

ASKING FOR A FRIEND

An exploration of the spiritual questions ^{YOUR FRIENDS} you most commonly ask

WHAT IS THIS, AND WHY SHOULD I TRUST IT?

Certain topics can feel *really* hard to talk about, even with our closest friends. Things like God, spirituality and core beliefs; our deepest fears, hurts and insecurities; what truth is and how to find it. If you find these topics difficult, you're not alone. These conversations can be awkward. Uncomfortable. Even risky.

Though many of us shy away from discussing such things, at one point or another we all think about them. Maybe a loved one's death shakes you and causes you to wonder if there's anything beyond the physical world. Maybe an awful trauma creates questions about whether God is good, or even real. Or maybe your mind just wanders into unsettling philosophical territory.

Naturally, we pursue answers. Where can we find them if the topics are so hard to talk about?

Since 1951, Cru has sought to be a safe place for people to pursue and learn about God. Cru is a nonprofit Christian organization that seeks to come alongside others and help them discover the forgiveness, peace, and purpose God has made available to us through Jesus Christ. Cru communities can be found in over 100 nations, within many college and pro sports teams,

and on over 5,000 high school and college campuses worldwide. Maybe you even received this magazine from someone involved with Cru at your school.

Naturally, you might be skeptical. What is this? Is it propaganda? Biased opinion? How can I trust it?

We get it. We'd ask the same thing.

This collection of articles addresses the questions and issues that burden the minds of students like you. None are new, they're just framed in ways that reflect the experiences of your generation. Through research and firsthand experience, magazine editor Jason Weimer compiled and adapted content from a number of authors—including seminary professors, former atheists, and people who have studied the Bible and put it into practice for decades—and added some of his own material, in order to offer a thoughtful, relevant perspective on these subjects from the framework of biblical Christianity.

Jason has served as a Cru staff member for 19 years, helping mentor university students in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Melbourne, Australia. He has a



QUESTION 1

IS THERE A GOD? DOES THAT MATTER TO MY LIFE?.....6

What evidence for God's existence is there? Why isn't that evidence more conclusive? Can we even know if God is real? Is God close or distant? Would I want to know God if he did exist? How would God's existence or non-existence change my life?

QUESTION 2

HOW CAN I FIND PEACE IN SUCH A STRESSFUL AND CONFUSING WORLD?.....16

Why does it seem like we're all so stressed? Where can I turn to find stability and peace? Why do we have so much but still feel anxious and unsatisfied? Is freedom from anxiety even possible?

QUESTION 3

IN SUCH A CONNECTED WORLD, WHY DO I FEEL SO ISOLATED AND LONELY?.....24

How can I have so many friends but still feel so alone? Does anyone truly know me? Do I know myself? If I let people see the real me, would they accept me or push me away? How can I escape loneliness? Can God help me feel less lonely?

QUESTION 4

IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EVIL, PAIN, AND SUFFERING?.....32

Why is life so hard? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why doesn't God do something about it? If God loves us, why does suffering even exist at all? What about the trauma I've faced—where was God in it? How can I find healing and hope?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTION 5

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT JUSTICE?.....40

Why do we yearn for justice so deeply? Why do so many Christians seem unconcerned about social injustices? How does God view injustice? What does he do about it? What about injustices I've committed—what does pursuing justice for them mean for me? What does true justice look like?

QUESTION 6

DOESN'T SCIENCE REFUTE MUCH OF WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS?.....50

Doesn't the Bible and Christian teaching reject established scientific facts? Would I need to turn my brain off to become a Christian? Are there questions that science can't answer but the Bible can? Is it possible for science and the Bible to be harmonized? How?

QUESTION 7

AREN'T ALL RELIGIONS BASICALLY THE SAME?.....60

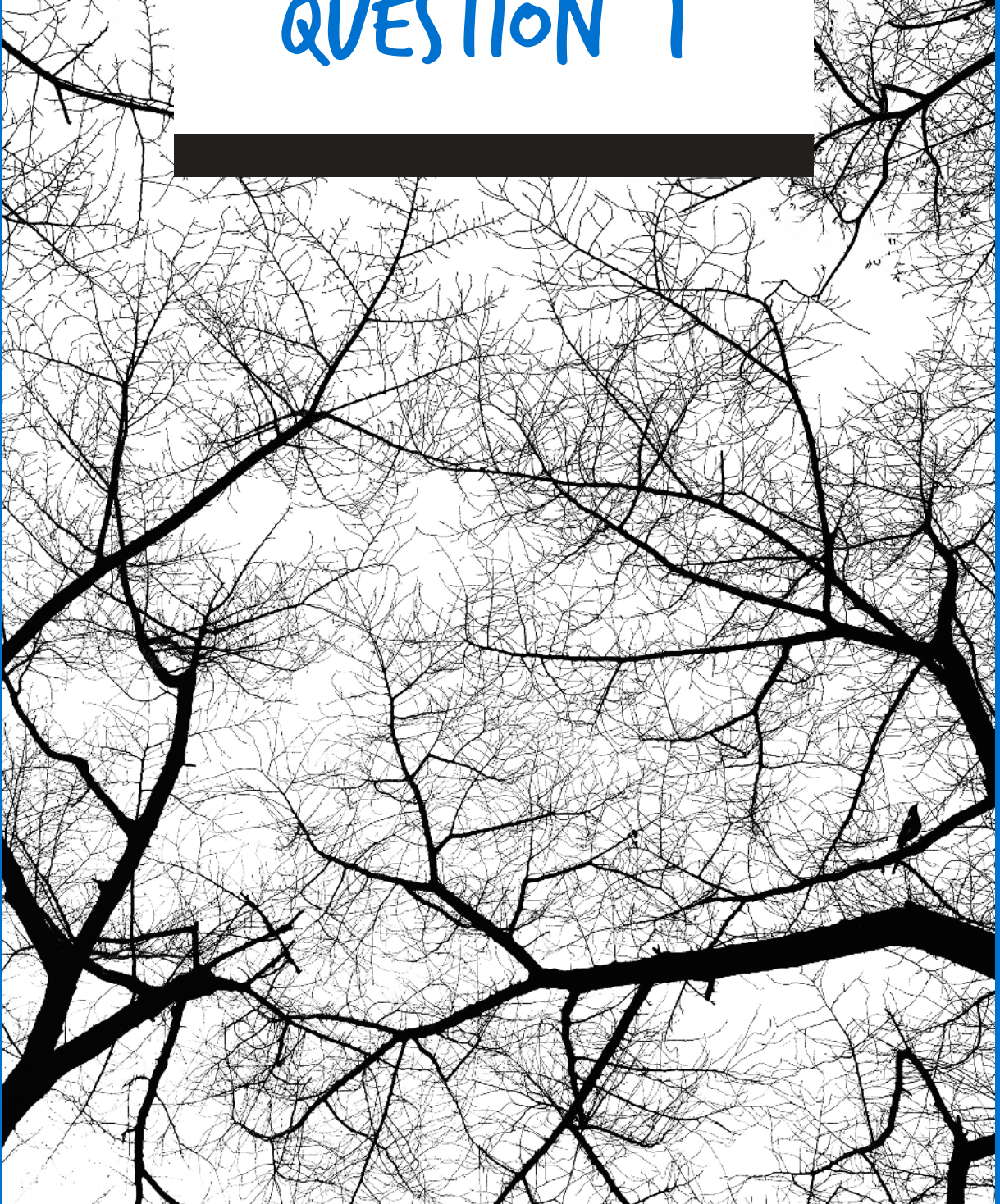
Aren't different religions just different perspectives on the same God? Why does Christianity claim to be the "only way?" Isn't that bigoted and intolerant? Isn't it unloving, even un-Christian, to judge people and tell them they're wrong? Wouldn't God accept good-hearted people from other faiths?

QUESTION 8

ISN'T BELIEVING IN JESUS JUST BLIND FAITH?.....70

Hasn't the Bible been changed over time, so that the real Jesus has become distorted? What was Jesus's life really like? What factual evidence is there for him and for the Bible? How can serious people accept miracles like the resurrection to be true? Isn't it like believing a fairy tale? What do Jesus's claims and the evidence surrounding him mean for me?

QUESTION 1



IS THERE A GOD? DOES THAT MATTER TO MY LIFE?

Imagine you live in a two-dimensional world. You have height and width but no depth, like a drawing on flat paper. To you, a 3-D person would be impossible to comprehend. They'd exist off the paper. You could look left and right or up and down, but looking outward—off the paper—isn't possible; that plane simply doesn't exist.¹

How would the 3-D person reveal themselves and engage with people in the 2-D world?

This is a bit like our situation with God. You and I exist in space and time—a physical world—so understanding or interacting with a being outside these dimensions is difficult. We can't “see” this being any more than a 2-D person could look off the paper to see a 3-D one. We might wonder if such a being even exists. We need that being to reveal themselves to us in some way.

A 3-D person might reveal themselves to a 2-D world by pressing their finger to the paper. They'd enter the world, but their appearance in it would be a fingerprint. It would suggest the 3-D person's existence, and even say something about what they're like, but it could also be dismissed. What if that “fingerprint” is just a part of 2-D reality, not an indication of a superior being?

^A PSALM 19:1

^B ROMANS 1:20

^C ROMANS 1:18

^D JEREMIAH 29:13

The Bible anticipates these different responses. One of the Psalms, a songbook for the Hebrew people, begins: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”^A A later book states, “since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made....”^B The observable world gives indications of God's existence. But the same passage says that people look at this plain evidence and dismiss it, suppressing the truth about God.^C

So, as we examine some evidence for God's existence, ask yourself: *If God exists, would I want to know him?* If you do, God says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”^D

WHAT “FINGERPRINTS” OF GOD ARE OBSERVABLE?

When we encounter something that appears to serve a clear purpose, we assume it has been designed. For example, when you see a Bird or Lime scooter on the street, you recognize that a company created it with an intended purpose, that it's something you ride, something you must pay to rent, something able take you places faster than walking can. You don't assume that it formed by a chance combination of parts.

When we observe the world around us, do we see indications of design? What should we do with that information if we do?

Here are just a few things that appear to show design, and, therefore, a designer.

THE BIG BANG

Scientists are convinced that our universe began with a massive explosion of energy and light. Astrophysicist Robert Jastrow, a self-described agnostic, stated, “The seed of everything that has happened in the Universe was planted in that first instant; every star, every planet, and every living creature in the Universe came into being as a result of events that were set in motion in the moment of the cosmic explosion...and we cannot find out what caused that to happen.”²

Cause-and-effect is a scientific sure thing. There is no spontaneous motion; some force must act first. Chemicals don't suddenly change unless something causes a reaction. Matter cannot arise from non-matter.

Alternative theories for the universe's origins continue to be proposed, but the most scientifically consistent one is that there was an outside cause.

EARTH

The Earth is located the exact right distance from the sun. Our surface temperatures range, generally, between -30 and +120 degrees. If the Earth were any farther away, we'd all freeze. Any closer and we'd burn up. Even a tiny shift in the Earth's position in relation to the sun would make life on Earth impossible.

Our Moon is also precisely sized and positioned. The Moon's gravitational pull creates important ocean tides and movement so ocean waters don't stagnate, while at the same time restraining them from spilling across the continents.³

WATER

No living thing can survive without water. Its abundance on Earth is remarkable, but water's unique properties are what make it an indicator of design: it behaves differently than any other liquid.⁴

Water is a universal solvent, allowing chemicals, minerals, and nutrients to easily dissolve and be carried, absorbed and used throughout our bodies.⁵ It's also chemically neutral, so it doesn't change the nature of the substances it carries.

Water has a unique surface tension, so it can flow upward in plants, against gravity, bringing nourishment to the top of even the tallest trees. It's also unique in that it becomes less dense as it cools. It freezes from the top down and floats in solid form, allowing aquatic life to survive winter. If water acted like other liquids, plant and sea life would be nearly impossible. All other forms of life would become impossible too.



“SUPER-INTELLIGENCE EXPLANATION FOR THE THE COMPLEXITY OF

HUMAN BEINGS

Our eyes can distinguish among seven million colors. They have automatic focusing and handle an astounding 1.5 million messages at the same time.⁶

The eye is just one of many systems the human brain must manage constantly. Your brain processes more than a million messages a second:⁷ the temperature of the room, the swirl of sounds around you, the texture of your mobile device, the dryness of your mouth, and much more. It does this while storing memories, regulating emotions, and maintaining involuntary functions like heartbeat and breathing.

But more than any other complex biological system, DNA is what prompts many scientists to consider whether intentional design lies behind all life.

Dr. Antony Flew, a British philosopher and longtime advocate of atheism, stated in 2004, “Super-intelligence is the only good explanation for the origin of life and the complexity of nature.”⁸ DNA research and discoveries played a large role in his conclusion.

The DNA code is similar to an intricate computer program. Only, instead of ones and zeroes, a DNA strand is made of four chemicals, abbreviated with the letters A, T, G, and C. Embedded within every human cell is a code of three billion pairs of these letters. If you were to read that code aloud at three letters per second, it would take thirty-one years.⁹

Dr. Francis Collins, director of the Human Genome Project (which mapped the human

VIDEO: DR. FRANCIS
COLLINS OFFERS
FURTHER EVIDENCE
FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE
(LENGTH: 1:45)



HE IS THE ONLY GOOD THE ORIGIN OF LIFE AND OF NATURE. - ANTONY FLEW

DNA structure) said that one can “think of DNA as an instructional script, a software program, sitting in the nucleus of the cell.”¹⁰ And your DNA is 99.9% similar to everyone else’s; the variations in the script that cause you to be you lie in that tiny difference.¹¹

As we consider these examples, we have to ask, “Why?” Why are Earth’s properties so finely tuned to accommodate life? Why does water behave differently than any other liquid? Why is DNA so complex? Are these a few of the fingerprints God has left on the paper of our world?

DOES GOD CARE WHETHER WE ACKNOWLEDGE HIM?

I (Marilyn) was once an atheist. And like many atheists, the issue of people believing in God bothered me. Why would we devote so much time and energy refuting something we don’t even believe exists?

I thought my attention came from a sense of care for those poor, delusional believers. I wanted to help them realize their hope was ill-founded. But to be honest, I had another motive. As I challenged those who believed in God, I was deeply curious to see if they could convince me otherwise. Part of my quest was to become free from the question of God. If I could prove believers wrong, the issue would be off the table; I could freely go about my life.

ASK YOURSELF... OR A FRIEND

1. Do you find belief in God difficult or easy? Why?
2. How does the evidence of design affect your belief about the existence of God?
3. What other evidence do you see? What about evidence to the alternative?
4. How often do you find yourself questioning your beliefs (whether for God's existence or against)? What prompts those questions?
5. Have you ever felt like God was "pursuing" you? How?
6. What sort of evidence would you consider to be conclusive, or "proof," of God's existence?

SCAN HERE TO READ ABOUT HUGH, WHOSE PURSUIT OF SOLID EVIDENCE LED HIM TO BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, THEN THE BIBLE AND JESUS CHRIST:



I didn't realize that the reason the topic weighed so heavily on me was because God was pressing the issue. I've come to find out that God intends for us to know him. He's surrounded us with evidence of himself and keeps the question of his existence squarely before us.

Others have experienced this as well. The late journalist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, "I had a notion that somehow, besides questing, I was being pursued."¹² Renowned author and Oxford professor C. S. Lewis said of his experience: "...night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet... I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England."¹³

Lewis titled his memoir *Surprised by Joy* as a result of knowing God. I too had no expectations other than rightly admitting God's existence. But over the following months I became amazed by his love for me.

ARE THERE LESS SUBJECTIVE "FINGERPRINTS" OF GOD?

If God does desire for us to know him, we'd expect more than just subjective evidence. The good news is that he's given us just that in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Bible proclaims that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God,"^e "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."^f In Jesus, God "became flesh and made his dwelling among us."^g Through Jesus, God did more than just leave a fingerprint. He became a 2-D figure in our 2-D world. He drew himself onto the paper.

Leaders and founders of other major world religions—Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Moses, etc.—all identified themselves as teachers or prophets. None ever claimed to be equal to God. This is what sets Jesus apart. He said that God exists, and you're looking at him.

Jesus did more than just make this claim, however. He said he could do things only God could: forgive people of their sins, give them eternal life in heaven and a more abundant life here. And he did things no mere human could: restore sight to the blind, enable the paralyzed to walk, raise people from the dead, and exercise power over even nature itself.

^E COLOSSIANS 1:15
^F HEBREWS 1:3, ESV
^G JOHN 1:14

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”^H He voluntarily submitted to the barbaric ritual of crucifixion, dying a criminal’s death. His reason? “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...”^I Because of his great love for us, he accepted the punishment we deserve because of our sins (denying God, rebelling from him, living in immoral or wicked ways, etc.). Then he demonstrated mastery over even death by rising from the dead.

Of all the religions known to humanity, only through Jesus will you see God reaching toward us in love, providing a way for us to have a relationship with him. Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection is that way, and we’re invited to respond by entrusting ourselves to him through faith.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO
RESPOND TO JESUS?



WHY WOULD GOD MATTER TO MY LIFE?

You might think all this evidence is fine and good, that maybe God does exist, but don’t see how it relates to you. Plenty of people seem to be good, happy, content, and purposeful without God. What difference would knowing God make?

C. S. Lewis addressed this in a sermon called “The Weight of Glory”: “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”¹⁴

^H JOHN 14:6
^I 1 PETER 3:18, ESV
^J JOHN 4:13-14, 6:35

In other words, the happiness and fulfillment we get from staying healthy, being financially secure, doing meaningful work, and enjoying things like fine food or exotic vacations isn’t inherently bad, but joy on a much higher scale is available. As you’ve probably experienced, the shine of the newest device or the latest trip quickly wears off, and you’re left looking for the next thing that will make you feel satisfied.

Jesus said that he could fulfill desires in us that nothing else can.^J That’s because we are not just physical beings; we’re inherently spiritual, as well. We’re made for more than just what we can experience in this world. By knowing the one who designed us and choosing to follow the purposes for which he made us, we can experience a fullness of joy, purpose, and peace that exclaims, “I was born for this!” First and foremost, this comes through being in relationship with our Creator.

There is also the question of eternity.

If God created us to know him, we've all abandoned that purpose in various ways.

Some rebel openly and want nothing to do with God, denying him or living in ways we know are the opposite of what is right and good. The innate morality we all sense in our hearts acts as a sign that some standard-bearer exists, even if we intellectually don't believe it. It also acts as a conscience, bearing witness to our guilt.

Others may not rebel openly but still live in ignorance of the God who made us. Either way, what would ignorance and rebellion communicate to our designer and creator?

The Bible shows us a God who is patient and gracious, but also just. If you never acknowledge God and receive his invitation to know him through Jesus, you'll still enjoy the benefits and joys he built into this world. But it will end here, because you've accepted the gifts but rejected the giver. The consequence of this rejection is a just outcome and a case of God giving us what we want—an eternity without him.

Or, you can accept God's invitation and find forgiveness of sin, restoration of relationship with him, and the promise of an eternity of unimaginable joy. In this, he also gives us what we want, only he knows our true desires and needs, and how to fulfill them, far better than we do.

See "Isn't Believing in Jesus Just Blind Faith?" at the end of this magazine to learn more about Jesus and what he has done for us, and how to enter into relationship with God through him.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Flatland*, an 1884 book by Edwin A. Abbott, fictionalizes this concept.
- 2 Robert Jastrow, "Message from Professor Robert Jastrow," LeaderU.com; 2002.
- 3 "The Wonders of God's Creation," Moody Institute of Science (Chicago, IL).
- 4 Michelle Starr, "Water Behaves Differently From All Other Liquids, And We Finally Know Why," from sciencealert.com (April 2, 2018).
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- 6 Hugh Davson, *Physiology of the Eye*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991).
- 7 "The Wonders of God's Creation."
- 8 "There is a God, leading atheist concludes," nbcnews.com/id/wbna6688917. From Dec. 9, 2004.
- 9 Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006) 1.
- 10 Collins, 102.
- 11 Collins, 125.
- 12 Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Green Stick*, pt. 1 of *Chronicles of Wasted Time* (London: Collins, 1972), 125.
- 13 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 228-229.
- 14 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*, (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 26.





QUESTION 2