

# Why Doesn't God Show Himself?

# radiate

## Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week:
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make sure that new people know that they are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.  

or
- 4) Have a time of reflective worship.
  - a) Play a recording of a song that speaks of God's creation, like *Wonderful Maker* by Chris Tomlin.
  - b) Ask the group members to write down their responses to the song.
  - c) Optional: ask the group members to turn their reflections into short prayers to say out loud in a group prayer time.

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to the point prayers.

## Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) When you were little did you ever have an imaginary friend?
  - a) Did you believe in Father Christmas or some other imaginary character?
  - b) What was so great about believing in an imaginary character?
  - c) When one boy was asked "what is faith?", he said it was "believing in something that you know it isn't true".
- 2) Think about something that you believed in as a child, but now know it to be not true.
  - a) How did you discover it to be not true?
  - b) Assuming it was something that made you happy to believe in, why don't you go back to believing that now?
  - c) Do you think it is really possible to believe in something that you know not to be true?
- 3) Richard Dawkins (a famous British atheist) claims that there are no credible facts to support faith in God. What do you think?
- 4) If God showed himself, with undeniable proof, to every human being, how would that change things?
- 5) What would faith mean? How would our experience of God change?

Some atheist critics compare faith in God to having an imaginary friend.

The main point here is to demonstrate that mature faith must be based on some evidence.

If one of the members says "God" in response to this question, simply acknowledge their answer as you would any of the others. Don't argue the point here.

For most people, beliefs must be sustained by credible facts.

Richard Dawkins is a professor of biology at Oxford U. His book *The God Delusion* is a bestseller, but is receiving a great deal of criticism in scholarly circles.

## Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

### Is there any evidence for God's existence?

- 1) It is estimated that 98% of the world's population believes in God.
  - a) The specifics of those beliefs vary but it's remarkable that there is nearly universal agreement that God is real.
    - i) This fact alone is an important and obvious piece of evidence that is often overlooked.
    - ii) While this fact isn't proof of God's existence it is so huge that it

Many ask for proof of God's existence. However, "proof" in the absolute sense is only possible in mathematics. All other fields of knowledge (including science) rely on evidence.

We do not demand comprehensive knowledge in any other area of life. We don't need all possible

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cannot be dismissed as "wishful thinking" or some kind of "God delusion."

- b) There are fewer atheists (like Dawkins) around today than 100 years ago.
  - i) This is amazing because 100 years ago atheists predicted that by our time science would have wiped out any remaining belief in God. Instead, many people have come to believe in God because of science.
  - ii) For example, prior to Dawkins, the world's leading atheist was Antony Flew. In December 2004, Flew announced that he believed that the scientific evidence for God's existence was now overwhelming. Flew does not profess any particular religion, but nevertheless he has shocked the scholarly world by declaring that he is no longer an atheist.
- 2) There are some important questions that science will never be able to answer, such as:
  - a) "Why is there something instead of nothing?" Evolutionary Theory can only deal with the development of what is...but where did the building blocks (matter itself) come from?
  - b) If the universe is a result of random chance, why does the evidence indicate that it appears to have designed the human mind so we could ask questions like this?
  - c) Science cannot account for the most important aspects of human experience: love, faith, hope, among others. Should we conclude that anything that can't be reproduced in a laboratory isn't real?
  - d) Natural selection (survival of the fittest) depends upon competition (win/lose conflicts). Why then, regardless of religion or philosophy, is the value of fairness almost universal among human beings?

questions answered about whether light is a wave or a particle to switch on a light to see around a room!

Antony Flew was a lecturer in philosophy at (among others) Oxford, U of Aberdeen, and Reading U.

### Discussion 1: About 15 minutes Does God ever show himself?

- 1) " In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." (Gen. 1:1-2, NRSV)
  - a) What evidence do you see in the universe that it was made by someone who knew what he or she was doing?
  - b) What artistic flourishes (apart from mere functionality) do you see in creation? What do you think that says about the Creator?
- 2) The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world." (Psa. 19:1-4, NRSV)
  - a) According to this passage, who is God trying to communicate with through his creation?
  - b) What does the beauty of the day and night skies tell us about God?
- 3) "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and

Theologians have long taught that God reveals himself in two main ways: *General Revelation* refers to what can be learned about God by observation of creation. *Special Revelation* refers to God making himself known by direct action and communication with his creatures.

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divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (Rom. 1:19-20, NRSV)

- a) By observing God's creation, what two things should be plain to us?
  - b) Based on what we now know about the vastness and complexity of the universe, what does it tell us about God's power?
  - c) Basic moral knowledge is evidenced by all cultures. What does our conscience teach us about the virtues of God and his expectations for human beings?
- 4) "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds." (Heb. 1:1-3, NRSV)
- a) Does it seem strange to you that God would speak to people? Or would it seem stranger if he didn't?
  - b) Was the message of the prophets well received by the people? (Generally not!) Why not?
  - c) Would you think, then, that God would be more or less inclined to give more information to more people?
  - d) After the prophets, how has God chosen to speak to us?

God's *eternal power* (he can make whatever he desires) and God's *divine nature* (he is moral-he has made us with a conscience to know right from wrong).

"The prophets" refers to people to whom God gave special revealed knowledge to communicate with everyone else. Some of the prophets wrote down their communication from God, which we have today in the form of the Jewish Bible, which is the Christian Old Testament.

### Discussion 2: *About 15 minutes* God showed himself most clearly in Jesus.

- 1) "He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word..." (Heb. 1:3-4, NRSV)
  - i) Who is the "he" mentioned here?
  - ii) How can Jesus be the "exact imprint of God's very being"?
  - iii) What can we learn about God by looking at the life of Jesus?
  - iv) In what ways is Jesus claiming to be more than a "good man" or even, "a prophet"?
- 2) "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:6-9, NRSV)
  - a) "No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus forces us to make up our minds about him? What are our options?
  - b) What did Jesus mean when he said, "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him"?
  - c) What do you think Jesus' attitude toward Philip is when he says, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?"
  - d) What do you think God's answer would be to someone who asks, "Why doesn't God show himself?"

"His Son is the reflection of God's glory and the exact likeness of God's being," God's Word Translation

Sometimes theologians refer to Jesus as "the human face of God."

Is Jesus being narrow minded, a megalomaniac, or something else? C.S. Lewis said that Jesus himself forces us to choose: is he a liar, a lunatic, or Lord?

Jesus reveals the Father in the clearest way that human beings can understand: God as a human being.

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- 3) "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (John 14:25-27, NRSV) When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf." (John 15:26, NRSV)
- Who is the Advocate? What will the advocate do?
  - Now that Jesus is no longer physically present among us, how does God reveal himself to us?
  - How do you know if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you?

God the Spirit testifies (affirms, remind us) of Jesus and causes us to experience the presence of God.

Ask the members how they experience the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Remind them that the Holy Spirit speaks only what Jesus would say were he here. So if we "sense" that we should do something that Jesus would not approve of we can be sure it is not the Holy Spirit speaking to us.

### Closer:

- If it were possible to hear God speaking to you, would you want him to?
- Could it be that God is speaking to us all the time but we've tuned out his voice because we don't like what he is telling us?
- Journaling exercise: Knowing what you know about God through the words and attitudes of Jesus, what do you think he would say if he wrote you a letter today? Use your imagination and write it down.

This is, of course, NOT, the same thing as God actually writing to us! But it is an interesting and often enlightening exercise that reveals what we think of God. And, yet, sometimes the Holy Spirit uses this exercise to actually speak to people.