



REALLY?

**Untruths
Uncovered**

Many untrue things are said about God, Jesus, the Bible and the Church. Let's expose some false narratives as we walk toward Easter this year. We are not trying to win arguments, but to begin conversations with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Each week's sermon will provide a thoughtful question, so you can start a conversation with a skeptic or non-believer. Ultimately, Easter morning declares the greatest news. Everyone said Jesus was dead, and that death would hold Him forever. Really? Guess what—Jesus is alive again!

REALLY? • Hebrews 1:1-12 • Tim McConnell • February 18, 2018

What do you do when someone says, “I don’t believe in God”? What do you say when the conversation takes that turn, a window opens up in the conversation to divine things. Maybe it’s a friend. Maybe it’s your brother or sister, or your daughter or son. “I don’t believe that anymore, Dad.” What do you say? Have you ever walked away from a moment like that with regret? There’s so much I should have said. Or if your experience is more like mine, I should ask it the other way: Have you ever walked away from that moment feeling good? Feeling like you absolutely handled it well. “Nailed it! You’re lucky I’m around Jesus! I said everything right, didn’t miss a mark. There’s no way anybody’s walking away from that conversation without giving their life!” I can’t imagine that. But I’d like to fall somewhere in between. Jesus has asked us to be His witnesses. If you’re a believer this morning, you have already given your life to Christ, you probably want to say you’d be willing to do anything for Jesus. You’d do anything for the one who died to save your soul and fill your life with joy—if only you knew how. If you’re not a believer and you’re exploring the faith this morning, you’ll probably hear a lot of things today we believers wish we could say but never do! Maybe some questions will be answered. The question today as we launch into this series is this one: Did we make God or did God make us? The difference between those two positions will change how you look at just about everything.

From now until Easter, for seven weeks, we will be looking at some tough questions or at least things we hear a lot out there about what Christians believe. Today we ask does God exist and can we hear from Him. As we get into these questions, first I want to look at 1 Peter 3:15. This is the guiding verse for the kinds of conversations we hope to have. “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15) This verse is the outline for any helpful conversation about faith. It doesn’t say, “Pick a fight and win the argument” does it? You can win the battle and lose a friend. What does it say? First, “In your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” It starts with your genuine faith, your relationship with Jesus. Then “be prepared to give an answer.” If you’ve been around in church you’ve heard this, this is the verse about Apologetics, the intellectual discipline of defending the faith. Be prepared to defend the faith; prepare beforehand to make an answer. Absolutely. But do you see how Peter says this will unfold? Be prepared to answer, when someone asks you. And what are they asking you about? When someone “asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Someone sees hope in you, joy, love, peace so profound they wind up asking you about it. They ask you about the light shining in you because of your personal, genuine relationship with Jesus that fills you up in your inner being. That shines out. Someone asks. Time to give a response, and better if you’ve thought about it a little before the words start spilling out of your mouth. Why? Because this is a holy moment. This is a sacred mission. Jesus died for that person in front of you. Jesus came to seek and to save that person before you. And don’t be confused, when they ask you about God, or death, or Jesus, or the Bible or suffering, or justice, or this week someone may ask you, “Hey, you’re a Christian, you believe in God. What do you have to say about this shooting in Florida? Where does evil like that come from? Where is God when people suffer like that?” And you feel that window opening up and the wind of heaven blowing in—that’s a sacred moment. We want to be prepared. Not to win the fight, but to give a reason for what they have already seen in you. And do this, don’t miss this point now, “But do this with gentleness and respect.” Some have noticed a slight decline in civil discourse. I don’t want to alarm you! Do this with gentleness and respect. It’s like how a golfer walks all the way around a hole to line up a put. The golfer needs that opposite perspective to make the shot. You need the perspective of others to make the connection. Try your best to see things from where they stand. The best witness to Christ is a reasonable response to the hope that is shining in you offered with gentleness and respect.

So, “I don’t believe in God.” What is that person really saying? I have met very few genuine, hardline atheists. Most people believe there is a “god” out there, but to claim that you know God or that God can talk to you, or certainly to claim that there is only one way to interact with God—these claims say too much for them. I think the predominant idea is actually that we made God. God is a human projection we constructed in our practice of religion. Maybe you took a class on sociology or religion in college and heard that religion is ultimately about community formation and behavior modification—community through conformity. And to accomplish that, and to assuage our fear of death, we created a notion of an eternal and all-powerful being. But we made God, and so we don’t actually have to respond to God or answer to God, and it doesn’t matter what you call this “god” (Karma, The Universe, etc.). We made God. Really? You might be thinking, “Man that makes a lot of sense. I’m out of here!” Wait a minute. We still have to come to terms with the main question: Is God there or not? And if God is there, can He communicate with us? In fact, these are the discus-

sion questions we are sending home with you on these cards. If you are so bold, you might just ask a friend these questions this week.

Our passage today expresses the Christian belief that God made the world. Quoting Psalm 102, Hebrews 1 says, "He also says, 'In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.'" (Hebrews 1:10-12) You, God, are Creator, eternal, everlasting, and we are creation, impermanent, passing away. The verse doesn't really argue for the existence of God so much as assume it. It leans on hundreds of years of scriptures and beliefs assuming God is there and God made the world. But is that a valid assumption?

I'm with those who say you will never argue someone into faith in God, but you can remove obstacles and offer clues. So let me give you just a few points of conversation around this question, is God there. (1) The Big Bang Theory. The results of the Hubble telescope were actually very hard for the atheistic part of the scientific community to accept. The question of the existence of God very quickly becomes a creation question. If the universe existed forever just as it is, it is easier to imagine a world without God, a forever universe without a Maker. But if the universe came into being at some point in time, that raises all kinds of questions. Hubble proved what scientists had postulated, that the universe is in constant expansion of both space and time. So it had to have had a beginning, some point where and when it began. It's remarkable that the main idea used to prop up atheism, the Big Bang Theory, was actually received by atheists as a horrible and destructive challenge to their worldview. If there was a beginning they were going to have to accept that something or someone was the Beginner.

(2) Intelligence and order. We have to deal with the reality we find ourselves in, and this universe is replete with intelligent order. It's the difference between walking along the beach and finding a chunk of wood and walking along and finding a wristwatch. Something made this, and whatever this is, it is fine-tuned. The mathematical chances of our universe coming into being at all are so tiny it is not feasible to leave it to random chaos. The odds are put at somewhere around 1:10¹³⁸. I don't even know how to explain that number, but astrophysicists say there are around 122 variables that had to line up in perfect order for matter to come into existence. Imagine 122 dials on a machine that all had to be tuned in precisely, only they

don't have 10 points on the dial, or even 360 points on the dial, but each dial has over a trillion values on it. It gets even narrower when you ask about the variables to have a universe that supports life. Chance? If you have eternity to work with, maybe. But we don't. The universe has a beginning. It's been proven.

(3) DNA. Francis Collins directed the Human Genome Project and is now the Director of the National Institutes of Health. Mapping the code of DNA, Collins said the amount of information packed into a single strand of DNA is comparable to thirty encyclopedias of data. Collins calls it the "language of God." He believes God is there. Universities have more atheists in the social science departments than the hard science departments. It's the psychology professor who claims physics disproves God, not the physicist. Can I argue you into believing God is there? No. But there sure are clues.

Can God speak to us then? Can we communicate with God? We will take this up even more next week when we ask about the Bible. But it is a big question. Think about it. It's one thing to say there is a "God" out there somewhere and another thing entirely to say God confronts us, converses with us, makes a claim on us in a personal way. Hebrews says God speaks in a lot of different ways. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways." (Hebrews 1:1) But let's be honest, God doesn't roar down at us like a voice from heaven. Not very often anyway. I've never experienced that. God is hidden.

This is one of the most amazing things to me. God has set up the universe and our lives in it in such a way that it is possible for us to disbelieve His existence. God has made creation so consistent and orderly, and made us so comfortable in it, that we can believe that we are here by ourselves. Why? I think this has got to be so frustrating for God—although God is not frustrated. But it would be so frustrating to me! Have you ever lost credit for your work? Ever had someone quote something you said, in a meeting or class or something, but they don't credit you with the idea, in fact they credit someone else? Doesn't that eat you up? Imagine creating the entire universe and watching people ignore what you did! Or worse, deny that you even exist! But that's what God does. God wants us so comfortable in His creation that it becomes possible for us to overlook his very existence. He could be present—a giant God-face in the sky, undeniably apparent for all. But that would not do what God intends. See, if God did that, you would be forced into a relationship with Him.

God values your freedom, even when it means you have the freedom to dismiss Him entirely from your

life. God wants us to come to Him in faith, with love, not out of coercion or force. So all we can do is point out the clues, the hints of God's existence and His love. You know, when you argue from the scientific order of the universe you haven't even scratched the idea of beauty. The universe could exist, ordered and scientifically correct to sustain life, and be ugly. It's Valentine's Week. Let me say something Valentine's Day card-y. Does God communicate with you? Every sunset is a love letter from God. He not only made, He made with beauty because He loves. He loves you.

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (Hebrews 1:1-3) God speaks in many ways in many times, but God speaks nowhere so loudly and so clearly as in Jesus. Want to know a secret? Every faith conversation you are in is a conversation about Jesus. Don't fail to get to Jesus. He is the radiance of God's glory. God is invisible, but we get to see God in Jesus. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). You think, no, this is a conversation about astrophysics. This is a conversation about microbiology. No it isn't. This is a conversation about morals; this is a conversation about philosophy or psychology. No it isn't. It's a conversation about Jesus. Get home to Jesus. Did we make God? I don't think so. I think God is there. That means God made us—but good news. God loves all that He has made, loves it so much He sent His son Jesus. Look to Jesus. If you want to see the image of the invisible God, it is found in Jesus Christ. We can't argue our way to God. We can't construct a scaffolding of logic high enough to reach to the divine realm, but Jesus has come down to find us, to speak to us, to remove the obstacles and defensive structures we build up to defend ourselves from the reality of God, Jesus has come down to remove all that, and show us the Father, and forgive our sins, and carry us home.

STUDY GUIDE

REALLY? • Hebrews 1:1-12

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage, Hebrews 1:1-12. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.

- What do you notice about our passage? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- According to the author of Hebrews, how does God reveal Himself? What does this revelation tell you about God?
- In describing Jesus, what point is the author of Hebrews trying to emphasize? Why is this significant?
- Someone might say to you, "God is just a human projection. We made God." How would you respond? How would you use Hebrews 1 to add detail to your response?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Throughout our sermon series, we will look at questions to ask a skeptic or non-believer as a conversation starter. We raise these questions not to try and win an argument but to provoke conversation.

Have you ever been in a conversation where the other person was just trying to win an argument? What was that experience like?

What does it mean to share our hope in Christ with gentleness and respect?

IN: Connect With the Family of God

If God is there—if God is real and speaking to us—what response is required on our behalf regarding Jesus, His Kingdom and His teachings? Share your insight with someone this week.