one to tell Jerusalem that the people were coming home.**

**I sent a messenger to Jerusalem with the good news.**

**I look at the idols, but there is not one that can answer.**

**None of them can give advice; none of them can answer my questions.**

**Look, all these idols are false.**

**They cannot do anything; they are worth nothing.”** (Isaiah 41:21-29)

**“Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel. Also bring the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”**

**So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to Mount Carmel. Elijah approached the people and said, “How long will you not decide between two choices? If the Lord is the true God, follow him, but if Baal is the true God, follow him!” But the people said nothing.**

**Elijah said, “I am the only prophet of the Lord here, but there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull and kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood, but they are not to set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull, putting the meat on the wood but not setting fire to it. You prophets of Baal, pray to your god, and I will pray to the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to his wood is the true God.”**

**All the people agreed that this was a good idea.**

**Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “There are many of you, so you go first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don’t start the fire.”**

**So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon, shouting “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound, and no one answered. They danced around the altar they had built.**

**At noon Elijah began to make fun of them. “Pray louder!” he said. “If Baal really is a god, maybe he is thinking, or busy, or traveling! Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!” The prophets prayed louder, cutting themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed, which was the way they worshiped. The afternoon passed, and the prophets continued to act like this until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard; Baal did not answer, and no one paid attention.**

**Then Elijah said to all the people, “Now come to me.” So they gathered around him, and Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, the number of Jacob’s sons. (The Lord changed Jacob’s name to Israel.) Elijah used these stones to rebuild the altar in honor of the Lord. Then he dug a ditch around the altar that was big enough to hold about thirteen quarts of seed. Elijah put the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, “Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the meat and on the wood.” Then Elijah said, “Do it again,” and they did it again. Then he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it the third time. So the water ran off the altar and filled the ditch.**

**At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. “Lord, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,” he prayed. “Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things. Lord, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you will change their minds.”**

**Then fire from the Lord came down and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch. When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God!”**

**Then Elijah said, “Capture the prophets of Baal! Don’t let any of them run away!” The people captured all the prophets. Then Elijah led them down to the Kishon Valley, where he killed them.”** (1 Kings 18:19-40)

The Bible consistently presents One True God, and Jesus is consistently presented as the only true way to the One True God.

*“Simply put, if Jesus is not the only way to God, then he is not any way to God. If there are many roads to God, then Jesus is not one of them, because he absolutely claimed there was only one road to God, and he himself was that road. If Jesus is not the only way to God, then he was not an honest man; He was most certainly not a true prophet. He then would either be a madman or a lying devil. There is no middle ground available.”* (Guzik, ©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022)

We will often hear people object to this idea and say, “I believe Jesus was an honest man, and I believe he was a true prophet.

But I don’t actually believe he said those things about himself as we read it in the Bible.

I believe Christians added those things in later on all by themselves.”

But there is no objective reason for a person to make a distinction between “Jesus really said this” or “Jesus really didn’t say that.”

We have no ancient texts showing us just the supposedly true sayings of Jesus.

Any such distinction is based purely on subjective reasons – “I personally don’t think Jesus would have said that, therefore he did not say that – later Christians only put those words in His mouth.”

If it is all up to our own personal opinion – if we can establish what Jesus said or didn’t say on our own whims – then we should reject the Gospels completely.

It really is an “all-or-nothing” deal.

Either we take the words of Jesus as recorded by these historically reliable and accurate documents, or we reject them completely.

But the question is: “Is Christianity bigoted?”

Certainly, there are some who claim to be Christians who are in fact bigots.

But Biblical Christianity is the most pluralistic,

tolerant,

embracing of other cultures religion on earth.

Christianity is the one religion to embrace other cultures and has the most urgency to translate the Scriptures into other languages.

A Christian can keep their native language and culture and follow Jesus in the midst of it.

An early criticism of Christianity was the observation that they would take anybody!

Slave or free;

rich or poor;

man or woman;

Greek or Barbarian.

All were accepted, but on the common ground of the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ.

To leave this common ground in Jesus is spiritual suicide, for both now and eternity. (taken and adapted from Guzik, ©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022)

*“If this seems offensively exclusive, let it be borne in mind that the one who makes this claim is the incarnate Word, the revealer of the Father.”* (Bruce, © 2022 All rights reserved. Retrieved April 19, 2022)

Please note: for further reading of this article, you can download it from:

[**https://www.gty.org/library/Blog/B160316**](https://www.gty.org/library/Print/Blog/~/library/Blog/B160316)

The Christian faith will receive anyone who comes through Jesus.

Jesus said, through me – **“I am the way.”**

It is not ‘through believing certain propositions regarding me’ nor ‘through some special kind of faith,’ but ‘through me’.” (Guzik, ©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022)

**By pointing to Jesus as the only way to the Father, God is being:**

1. **unfair**
2. **narrow-minded**
3. **merciful**
4. **shortsighted**
5. **old fashioned**

**Why?**

**I am persuaded to believe that Jesus is the Way because:**

1. **he said so**
2. **it makes sense**
3. **I have read about what he did**
4. **of his miracles**
5. **of the changes I have seen in myself**
6. **there is no alternative**

**If you have trouble seeing Jesus as “the Way”, what would be the cause of this doubt?**

**In troubled times, what promises of God give you hope and courage?**

Next week . . . ***“Is Jesus God?”*** (John 1:1-3, 14 NCV)

Let us pray:[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Loving Father, familiarity with Scripture has sometimes prevented me from seeing the astonishing truth behind so much of your Word.**

**Open my understanding to grasp,**

**Believe**

**and act on these simple yet profound truths.**

**Thank you that your ways are higher than our ways.**

**That your plans are for good and not evil.**

**That your love is dominion over all, for you are Love.**

**You are the Great and Powerful One,**

**Owner of all in Heaven and earth.**

**Thank You for going up ahead of us and providing people,**

**situations**

**and opportunities that show us your Truth and Life.**

**You are the Way.**

**You are the Truth.**

**And you are Life.**

**Thank you for your great mercies are new every morning.**

**Thank you for leading us on a path of life, which is righteousness, and all for your Great Name, Lord Jesus.**

**May the honor of your Name be restored as you gently lead us to health and righteousness – inside and out.**

**Blessed be your Name, Lord.**

**We love you.**

**Loving Father, familiarity with Scripture has sometimes prevented me from seeing the astonishing truth behind so much of your Word.**

**Open my understanding to grasp,**

**Believe**

**and act on these simple yet profound truths.**

**In Jesus’ name I pray,**

**Amen . . . and AMEN**

**Bibliography**

Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum. (2022 All rights reserved retrieved April 19, 2022). *Deities in Ancient Egypt - Ra.* Retrieved from egyptianmuseum.org: https://egyptianmuseum.org/deities-ra#:~:text=Ra%20was%20the%20king%20of,as%20well%20as%20the%20day.

Barclay, W. (1956, revised 1975). *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Volume 2 Chapters 8-21 (Revised Edition).* Toronto, Ontario: G. R. Welch Co., Ltd.

Bruce, F. F. (© 2022 All rights reserved. Retrieved April 19, 2022). *Together Against Ecumenism.* Retrieved from Grace to You: https://www.gty.org/library/Print/Blog/B160316

Explore God. (2021 Retrieved March 21, 2022, May 20). *IDEO SERIES: THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS.* Retrieved from exploregod.com: https://www.exploregod.com/series/the-7-big-questions

Guzik, D. (©2018 David Guzik Retrieved April 19, 2022). *JOHN 14 – THE DEPARTING JESUS.* Retrieved from enduringword.com: https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/john-14/

Thomas Nelson, Inc. (© 2005). *The Holy Bible, New Century Version® (NCV) .* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

**Session 5: Is Jesus Really God?**

Lord?

Liar?

Lunatic?

Jesus actually claimed to be God.

How can we possibly know if he was telling the truth?

The ***Pulse of the World*** (first portion of this video) is a brief collection of questions and thoughts by various people – much like you and me.

***The Curiosity Collective*** (second part of this video) brings together thought leaders, subject matter experts, pastors, and theologians to explore this difficult question.

**Pulse of the World** (transcript)

* *I'd like to think Jesus is a great person. Uh, I just, I— It's just, it's— To me, it's a silly story.*
* *Jesus is the Son of God, and He is also God Himself.*
* *Jesus was the shepherd who basically was the leader of the pack and told people what to do.*
* *He would probably be the guy that I walked by and thought He was a homeless bum and ignored Him honestly. I'm sure that He would be saying something really profound, and I'm afraid I might be ignoring it.*
* *I don't necessarily believe that any one person is God. I don't think that Jesus may have been God. However, I do believe that we all have divinity within us.*
* *I'm just trying to do the best I can down here. I, I, I believe that, that uh, the teachings of Jesus, uh, they ring true to me. That's the— It makes sense to live that way, to, to love people instead of hate people, to, to look out for your fellow man instead of always trying to beat him down.*

***Barna Survey:***

*Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?*

*67% of U.S. adults said, “Yes.”* (The BARNA GROUP)

* *Jesus wasn't white, so I don't think that you could say that he's just here for white, middle-class people.*
* *Um, if he really existed, I'm all for it, um... Too bad that there is no other people like, like Him nowadays.*
* *Jesus, I believe, was a liberal. And I think, looking at where we're going, I think he'd be happy to see that people are becoming more and more accepting.*
* *Sure, I believe that Jesus was a historical person, um, but I don't believe the, uh, the other things that have accrued around the story of His life.*
* *He's, he's like the pinnacle of love.*
* *It's idolization basically, the idea that there's a human being that can be viewed as a god is, is, is... is a tough, um, tough proposition for me to accept.*
* *Jesus— he loves people, and he wants people in his family, and he's not someone that pushes people outside. He's always inviting people in.*
* *Jesus is the son of God, who died for us, to redeem us from our sins and to go to Heaven.*
* *I think I'm, I grow more curious about that every day, um... uh, and, and how I can be a better person um, maybe by following his teachings. And, and maybe it will be a fit for me, and maybe it won't, but, you know, I have a lifetime to figure that out.*

**Do you identify with anyone’s views as expressed in the video?**

**If so, who, and what resonated with you?**

**What do you think about the statistic that *“67 percent of U.S. adults . . . have a personal relationship with Jesus”*?**

**Why or why not?**

**The Curiosity Collective** (transcript)

**Is Jesus Really God?**

**John Maisel** Ministry Leader | Teacher

*I kind of worked through the, the theme of having a lot of different ways to God, and God sitting on a mountain, and it depends on which path up the mountain, uh, you take. But, uh, as I looked at that, there were so many different contradictions among, uh, the paths up the mountain, and there was different types of gods that they were starting. And then I kind of came to the realization, uh, one time, when I said, "You know, if you're really going to be serious about this, somewhere along the line, no matter what you learn about 'Does God exist?' and other religions, you've gotta come back and ask the question, 'Who is Jesus?'" Because of all the religious leaders in the world, Jesus is the only one who claimed to be God.*

**John Burke** Pastor | Author

*What the Bible talks about is that, you know, Jesus revealed what God is like in a way we could comprehend— this unseen, infinite God that we can't even fathom. And, you know, people would say, Well, yeah, that's a, that's a great thought, but, uh, it's just probably myth. But actually, God put into history signs and markers so that we could know it really was true, that it really was from Him. You know, the Old Testament is, is not one book. It's actually 39 books written by about 40 different authors over a period of about 1,500 years. And, and all throughout, God was foretelling when He would actually send this Messiah, this one who would reveal the unseen God in a, a way we could relate to. And it foretold when that would happen, um, I mean, to, to the, to the time and the place. Like, it'll happen in Jerusalem and before, uh, the, the temple is destroyed. Well, that's real history, uh, because the temple was destroyed by the Roman General Titus in 70 A.D., and it still hasn't been rebuilt, to this day. So there are lots of reasons like that to, to realize this isn't just myth. You know, and I thought— that's what I thought. I thought it was myth, but I just hadn't taken the time to really look.*

**Gabe Lyons** Social Commentator | Author

*You know, Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life. He announced a new order of things, a new way that the world would work, uh, that was going to look, going to look very different than how the religious leaders of the day had sort of set things up. Uh, he was somebody who was going to set people free, who had felt captive. And I think many of them had felt captive to religion, had felt captive to a list of to-dos and a, a big moral rule book that they felt like they had to live by, otherwise, they couldn't be in a relationship with God, and He was breaking through that.*

**Leonce Crump** Former NFL Player

*Religion says, "I do, therefore I'm loved." Jesus says, "You love, therefore you do." And I think that is the demarcation, that is the line in the sand, so clearly expressed through His character.*

**Mike Foster** Leadership Coach

*I think Jesus is a different sort of king and a different sort of savior because He doesn't express His message through power or making an enemy or success. He displayed His power through suffering and a crucifixion and dying and losing on the cross. But then the, the kicker on the story is that, uh, He rose again.*

**Erin Fonner** Teacher | Writer | Entrepreneur

*If Jesus actually rose from the dead, nobody else, no other religious figure, nobody else in all of humanity has ever done that. You look at the fact that, you know, we know Jesus lived 2,000-ish years ago. There was a man named Jesus, lived in Nazareth, was crucified by the Romans. We know that, like, not just, not just from the Bible, but other sources have testified to that.*

**John Herrington** Ministry Leadership Teacher

*Three days later, He comes back to life, and the authorities are so freaked out by this reality that they pay off the guards, and they come up with some ways to obfuscate what's happened. But the reality is, there was an empty tomb, and all they'd have had to have done is hauled out the broken body of Jesus Christ, but they couldn't produce it.*

**Bryan Winchester** Hip Hop Artist

*He was resurrected, rose up from the dead— with over 500 witnesses that saw Him— and based on that encounter, were willing to die in order to testify to what they had saw.*

**Erin Fonner** Teacher | Writer | Entrepreneur

*They truly were so convicted that this— that they saw a dead guy rise that it m— you know, it made history.*

**Makoto Fujimura** Painter | Arts Advocate

*I would speak to my friends who are atheists, agnostics. Um... I have not had a moment where they would shut me down because I talked about Jesus. People throw rocks at me for talking about the church, but not Jesus. Oftentimes, I, I find Jesus there. Uh, he's already there before me in the studios and in the backstages, um, with dancers and actors. He's already there in the conversation. He's already in, in their bones, and my practice has been to go and look for him. I realized this historic figure of Jesus was no longer just a historic figure, but he was the one who was calling me all along, through my creativity. And he wanted to reveal Himself to me into a way that I could understand. When Jesus says, "I am the, I am the truth. I am the way, truth, and the life," actually to me, as an artist, he is actually claiming to be the author of life. And he's, he's actually not only doing that, but he's saying that we are his artwork.*

**Eric Metaxes** Author | Radio Host

*Imagine that there were a man who's making all these claims about himself. And then imagine that, okay, uh, he's not God, he's not, you know, the Messiah, so it kind of makes him crazy. Uh, but he doesn't sound crazy. But why would he make these claims that he can forgive sin, that he can do all these amazing things, that... Okay, he's not crazy, well, then what? Then he's a liar? Uh, he doesn't sound like a liar. He's saying these beautiful things. He sounds like a beautiful, authentic person with incredible wisdom, so... it feels like the only option is to say, he is who he says he is. That's where your logical thoughts take you, but this is, there's more to this than logic. Believing that Jesus is God is one of those things that at the end of the day, God has to sort of reveal it. At this point, I do know that it's true, but I don't expect other people to accept it. I think that they have to think it through for themselves. I would encourage them to think it through, because it's kind of important.*

**John Maisel** Ministry Leader | Teacher

*As you look at the men and women in the Bible, they all come back to this one simple statement: The love of Christ compels me. Not their love for Christ, Christ's love for them. The love of Christ compels. That's the spectacularness of who he is, and that's what He wishes to do in and through each of us.*

**In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in The Curiosity Collective?**

**What did you find intriguing or compelling?**

**Was Jesus a historical figure, in your opinion?**

**Why or why not?**

**What did Leonce mean when he said, *“Religion says ‘I do, therefore I’m loved.’ Jesus says, ‘You’re loved, therefore you do’”*?**

Christians believe that sin separates humanity from God. Yet Jesus, through his death, bridges that gap.

**Why do you think Jesus had to die in order to accomplish this?**

In the video, Bryan says *“*[Jesus] *was resurrected – rose up from the dead – with over five hundred witnesses. They saw him and, based on that encounter, were willing to die in order to testify as to what they saw.”*

**What do you think about his claim?**

**What do you think about Jesus’s claim to be God?**

**Scripture Reading: John 1-5, 10-14 NCV; 1 John 4:2 GW**

**“In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.**

**The Word was in the world, and the world was made by him, but the world did not know him. He came to the world that was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God. They did not become his children in any human way – by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.**

**The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his glory – the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father – and he was full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:1-5, 10-14)

**“This is how you can recognize God’s Spirit: Every person who declares that Jesus Christ has come as a human has the Spirit that is from God.”** (1 John 4:2 GW)

Back in February, we completed another Bible study about **Jesus, Your Best Friend – Foundations Study Series[[4]](#footnote-4): Jesus Is God**.

Much of this study is taken and adapted from this former study.

**How do we know Jesus is God?**

1. Jesus said he ***IS*** God.

**“. . . Now he says that God is his own Father, making himself equal with God!”** (John 5:18)

**“The Father and I are one.”** (John 10:30)

**“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I am!”** (John 8:58)

2. Others said he was God.

This started in the prophecies of Jesus’ birth before he was born.

**“His name will be . . . Powerful God, . . .”** (Isaiah 9:6)

It continued with those who were closest to him, his own disciples.

**“. . . so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus – everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. And everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and bring glory to God the Father.”** (Philippians 2:10-11)

Compare these verses from **Philippians 2:10-11**, with these words from Isaiah.

**“. . . I am God. There is no other God. . . . I promise that everyone will bow before me and will promise to follow me.”** (Isaiah 45:22-23)

What do these verses tell us?

**“All of God lives fully in Christ** (even when Christ was on earth)**,”** (Colossians 2:9)

**“In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”** (John 1:1-2)

3. He is worshipped as God.

Many worshiped him:

• a healed leper

**“Then a man with a skin disease came to Jesus. The man bowed down before him and said, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.”** (Matthew 8:2)

• a woman

**“Then the woman came to Jesus again and bowed before him and said, “Lord, help me!”** (Matthew 15:25)

• the mother of James and John

**“Then the wife of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons. She bowed before him and asked him to do something for her.”** (Matthew 20:20)

• a Gerasenes demoniac

**“While Jesus was still far away, the man saw him, ran to him, and fell down before him.”** (Mark 5:6)

• a blind man

**“The man answered, “This is a very strange thing. You don’t know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We all know that God does not listen to sinners, but he listens to anyone who worships and obeys him. Nobody has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.””** (John 9:30-33)

He accepted such worship.

**“Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

**Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you see me. Those who believe without seeing me will be truly blessed.”** (John 20:28-29)

**“Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, “Truly you are the Son of God!”**

**“Suddenly, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings.” The women came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my followers to go on to Galilee, and they will see me there.”** (Matthew 14:33, 28:9-10)

His disciples prayed to him.

**“While they were throwing stones, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”** (Acts 7:59)

4. He does what only God can do.

• He has the power to forgive sins

**“A few days later, when Jesus came back to Capernaum, the news spread that he was at home. Many people gathered together so that there was no room in the house, not even outside the door. And Jesus was teaching them God’s message. Four people came, carrying a paralyzed man. Since they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, they dug a hole in the roof right above where he was speaking. When they got through, they lowered the mat with the paralyzed man on it. When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man, “Young man, your sins are forgiven.”**

**Some of the teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this man say things like that? He is speaking as if he were God. Only God can forgive sins.”**

**Jesus knew immediately what these teachers of the law were thinking. So he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to tell this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to tell him, ‘Stand up. Take your mat and walk’? But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home.” Immediately the paralyzed man stood up, took his mat, and walked out while everyone was watching him.**

**The people were amazed and praised God. They said, “We have never seen anything like this!””** (Mark 2:1-12)

• He sends the Spirit

**“I will send you the Helper[a] from the Father; he is the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. When he comes, he will tell about me, . . .”** (John 15:26)

• He will raise the dead

**“I tell you the truth, the time is coming and is already here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will have life.”** (John 5:25)

• He is the Creator

**“All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him.”** (John 1:3)

**“Through his power all things were made – things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ.”** (Colossians 1:16)

**“God also says, “Lord, in the beginning you made the earth, and your hands made the skies.”** (Hebrews 1:10)

• He is the Sustainer, upholding all

**“He was there before anything was made, and all things continue because of him.”** (Colossians 1:17)

**“The Son reflects the glory of God and shows exactly what God is like. He holds everything together with his powerful word. When the Son made people clean from their sins, he sat down at the right side of God, the Great One in heaven.”** (Hebrews 1:3)

**What Evidence Supports Jesus' Claim to Be God?**

Evidence #1: The fulfillment of prophecy

**“He said to them, “Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen – everything in the law of Moses, the books of the prophets, and the Psalms.”** (Luke 24:44)

**Fulfilled Prophecy**

Old Testament verses are the prophecy. The New Testament verses proclaim the fulfillment.

1. Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23)

2. A descendent of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16)

3. Of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Luke 3:23, 33; Hebrews 7:14)

4. Of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Matthew 1:1)

5. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7)

6. Taken to Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14-15)

7. Herod's killing of the infants (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16-18)

8. Anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; Matthew 3:16-17)

9. Heralded by the messenger of the Lord (John the Baptist) (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:1-3)

10. Would perform miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 9:35)

11. Would preach good news (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:14-21)

12. Would minister in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:12-16)

13. Would cleanse the temple (Malachi 3:1, 3; Matthew 21:12-13)

14. Would enter Jerusalem as a king on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:4-9)

15. Would be rejected by Jews (Psalm 118:22; 1 Peter 2:7)

16. Would die a humiliating death (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53)

• rejection (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:10-11; 7:5, 48)

• betrayal by a friend (Psalm 41:9; Luke 22:3-4; John 13:18)

• being sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:14-15)

• silence before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12-14)

• being mocked (Psalm 22:7-8; Matthew 27:31)

• being beaten (Isaiah 52:14; Matthew 27:26)

• being spit upon (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 27:30)

• piercing his hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Matthew 27:31)

• being crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38)

• praying for his persecutors (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:34)

• piercing his side (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34)

• being given gall and vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21; Matthew 27:34; Luke 23:36)

• no broken bones (Psalm 34:20; John 19:32-36)

• being buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60)

• casting lots for his garments (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24)

17. Would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Mark 16:6; Acts 2:31)

18. Would ascend into heaven (Psalm 68:18; Acts 1:9)

19. Would sit down at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:3)

These predictions were more than just a matter of chance.

Some of these fulfillments of prophecy are beyond any statistical probability because they took the power of God in the fulfillment.

Evidence #2 His miracles.

**“Then Jesus answered John’s followers, “Go tell John what you saw and heard here. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor.”** (Luke 7:22)

• "The blind can see" (Matthew 9:27-31; Luke 18:35-43; Mark 8:22-26)

• "The cripples can walk" (Matthew 9:2-7)

• ". . . people with skin diseases (leprosy) are healed" (Matthew 8:2-3; Luke 17:11-19)

• "The deaf can hear" (Mark 7:31-37)

• "The dead are raised to life" (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-25; Luke 7:11-15; John 11:1-44)

• "The Good News is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:5)

Evidence #3: His resurrection

1. Jesus not only predicted it but told the number of days!

**“Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days.”** (John 2:19)

**“Jonah was in the stomach of the big fish for three days and three nights. In the same way, the Son of Man will be in the grave three days and three nights.”** (Matthew 12:40)

**“Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and that he would be rejected by the Jewish elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He told them that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from the dead after three days.”** (Mark 8:31)

2. Jesus claimed the authority behind the resurrection.

**“The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again. No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely. I have the right to give my life, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father commanded me to do.”** (John 10:17-18)

**Do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus is fully God?**

**Why or why not?**

**Which of the evidences you heard today regarding Jesus being fully God was most helpful to you in understanding this important doctrine?**

**Why does this evidence matter to you?**

**How does the truth that Jesus is fully God give you a sense of confidence and security in your everyday life?**

**Even with the overwhelming proof that Jesus is fully God, many people struggle to believe it.**

**What's the difference between physical proof and personal faith?**

**Is faith something we should have without any proof at all?**

**Is proof a guarantee we will have faith? Why or why not?**

The apostle Paul does not stop there.

He goes on to state:

**“Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit.**

**But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born as a man and became like a servant.**

**And when he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death – death on a cross.**

**So God raised him to the highest place. God made his name greater than every other name so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus – everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.**

**And everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and bring glory to God the Father.”** (Philippians 2:6-11)

**Jesus Is Man**

How Do We know that Jesus Is Man?

1. He had a *human birth*.

**“The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel. He will be eating milk curds and honey when he learns to reject what is evil and to choose what is good. You are afraid of the kings of Israel and Aram now. But before the child learns to choose good and reject evil, the lands of Israel and Aram will be empty.”** (Isaiah 7:14-16)

**“The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel,” which means “God is with us.”** (Matthew 1:23)

**“But when the right time came, God sent his Son who was born of a woman and lived under the law.”** (Galatians 4:4)

1. He showed human growth.

**“The little child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s goodness was upon him . . . Jesus became wiser and grew physically. People liked him, and he pleased God.”** (Luke 2:40, 52)

* *intellectually*
* *physically*
* *spiritually*
* *socially*

1. He experienced human emotion.

Jesus felt:

* Grief

**“Jesus cried.”** (John 11:35)

* Sorrow

**“He said to them, “My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me.”** (Matthew 26:38)

* Amazement

**“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. He said to those who were following him, “I tell you the truth, this is the greatest faith I have found, even in Israel.”** (Matthew 8:10)

* Love
* **for an unbeliever**

**“Jesus, looking at the man, loved him and said, “There is one more thing you need to do. Go and sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”** (Mark 10:21)

* **for his friends**

**“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”** (John 11:5)

* **for his disciples**

**“It was almost time for the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that it was time for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and he loved them all the way to the end.”** (John 13:1)

* **for his mother**

**“When Jesus saw his mother and the follower he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the follower, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, the follower took her to live in his home.”** (John 19:26-27)

* Wonder

**“He was amazed at how many people had no faith. Then Jesus went to other villages in that area and taught.”** (Mark 6:6)

* Distress

**“Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be very sad and troubled.”** (Mark 14:33)

* Compassion

**“Jesus felt sorry for the man, so he reached out his hand and touched him and said, “I will. Be healed!”** (Mark 1:41)

* Anger

**“Jesus was angry as he looked at the people, and he felt very sad because they were stubborn. Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand and it was healed.”** (Mark 3:5)

.

1. He hadhuman *experiences* and *needs*.

* He was tired

**“Jacob’s well was there. Jesus was tired from his long trip, so he sat down beside the well. It was about twelve o’clock noon.”** (John 4:6)

**“Jesus was at the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a cushion. His followers woke him and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are drowning!”** (Mark 4:38)

* He was hungry

**“Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry.”** (Matthew 4:2)

* He was thirsty

**“After this, Jesus knew that everything had been done. So that the Scripture would come true, he said, “I am thirsty.”** (John 19:28)

* He was in agony

**“Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”** (Luke 22:44)

* He was tempted

**“Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread.”**

**Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘A person lives not on bread alone, but by everything God says.’”**

**Then the devil led Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the Temple. 6 The devil said, “If you are the Son of God, jump down, because it is written in the Scriptures: ‘He has put his angels in charge of you. They will catch you in their hands so that you will not hit your foot on a rock.’”** *(Psalm 91:11–12)*

**Jesus answered him, “It also says in the Scriptures, ‘Do not test the Lord your God.’”**

**Then the devil led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. The devil said, “If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things.”**

**Jesus said to the devil, “Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”**

**So the devil left Jesus, and angels came and took care of him.”** (Matthew 4:1-11)

* He died

**“Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, I give you my life.” After Jesus said this, he died.”** (Luke 23:46)

**A Fresh Word**

**Incarnation**

The word *“incarnation”* is from the Latin for *"in the flesh."*

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, this was the *“incarnation of God”* into this world.

God came to us in human flesh.

God, as Creator, made us in his image for relationship with him and since “the Fall”, has been reaching down to re-establish that relationship once again.

And humanity, in their fallenness, is reaching up to God for redemption salvation.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

So, God, in his ultimate work of grace and love, brings heaven and earth together in Jesus.

**The Dual Nature of Jesus Christ**

**Jesus Is Fully God and Fully Man**

There is a **Statement of Faith** that we, as Christians, as part of the Body of Christ.

These are the **Creeds** that we use:

* Apostle’s Creed
* Nicene Creed
* Athanasian Creed

**Hypostatic Union**

The union of undiminished deity and perfect humanity forever in one person.

That means that Jesus not only became God and man but that he will always be God

and man.

1. Jesus always has been God

**“He was with God in the beginning.”** (John 1:2)

1. Jesus became man while continuing to be God

**“The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his glory – the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father – and he was full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14)

1. Jesus continues to exist as God and man

**“After he said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud hid him from their sight. As he was going, they were looking into the sky. Suddenly, two men wearing white clothes stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? Jesus, whom you saw taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you saw him go.”** (Acts 1:9-11)

**A picture containing graphical user interface

Description automatically generated**

Death proved Jesus was fully man.

Resurrection proved he was fully God.

While Jesus was in this world, he made a choice:

1. Jesus limited himself.

Four ways that Jesus limited himself:

• He took the form of a man

**“Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit. But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born as a man and became like a servant.**

**And when he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death – death on a cross.”** (Philippians 2:6-8)

**•** He limited his presence to one place and one time

• He took a position in which the Father was "greater”

**“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going, but I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you should be happy that I am going back to the Father, because he is greater than I am.”** (John 14:28)

• He limited his understanding.

**“No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows.”** (Matthew 24:36)

1. Jesus did not lessen himself.

• He was still fully God as he walked this earth (Mark 2:8; Matthew 26:53)

The decision to be born a man, to walk this earth, and to die on a cross was made for him as a part of the Trinity

• This attitude is humility.

**“When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. 4 Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.”** (Philippians 2:3-4)

1. As fully man, Jesus shows us that he understands our needs.
2. As fully God, Jesus shows us that he can meet our needs.

**Which is harder for you to see as real: the fact that Jesus is completely God or the fact that Jesus is completely man?**

**We know Jesus can identify with our struggles and weaknesses because he became a person. Right now, where are you most glad he is able to identify with you?**

**Which one or two or these areas are especially meaningful to you?**

* **Tiredness**
* **Temptations**
* **Emotions**
* **Disappointment**
* **Betrayal**
* **Relationships**
* **Stress**

**What does humility look like in our daily lives? When and how can we be like Jesus by willingly putting others ahead of ourselves?**

**Bibliography**

Explore God. (2021 Retrieved March 21, 2022, May 20). *IDEO SERIES: THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS.* Retrieved from exploregod.com: https://www.exploregod.com/series/the-7-big-questions

God's Word to the Nations . (1995). *God's Word (GW).* Baker Publishing Group.

Holladay/Warren, T. H. (2003, 2008). *Foundations Jesus Study Guide & JESUS: Video Series.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Thomas Nelson, Inc. (© 2005). *The Holy Bible, New Century Version® (NCV) .* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

1. Taken and adapted from **Explore God: The 7 Big Questions Series** **© 2022 Explore God**, https://www.exploregod.com Mechanicsville, Virginia, USA [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is taken from the **New Century Version (NCV)**®. Copyright © 1987, 1988, 1991 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Compilation of a) **Prayer for John 14:6**, © Copyright [2011 - 2022] Knowing-Jesus.com <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/John/14/6>; and b) **Daily Prayer – John 14:6** © 2022 - Daily Bible Verse, https://daily-bible-verse.net/daily-prayer-john-146.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Taken and adapted from **Foundations: JESUS Study Guide** 2003, 2008 by Tom Holladay and Kay Warren, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan [↑](#footnote-ref-4)