

PVTEENS

# GOD ON TRIAL

A DISCUSSION ON APOLOGETICS



## FIRST THINGS FIRST

### Faith without Doubt

"A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection."

Timothy Keller, *Reasons for God*

Welcome to a discussion on apologetics! We appreciate deep thinkers who are not scared to discuss difficult and very valid questions. God is not afraid of your big questions, and we believe wrestling with hard questions deepens your faith and your life with God. These four short discussions will only scratch the surface of some extremely complex issues. Our goal is to open avenues of dialogue amongst family members so they can dig deeper together. We have also included a wonderful book by Timothy Keller to continue your journey. If you ever have any questions or want more resources, feel free to reach out to us!



## Before You Begin

READ | Mark 9:14-29

DISCUSS | What areas of unbelief do you experience or have experienced in life?

PRAY | Pray together that the Lord will help your unbelief.

MONTH LONG CHALLENGE | Keep a journal about your doubts and the questions/answers that come from your discussions in this series.

# WEEK 1: GOD ON TRIAL

The opposite of faith is not doubt,  
but certainty.

Anne Lamott

ACTIVITY | LOOKING FOR TREASURE (**ONLY ONE PERSON READ THESE DIRECTIONS**)

DO NOT LET YOUR FAMILY SEE THE MONEY. Hide all of the five dollar bills in the house while the rest of the family sits in a secluded place. Have the whole family look for the the hidden bills (you may not want to hide them too well or they will be looking all night!).

DISCUSS | Have you ever found something in life that you thought was valuable but wasn't? Explain. What similarities do you see between this activity and looking for answers about God?

*Ask and it will be given to you;  
seek and you will find; knock  
and the door will be opened to  
you.*

*Matthew 7:7*



READ | Genesis 32:22-30

DISCUSS | What did Jacob get for wrestling with the angel? Would you say that Jacob won the match? Why or why not? How do people wrestle with God today?

THINK | God names his people after Jacob. Israel literally means wrestling with God. It is so important to know that God does not mind your questions, it is just a matter of going to the right source to get your answers.

QUESTIONS | What is the most difficult thing that you have faced in life? What kinds of questions did it bring up about the character/nature of God?

CHALLENGE | Find a question that you have about God or a question that you wouldn't know how to ask if you were challenged by an unbeliever. Over the next month research that question to find some good answers. Each week share with your family something you have learned



# WEEK 2: CHRISTIANITY IS TOO EXCLUSIVE

How can anyone in good conscious claim there is only one way to God?

## ACTIVITY | BAD DIRECTIONS

Choose a person to hide an object (hide it really well). Afterwards, come back and give the worst possible directions to the rest of the family members to find it (lead them away from the object). After a period of searching, come back together and give precise directions that would lead directly to the object.

DISCUSS | Has anyone ever given you bad advice/directions? What happened? Why was the truth essential to finding the hidden object?

*I am the way, and the truth,  
and the life. No one comes to  
the Father except through me*  
*John 14:6*

## TRUTH & TOLERANCE

People who decry absolute truth typically fear intolerance of anything that doesn't fit within that truth, which leads to oppression. No one can claim Christianity is innocent of intolerance and oppression. However, Christianity should produce humility that promotes inclusion.

The Greco-Roman world tolerated religion. Pantheism allowed all to have their own god, yet their social practices were brutal and their socioeconomic divide was severe. Yet Christians' actions differed. They cared for the poor, elevated women, and treated the sick. Timothy Keller writes, "At the very heart of their view of reality was a man who died for his enemies, praying for their forgiveness." The truth is God that each human was created in God's image and deserves the utmost respect regardless of the beliefs they hold.

CHALLENGE | Read Matthew 5:16. This assumes that you will be interacting with nonbelievers in such a way that they admire your character, not feel excluded by your beliefs. What can you do this week to be a light?



READ | John 14:1-7

QUESTIONS | How could these statements be offensive? What would you say to someone who takes offense to Jesus being the *only* way.

THINK | The Western world insists there are many approaches to truth. "You do you" or "what's true to you may not be true to me" are phrases you may hear. These have started to seep into faith as well. "There are many paths to God," or "no religion can claim to have the whole truth."

## ABSOLUTE TRUTH & SUPERIORITY

Tell about a time when you have been right in an argument or the victor in some competition, and you rubbed it in that you were right/the winner.

The logic to relative truth rests in removing "wrongness" so that everyone can feel equally confident in their truth. That way, there are no losers. Can you think of any dangers to relative truth statements like "you do you"?

# WEEK 3: GOD AND SUFFERING

If God is all powerful, then he isn't good because he allows suffering. If God is all good, he isn't all powerful because he cannot stop it

## ACTIVITY | SCAVENGER HUNT

This activity is broken into four rounds. In each round, every person go find the object mentioned and bring it back to the table to show the rest of the family.

Round one: A piece of furniture

Round two: Your favorite article of clothing

Round three: A meaningful trinket (something small)

Round four: A germ

DISCUSS THIS STATEMENT | At times we think that reasons for suffering should be apparent, and if we cannot see them, there could not possibly be a valid reason for it. But what if the reason is more like a germ, you know its there, but it may not be apparent, and you may need the right equipping to see it properly?

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

*James 1:2-4*

UNDIGNIFIED DEATH | Jesus's death was very undignified, not in terms of his nakedness or manner of death. But Jesus is terribly shaken by the events of his death (Mark 14:33-34, Luke 22:43, Matthew 27:46). Over the centuries many martyrs have faced far more extreme deaths with much more confidence, even with joy.

DISCUSS | What is it about Jesus's death that made him approach it with such anguish?



READ | Genesis 37, 39-40

WRITE | Pick a time in Joseph's life where others may consider his suffering unfair/unjust. Write a prayer you think Joseph would say at this point in his life (or the prayer you would say if you were in his situation). After writing the prayer, read Genesis 50:20.

## SUFFERING & CHRISTIANITY

We may not know what the reason for suffering is, but we know what it cannot be. It can't be that God is indifferent towards or does not love us. Christianity is the only religion where God comes and accepts suffering into his own life.

QUESTION | What does it say about God that he is willing to suffer? How do you think Jesus felt when his prayer to take this cup from him was not answered?

# WEEK 4: GOD AND HELL

How could a loving God send someone to hell for eternity?

## ACTIVITY | DESCRIBE YOUR SPOUSE

Have each unmarried person at the table describe their ideal spouse. Have each married person at the table describe what they love about their spouse.

DISCUSS | For the unmarried members: How would you make that person love you? For the married members: How did you make your spouse person love you

I hope the words "make a person love you" make you feel uncomfortable. Love is a choice. If that concept was not brought up in your conversation, discuss why you think love must be a choice.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 17:3

FROM A FAMOUS ATHEIST | Christopher Hitchens, a dedicated atheist who argued publicly and frequently against God once said, "To me, heaven would be hell." He went on to talk about all the things that he did not like about God and how he would want no part of a relationship with him.

YOUR OLD HOME | Pull out pictures of a previous home you lived in. Tell some nostalgic stories or fond memories about that house. Would you want to live there again but without your family?

The interesting thing about a home is that the magic of that home is closely tied to the relationships in that home. Christians have focused too much on heaven and hell being locations as opposed to the presence or absence of a full relationship with God.



REVIEW | What sticks out to you about the previous two studies?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER | Week 1 introduced us to wrestling with God. Week 2 discussed the exclusivity of Christianity. Reread John 14:6. Week 3 discussed the relationship between God and suffering and how Jesus died an undignified death. The reason that Jesus is the way, truth, and life and the *only* path to God is because a relationship with him IS heaven. It is not a place or destination. That is why no other path gets you there. That is also why his death was so excruciating. His sacrifice was taking our sin which removed him from God (see Matthew 27:46). All of this points to the fact that a relationship with God is what sustains us. It is why heaven is relation

QUESTION | What would a relationship look like if someone were forced to be a part of it? Why would God not force somebody into relationship with him?