

# GOOD QUESTION



Real answers to life's big questions

*Good Question was developed by  
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Scripture verses taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.

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## INTRODUCTION

It's great when young children go through a questioning phase.

"Why does rain go into puddles?"

"Why are there white lines in the middle of roads?"

"Why do goats look sad?"

As we grow older, we stop asking so many questions (we start getting asked them instead!). But we don't stop having them. It's just that often life is too busy to get round to thinking about them. Or we're too embarrassed to ask them. Or we're a bit worried about what the answers would be if we faced up to them.

Christianity isn't about having all the answers. But it is about knowing the one who does, God, and listening to what he has to say about life, the world and our future.

So we're really glad you're asking the big questions about life and about Christianity (even bigger than why rain goes into puddles). In this booklet you'll find answers from the Bible to some of the questions people most often ask. You can read them in any order you like.

We hope you find it helpful, thought-provoking, and even exciting.

Now, why *do* goats look sad?!

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## HOW CAN WE KNOW GOD EXISTS

“I can’t see him (or her, or it), or test him, or feel him. Why should I believe in God? And if there’s no God, then Christianity, and this booklet, are a waste of time!”

Two things **point** to God’s existence...

### CREATION

“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” (from the Bible book of Romans, chapter 1, verse 20).

Creation is amazing. It’s like a wonderful painting, which prompts us to say: “Whoever painted this must be amazing”. And no one looks at a painting and assumes the paint just fell like that! So the Bible says God deserves “glory and honour ... for you created all things” (Revelation 4 v 11).

### CONSCIENCE

Each of us has a sense that some things are right and some things are wrong—a kind of internal moral code. Where did that come from? Animals don’t have a conscience. The Bible says that our “consciences bear witness” (Romans 2 v 15) to there being a God who put the idea of right and wrong in our hearts.

But many people look at the universe and say it’s not created by God; many people explain how we got our

consciences without referring to God. There are good arguments on either side.

That's because these two things are only *pointers* to there being a God: for *proof*, we need to look at...

## CHRIST

Jesus said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14 v 9). He claimed that when you look at him, you're looking at God living on earth as a human. Jesus backed up that claim by what he did in history, 2000 years ago. And if Jesus is God, that's unarguable proof that God exists!

So the question we each need to ask ourselves is:

*"Who was Jesus Christ?"*

You can look into that yourself by reading one of the four historical accounts of his life found in the Bible, named after their authors—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

### **Yes, but...**

"You've quoted the Bible there. *Can we trust what the Bible says?*" Have a look at the next question.

"I get that Jesus is important to Christians. *But wasn't he just a great teacher?*" Have a look at page 10.

## CAN WE TRUST WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

“The Bible was written thousands of years ago... contains some claims that seem far-fetched... was written by people who were really biased... and can seem quite confusing. Why would I read it today in the 21st century, let alone base my life on it?”

### WHAT JESUS SAID

In the Gospels (the four accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible), Jesus says that:

- the Old Testament (the part written before he was born) is God's words, written by his messengers, or “prophets”.
- the New Testament, written by his friends, has been written by God's Spirit, who Jesus promised would “guide [his friends] into all truth” (John 16 v 13).

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) claim that Jesus is God, living on earth as a human. So if the Gospels are right about Jesus, then we can trust the Bible, because he says it has all been written by God. If the Gospels are trustworthy, the Bible is God's words.

But that's a big “if”! Can we trust the Gospels?

### FIVE REASONS WHY WE CAN

- 1. *The Gospels claim to be history***—not fairy tales. Luke begins his Gospel by saying he's “carefully investigated everything”, by interviewing “those who from the first were eyewitnesses” (Luke 1 v 3, 2).
- 2. *The Gospel claims are backed up by witnesses.*** Most of the New Testament was written within a

generation of Jesus' life. So it would have been easy for people to say: "I was there, and that bit didn't happen". One New Testament writer, Paul, said that after Jesus died and rose back to life, he "appeared to more than five hundred ... most of whom are still living" (1 Corinthians 15 v 6). None of them said: "No, this is made up!"

**3. *The Gospels we read are authentic.*** We have enough very early New Testaments to know that what we read is the same as what was first written 2000 years ago (though it's been translated from Greek to English, of course!)

**4. *The Gospels are backed up by historical research.*** The more we find out about that era, the more we discover that the Gospels' details check out with what non-Christian writers (such as the Roman, Tacitus; and the Jew, Josephus) wrote.

**5. *The Gospel writers suffered for their claims.*** Jesus' first followers (including the Gospel writers) were tortured and even killed for what they said. They were willing to die for their claims about Jesus. Why die for something you *know* is a lie because *you* made it up?

Lots of people make their minds up without reading the Bible with an open mind. It's worth reading a Gospel before deciding!

**Yes, but...**

"Jesus could have got the Bible wrong. *Wasn't he just a great teacher?*" Have a look at the next question.



## WASN'T JESUS JUST A GREAT TEACHER

“I think Jesus is pretty important. He was probably a great man and a wise teacher—maybe even an amazing healer. But it’s just too far-fetched to conclude that he was God!”

It would be *easiest* for us if Jesus were simply a great teacher. We could learn about life from him; but when we think we know better, we could ignore him.

### WHO ARE YOU?

It’s only fair to take seriously what Jesus said about himself. Once, Jesus was talking to a group of people who were descended from a man called Abraham who had lived 1800 years before. When they asked if he had seen Abraham, Jesus said: “Before Abraham was born, I AM!” (John 8 v 58).

I AM was God’s name for himself, the name he had told people to call him by. Here, Jesus says it’s his name. Jesus says he’s older than Abraham. So in calling himself I AM, Jesus *claimed to be the eternal God*.

### WHAT HE CAN'T HAVE BEEN

And that means Jesus can’t just have been a great teacher.

Imagine you’re back at school, and your favourite maths teacher says “ $2+2=6$ ”. Now he can’t be just a good teacher. He’s either in charge of the whole of maths, so he can write the rules; or he’s making this up to fool you; or he’s making a terrible mistake.

Whichever it is, he *can’t* be just a great teacher!

It's the same with Jesus—but with higher stakes. Because Jesus claims to be God, he must be one of these:

**a liar:** deliberately trying to fool us

**a lunatic:** mistakenly thinking he is God

**the Lord:** God himself, and so a great teacher, but not just a great teacher.

## THE PROOF

While he was living on earth, Jesus deliberately gave some pretty good proofs that his claims about himself were true. He didn't only say he was God the Son, living on earth: he showed it. He healed people with a touch; he controlled the weather with a word; he even stopped a funeral and commanded a corpse: "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk" (Luke 7 v 14-15).

What Jesus did backed up what Jesus said. And if he is God, we can't just ignore him when we disagree with him. If he's God, we need to find out what he's like, and what he thinks of us, and what he wants to say to us.

### **Yes, but...**

"Does it really matter who I think Jesus was? *Surely as long as I'm good, I'll go to heaven anyway?*" Have a look at page 16.

"So Christians believe Jesus is God. *What did he have to say about what the point of life is?*" Have a look at page 26.

## HASN'T SCIENCE DISPROVED CHRISTIANITY

“We just don't have any need for “God” anymore. Science explains how the universe works, and what causes things to grow, and what weather to expect. We should only live by what we can prove—not by what some people just believe.”

Three helpful points, the **ABC** of this question:

### ANSWERS

Christianity and science are giving answers to different questions. Science asks questions like: *What* is this substance? *When* did that thing take place? *How* did that thing happen?

The beginning of the Bible, on the other hand, is much more concerned with the questions: *Who* made this? *Why* did they make it? *Why* are we here? So we shouldn't expect the Bible to offer us answers to What, When and How questions; but we shouldn't look to science to tell us Who made everything, or Why we are here.

### BELIEFS

Everyone has beliefs which they can't back up with scientific evidence—even scientists! So some scientists believe that there is no God (without being able to test scientifically that belief). And some scientists believe that there is a God (and they can't test that scientifically, either).

And what people believe affects how they look at the world. One scientist might believe the start of the universe

(however and whenever it happened) was caused by God; another might believe it began randomly, because there is no God.

But both views about God are a matter of belief, not scientific evidence.

So, science can't prove Christianity is wrong, nor can it prove it's right. It can't prove or disprove the existence of a God who works through science (like the God of the Bible).

The big question becomes: Does this God of the Bible, who controls his world and usually uses what we call scientific processes to do so, actually exist?

## CHRIST

Again, it comes back to Jesus. He once said to a storm on a sea "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm" (Mark 4 v 39).

Here's this God who controls everything, including scientific processes. He is in charge of science (he invented it!). The more we discover about how this world works, the more we see how ingenious its designer is.

### **Yes, but...**

"So science doesn't have the last word about everything. *What does Christianity say about the point of life?*" Turn to page 26.

"So God's in charge of the world. *Why does he allow suffering?*" Have a look at the next page.

## WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING

“Any kind of God worth knowing wouldn’t let suffering happen.  
A loving God wouldn’t allow wars, diseases and unhappiness.”

Suffering is horrible: and deep down we all feel it’s a problem, something that shouldn’t happen. That’s because it shouldn’t! God made this world to be suffering-free: to be “very good” (Genesis 1 v 31), with nothing bad in it. *So why is there suffering now?*

### ANSWER

Jesus once said: “out of men’s hearts come evil thoughts ... murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit...” (Mark 7 v 21-22). In other words, when people—like you and me—think we know better than God how to live, we cause suffering, to other people and sometimes to ourselves.

Because we reject God and his guidelines for living in his creation, the whole thing is messed up: in Bible-speak, the ground is “cursed”, imperfect (Genesis 3 v 17). This world goes wrong—earthquakes, tsunamis, diseases.

God allows suffering because he allows humans, who cause it, to exist. Asking God to stop *suffering* existing in the world is actually asking God to stop *us* existing in the world.

But actually *an answer to this question isn’t that helpful*. When we suffer, ***what we really need is two things...***

### HOPE

God won’t allow suffering in his world forever. One day he’ll get rid of all suffering and everything that causes

suffering: he'll remake the world new, and "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21 v 4). People will live with him in his perfect presence.

But because *we* reject God and cause suffering, *we* don't deserve to be in that world. That's why God's Son, in his love, came into the world as the man Jesus. He lived perfectly, never causing suffering—but he came, he said, to "suffer many things and ... be killed" (Mark 8 v 31). As Jesus died, *he* took what *we* deserve: separation from his Father God's perfect presence. So he can offer life in God's remade world to anyone who asks for it. Anyone who trusts Jesus can look forward to a guaranteed place there.

## HELP

God promises to be with Christians when they suffer: nothing can "separate us from the love of God" (Romans 8 v 39). And he promises to use suffering to help Christians know him better, and become like the people he created us to be. "In all things, God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8 v 28).

If there's no God, there's no reason for suffering or hope beyond it. It's just random bad luck. It's meaningless.

On the other hand, if there is a God who loves us, suffering is still horrible—but we can face it with hope, look beyond it to a better life, and trust in the God who promises to help us through it.

### **Yes, but...**

"All this hope is based on what the Bible says. *Can we really trust it?*" Turn to page 8.