

**WHEN GOD DOES
NOT ANSWER AN**

Honest Prayer

CHALLENGES TO FAITH

DANIEL JAPPAH

outskirts
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WHEN GOD DOES NOT ANSWER AN HONEST PRAYER

Challenges to Faith

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Outskirts Press, Inc.

<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-9772-2834-5

Library of Congress: 2020912545

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Acknowledgement

I AM NOT an atheist to be afflicted with Nebuchadnezzar's syndrome (Daniel 4:30) of wanton pride and arrogance to attribute the successes in my life to my own efforts. I have been and continue to be the undeserving beneficiary of God's boundless love, His amazing grace, and incredible mercy. To God be the glory for all the great things He has done and continues to do for me.

It has been a great blessing for me to be Maria's husband. My love and gratitude are always too inadequate to express my appreciation to you. I did not choose you as a wife because God knew that I did not need a wife. I needed an angel, and God chose you for me. I thank God for blessing me with you for 33 years and counting. Thank you for putting up with me.

It would not be fair to our five children if I do not mention their individual qualities that have brought so much joy to your mother and me: Danielle, the brilliant and generous leader; Yaminah, the brilliant family warrior; Faith, the great communicator and uniter; Daniel III, the confident man and brilliant musician; and Elisha, the determined businessman. Although all my prayers for you all have not been answered, I have been proud to be your father. I hope you all will forgive my shortcomings.

My special thanks to Danielle and Yaminah who worked diligently to design the cover for this book through their company, Half N Half Creative, LLC. I know your company will be a great success. Just don't keep offering free services like you've done for me.

My son-in-law, Joe, is not a son-in-law but a son. You have been such a blessing to the family. Like the rest of the family, I thank God for you and appreciate you. In the author's bio at the back of this book, I indicate that Maria and I have six children because you are a son to us. You and Faith have blessed us with two wonderful grandchildren,

River (aka Rae Rae) and Martin (aka Doc). Rae Rae and Doc will never know what joy they give us everyday.

I thank you all for letting me have the time to work on one of my passions: writing. May God bless you all.

With the love of Christ,

Daniel Jappah

July 2020

Introduction

I WOULD LIKE to begin with some housekeeping issues. In this book, Bible citations will come from the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), or the New International Version (NIV). I am familiar with the story about how the King James Version (KJV) came about and the quality of the scholarship that went into its production. That is why I am comfortable using KJV; however, the King James English can be a serious challenge. So for a more modern translation, I use NKJV. When KJV and NKJV aren't too clear, I turn to the very modern NIV (some people jokingly refer to as the *Nearly Inspired Version*).

I am not saying that these are the only accurate English translations of the Bible. There are over 100 English versions of the Bible, and I am not informed about the scholarship of many of these. I have limited myself to a few versions and I am telling you why. Just in case I forget to indicate which translation, know that it is one of these three: KJV, NKJV, and NIV.

Issues relating to God are considered in disciplines such as philosophy, biblical studies, and theology that have words that are not part of most people's common vocabulary. I don't think most people talk about *relativism*, *exegesis*, *hermeneutics*, or *soteriology*. When it becomes necessary to use specialized vocabulary, I will do my best to make it simple. Since I do not have the vocabulary of a *Scrapps National Spelling Bee* contestant, I hope most readers would share my limitations; therefore, you will not find me talking about the *vicissitudes of life* when I could simply talk about the *constant hardships of life*. At the same time, I hope not to underwhelm the philosophers, biblical scholars, theologians, and others accustomed to *Spelling Bee* vocabulary with the simplicity of this work. Now, let's get to the task at hand.

Life, all by itself, is just plain difficult, but the life of a Christian is an even more difficult one. In a world in which humanity has created comforts credited to advances in science and technology, it has become fashionable to believe in the human genius and look down on any belief in God as the activity of a simple and naive mind. When one actually examines the nature of the Christian faith, the exact opposite is true, that it requires a very simple and disturbed mind to not believe in God. Atheism requires nothing and demands nothing. Any old fool can easily be an atheist and take great pride in his folly.

The difficulty of the Christian life lies not in the belief in God. Although defending the belief in God requires a greater mental sophistication than unbelief, it is only after one has overcome the simple hurdles of doubt and unbelief can the believer affirm with the Psalmist that it is really the fool who says that there is no God (Psalms 14:1 and 53:1). If there are any real obstacles to faith in God, these obstacles make it even more difficult to live by that faith. There are many who have crossed the threshold of doubt and unbelief and have come to the realization that there is God; but to live a life dependent on God is quite another matter.

There are many people who call themselves Christians but don't care much about a church life, a prayer life, or even reading the Bible. For such Christians, when they encounter life's crises, turn to prayer, and find no answers, they can always find a ton of reasons to explain away why their prayers were not answered:

Maybe I waited for a crisis in order to pray.

Maybe God wants me to always depend on Him.

Maybe I did not pray long enough.

Maybe I started to pray too late.

Maybe I prayed and then still worried about it.

Maybe I prayed but really didn't believe my prayer would be answered.

Maybe...Maybe...Maybe...

The casual Christian – that is, the *I-only-go-to-Church-for-weddings-funerals-and-special-occasions* kind of Christian – can easily justify why a prayer may not be answered. This is the justification of little or no faith. If you are like that person, you only believe that God exists, but you have done very little or nothing to nurture that faith. James says this type of believer is no better than demons (*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!* James 2:19 NKJV). It is worse that the demons have a greater faith than you. At least they believe there is one God and tremble. You believe there is one God but are not moved because you don't have much of a faith to begin with. So when your prayer is not answered, a justification is quick to come by.

On the other hand, there are Christians who have a very strong prayer life because they strongly believe what the Bible says about God and prayer. We have been told that God will meet all our needs (Philippians 4:19) and if we ask God for anything in the name of Jesus, God - our loving, gracious, and merciful Heavenly Father – will give it to us (John 14:13-16; 15:16; & 16:23-24). The Christian life often becomes very complicated when prayer seems to fail this kind of believer. If you are that kind of Christian, in your existential crises, those life-and-death situations that hit at the core of your existence as a Christian, unanswered prayers can force you to ask questions whose answers you may have taken for granted, questions such as:

1. *Is there really God?*
2. *Does God really answer prayers or do I just pray to make myself feel good?*
3. *Why did God not answer my honest prayer?*
4. *Why should I continue to pray when I've cried out to God from the depths of my heart and God did not answer my prayer?*

These can be very difficult questions about God, especially when they arise out of a situation in which your faith seems to have

apparently not been affirmed. In other words, God did not turn out to be what you expected God to be. The spiritual doubt that follows is the most difficult kind of doubt to overcome. Frankly, I do not think there is anything that can be more challenging to your faith than when an honest prayer is not answered.

How does a Christian deal with God, faith, and prayer when, in the midst of a life-crushing situation, an honest prayer goes unanswered? In these brief pages, I will deal with this difficulty of the Christian life and show why prayer - even a sincere prayer - is not an insurance policy against the pain and suffering of this life. When prayer fails, why still believe in God? Why continue to pray?

When one's faith in God is not firmly established, that faith can be very easily destroyed by doubt. This was the sad case of Charles Templeton. Templeton and Billy Graham were like the Paul and Silas of their time, going on joint evangelistic trips to Europe and throughout the U.S.. In this scenario, Templeton was expected to be the Paul, the one who would change his world for Christ. Both Templeton and Graham encountered doubt about some claims in the Bible. They did not know how to deal with their doubts. Templeton trusted biblical criticism and his limited knowledge of science, and he lost his faith; Graham trusted God and he became the most famous and influential evangelist of his time.

If you are not sure about God, a little doubt can be very dangerous to your faith. A shallow understanding of the Bible confronted by distortions of science can cause one to doubt the existence of God. Once you begin to doubt the existence of God, nothing else about your faith matters. So, let's first deal with some of the common arguments that are used against the existence of God. Once we understand the flaws in these arguments and the opposing scientific and philosophical arguments for God, our faith in God's existence would be firmly established. That's chapter one.

It is a sad truth that although Christians believe in an awesome God, that belief does not instill in some of us fear and reverence for this awesome God. We, instead, want to relate to God as some

Celestial Friend, believing that a friend in need is a friend in deed. We keep God at a friendly distance until we are desperate for a miracle, then we send Him an urgent plea and expect God to coming running to our rescue. When an honest prayer is not answered according to our expectations, it creates all sorts of doubts about our belief system.

Doubt has an extremely powerful influence on faith. How we deal with doubt can determine if it turns us into a Charles Templeton or a Billy Graham. Chapter two will examine the general nature of doubt and how it interacts with faith. For the Christian and not the skeptic, the professional doubter, there are two major categories of doubt. The first is doubting something because it is just too good to be true. This is doubt as *suspended belief*. This doubt is discussed in chapter three.

No one loses faith because something good and wonderful happened. So doubt as *suspended belief* is not really a problem. The problem comes from things that challenge our faith. When you honestly pray for something and God does not come through for you, that unanswered prayer can lead you to doubt or question some things you believe. This is doubt as *questioned belief*. Honest prayers not answered and life's burdens can sometimes bear very heavily on one's faith. In Chapter 4, we will examine *Doubt as questioned belief*; then we will look honest prayer in Chapter 5.

Christians believe that God is everywhere (omnipresent) and He has the power to do anything (omnipotent); yet, God uses angels and ordinary people to do His work. Sometimes God might choose you to be the angel or the ordinary person to deliver the answer to another person's honest prayer. Your action or inaction could make the difference in someone's faith. Chapter 6, *When you are the answer*, will look at this phenomenon.

This is a culture in which almost everything comes with an expiration date or a deadline. So when we make an honest request, we expect God to work with our deadlines. When we pray, we sometimes pray about things that have deadlines. Should we also give God a deadline to answer our prayers? Should we put God on a

timer? This very interesting idea will be the focus of chapter 7.

Finally, have you ever prayed for something, did not get it, and then later thanked God that He did not answer that prayer? When God does not meet our deadline or He does not answer at all, it may be very disappointing and discouraging. We may not know it then, but sometimes there could be hidden blessings in those unanswered prayers. In the final chapter, we shall consider how unanswered prayers can really be hidden blessings in disguise.

The questions that arise from unanswered prayers are all very important and they reveal extremely difficult issues of faith. I hope to bring you some answers taken from my personal experience and theological reflections. I also hope this book will help believers deal with their crises of faith, especially those crises resulting from unanswered prayers.

As you read this book, there are two very important points I would like you to bear in mind. First, God is not a vending machine. Prayer is not some sort of currency that we can use to extract from God our wants and/or needs. Second, prayer is not an insurance policy to protect us from the problems of this life. These points are so important that they need repeating. It may annoy you, but these points will be repeated several times in this work. Enjoy!

Is there really a God?

IN YOUR JOURNEY of faith, there will be many times when your expectations and God's actions won't match. Those are the times you experience crises of faith. In such circumstances, a weak faith can turn a so-so believer away from God. The person with a strong faith will sometimes feel a sense of abandonment or general frustration with God. In any case, a crisis of faith may cause the believer to ask many questions, including the ultimate question about existence: *Is there really a God?*

The question about God's existence is not a question only for believers. It is a question for every curious mind. Since the so-called Enlightenment, western civilization has been trying to do away with God by claiming that there is no God. The result has been the undermining of the moral foundations of western civilization without getting rid of God. Racism, drugs, violence, prostitution, pornography, and vulgar language are a small sample of the effects of living without God. There are consequences for the individual and/or society to choose to live without God.

God does not exist because society says He exists, nor does God cease to exist because society says He does not exist. What anyone or any society thinks or says about God changes nothing about God. The individual and society are the ones who are impacted by the acceptance or rejection of God. Too many people reject God out

of ignorance or arrogance. There are lots of things that do not make sense without the possibility of God. How did the world get started? How did we get here? Is there any purpose or meaning to this life? Is this life all there is, or is there another existence beyond this life? The answers to these and many other questions depend on whether or not God exists.

It is not practical to answer any one, much more all, of these questions in detail here. What cannot be ignored is the fact that what we think or believe about the existence of God is the most important factor in determining how we value human life - our lives and the lives of others – and the value system we bring to all our relationships. Anyone can choose to be a nice and decent person. When that is a choice, it is not the choice people would make when it is inconvenient. This is not a choice for Christians. Christian morality does not only require decency, it demands it.

Because the issue of God's existence touches every important aspect of our lives, any adequate discussion would have to include information from many sources, like science, philosophy, and the Bible. I do not, in the least, suspect that everyone who reads this book is a scientist, philosopher, or biblical scholar. If you are not one of these, don't feel bad. I am not either. My only advantage might be my theological education; but I do not have the arrogance to call or think of myself as a theologian. I think of myself only as a well-informed Christian.

I was (and still remain) a conservative African Christian when I attended what could be called a liberal (well, very liberal) theology school. My faith was extremely challenged in this environment. After I took a public stand on a controversial issue, I received many notes of support in my seminary mailbox. One was from a professor who wrote the following: *Daniel, many of us share your views, but none of us are as brave as you to express it in this environment.* That response really shocked me. I never thought that it would require bravery to express a Christian view anywhere in America, and most certainly not at a school for training Christian ministers.

In this environment, I was forced to seriously think about everything I believed. Without going much into my seminary experience, I can say that it was one of the best things that ever happened for my faith. By questioning everything I believed, I was able to find solid reasons why I should be nothing other than a Christian. Today, I am a confident and well-informed Christian (I think) because I accept nothing, including the existence of God, on just faith alone.

The discussions that follow are not a frivolous attempt to show off my understanding of science, philosophy, and theology. If you are serious about your faith as a Christian, your faith will be tested in so many ways, if that has not happened already. In those testing times, it will seem very attractive to give up on God. The easy way is not always the best way. I simply want you be a well-informed Christian so that when testing comes, even if it takes you away from God briefly, you too, like the Prodigal son, will return to your Father.

In the Old Testament, Moses told the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 6:4 *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD **our God**, the Lord is one!
5 You shall love the LORD **your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.***

This is supposed to be the greatest commandment. When Jesus restated this commandment, he changed it in a very important way by adding *“mind”* as another way we should love God.

Mark 12: 30 (also Luke 10:27): *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’*

To love God with all your mind is the demand to apply reason to the things of faith. Don’t accept anything because someone says *“science says”* or *“the Bible says”*. If you take the time to investigate what *“science says”* or what *“the Bible says,”* you too will share my absolute confidence in the existence of God. The truth be told,

science and philosophy have absolutely no evidence to contradict any claim of the Bible; but you won't know that from the way some people talk about science. So every time we talk about the existence of God, we have to go through a landmine of misinformation. So let's just go there.

At this point, you might say, "I'm a Christian. I have the Bible; I don't need science and philosophy to tell me anything about God." If you are that kind of Christian, I say, "Welcome to the club." We don't need science and philosophy to tell us anything about God. Yet, we must admit that not all Christians have their faith solidly established. For those on the fence, especially the ones who have not done their own investigation, they could be easily persuaded by misinformation to give up on God. Remember Charles Templeton. Imagine the impact it would have had on the world if Templeton had been in ministry for as long as Billy Graham was.

We discuss issues in science and philosophy, not to bore you with high-minded ideas, but to equip you to properly defend your faith in every way. What I would like to accomplish here is to turn the tables and let you see that science and philosophy, if anything, point to and not away from the possibility of God.

SCIENCE AND GOD

It is very interesting how science books will tell you who discovered simple things like oxygen, hydrogen, gravity, the cell, and so forth; but there is complete silence on who discovered or proved God does not exist. Why? Because there is no such proof in science. Many of the greatest scientists of all-time got involved in science because of their faith. They saw the world as God's creation and they wanted to understand God's creation. So they got involved in science.

Nicholas Copernicus, who discovered that the sun is at the center of the universe was a priest. Galileo, who popularized Copernicus' theory, was a Christian and biblical scholar. Kepler was a devout Christian who provided proof for Copernicus' theory;

Isaac Newton, who discovered gravity and established physics, was a theologian. Robert Boyle, a devout Christian and defender of the faith, established chemistry. Gregor Mendel, a priest, developed genetics. Georges Lemaitre, another priest, developed the big bang theory which proved the world had a beginning.¹

None of these great scientists ever thought that anyone with a modicum (teeny weeny amount) of intelligence would ever question the existence of God, especially to make such a ridiculous claim in the name of science; but that is the current reality. Today, most biographical information about the founding fathers of modern science reveal very little, if anything at all, about how their faith influenced their scientific pursuits. This is all part of the conspiracy by the anti-God bigots of science organizations, secular publishers, and their media cheerleaders. They cannot maintain the lie that religion is harmful to science and then admit that many of the most brilliant scientists of all time have been very religious people.

Boyle laid the foundation for modern experimental science. He was a very strong Christian and also an accomplished theologian with many theological works to his credit, including titles such as *Style of the Scriptures* and *The Excellency of Theology*. It is believed that Boyle left money in his will for the continuation of a lecture series to defend Christianity. Look at it this way: the man who gave rise to the discipline of chemistry was a Christian theologian. So, both chemistry and physics were started by Christian theologians.

Pascal, the home- schooled mathematics and physics genius, was a born-again Bible-believing Christian. He was working on a defense of Christianity at the time of his death. In his work, published as *Penses (Thoughts)*, Pascal laid out in a systematic manner what he considered to be a logical evidence for the credibility of Christianity. After laying out the evidence, then Pascal put forth what is commonly referred to as *Pascal's Bet* or *Pascal's Wager* (what

1 Coppedge, David F. *The World's Greatest Creation Scientists: From Y1K to Y2K*. Accessed on 1/2/2020 at: www.creationsafaris.com/wgcs_2.htm.

follows in parenthesis is mine):

If you choose Christianity and it is false, (when you die) you lose nothing. If you reject Christianity and it is true, (when you die) you lose everything.

The most famous scientist of the 20th Century, Albert Einstein, was an agnostic, someone who believed that there isn't enough information to make a decision one way or the other about the existence of God. Well, a priest came along and converted Einstein by doing what religious scientists are notorious for doing: discovering verifiable scientific theories. Georges Lemaitre, a Belgian Priest and physicist, used Einstein's theory of general relativity to derive the *Big Bang Theory*, proving Genesis 1:1, that the universe had a beginning. It has been reported that Einstein initially did not approve of this theory; but approval was not his to grant.

Einstein and Lemaitre attended a seminar at Caltech where the priest explained his theory. It is reported that after Lemaitre's explanation, Einstein stood up, applauded and said that was the *best explanation of creation* he has ever heard. Einstein did not become a Christian or religious in any way but he rejected atheism outright as being scientifically unsustainable. Einstein was a creationist because he believed that the world was created and that it was created by God. Here is what Einstein had to say about people not believing in God:

"In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human mind, am able to recognize, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what really makes me angry is that they quote me for the support of such views."²

Even Stephen Hawking, the agnostic (some say atheist) English

2 Albert Einstein, according to the testimony of Prince Hubertus of Lowenstein; as quoted by Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times*, New York: World Publishing Company, 1971, p. 425

physicist who was often referred to as the Einstein of the late 20th Century, admitted this much:

“So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator.”³

In other words, real science points to God.

As a Christian, this is where using your mind, or as Jesus would say, *Loving God with your mind*, becomes very important. Ask yourself these two simple questions: *If science has demonstrated beyond the shadow of doubt that there is no God, why would Einstein believe in creation? Why would Einstein and Hawking even dare consider the possibility of a Creator?* The only reasonable answer is that there must be something in science that keeps pointing to God. Let us briefly take a look at this pointer.

The *Big Bang Theory* confirms that nature - everything we know as the universe: energy, matter, space, and time - had a beginning. Science books tell us that this beginning is somewhere from 14 to 20 billion years ago. So what? Great question. If nature came into existence 20 billion years ago, it means that 20.1 billion years ago or any time beyond 20 billion years, nature did not exist. Since there was a time when nature did not exist, then there are only two possible explanations for how nature came about:

1. Nature came into existence all by itself out of nothing;
2. Some agent that is not natural brought nature into existence.

For honest scientists, the idea of something coming into existence all by itself out of nothing is not only unscientific, it is total nonsense.

Whenever I mention scientists, I have to use the word, *honest*, because for too many of them, only their arrogance can match their

³ Hawking, Stephen. *A Brief History of Time*. New York: Bantam, 1990. Pp.104-141

dishonesty when it comes to God. Today, it is impossible to find an honest physicist to talk about the origin of the universe without mentioning the possibility of God. For honest scientists, the only logical explanation for the existence of the universe is that some agent that is not natural brought it into existence. If something that is not natural is responsible for creating nature, it means that nature is not the only thing that exists. This is indirect evidence from science for the existence of the supernatural.

You can see why Einstein believed in a Creator and Hawking considered the possibility of God. If this natural world is not all there is (and that's what science has told us), if there is another existence beyond this life, you would be wise to think about the afterlife.

All honest scientists see the *Big Bang Theory* as more of a credible scientific argument for a Creator than an evidence against Biblical creation. So any claim that the *Big Bang Theory* discredits the Bible is a claim rooted in delusion, scientific ignorance, or both; however, science cannot say that there is God or that God created the universe. Science is too limited for such a grand objective; but science has confirmed that there is more to reality than only the natural world.

People who give up on God because of science don't know science. That was the case with C.S. Lewis. He was taught to believe that science had done away with God. When he investigated the facts, he discovered that he was taught a lie. He became one of the greatest Christian writers of the last century. The same thing happened to Francis Collins, the former Director of the Human Genome Project and now Director of the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Collins was an atheist medical doctor until an encounter with one of his patients, an elderly Christian lady, forced him to investigate what he had only assumed. Here is how Dr. Collins described the experience:

“My most awkward moment came when an older woman, suffering daily from severe untreatable angina, asked me what I believed. It was a fair question; we had discussed many other important issues of life and death, and she had shared her own strong Christian beliefs with

me. I felt my face flush as I stammered out the words 'I'm not really sure.' Her obvious surprise brought into sharp relief a predicament that I had been running away from for nearly all of my twenty-six years. I have never really seriously considered the evidence for and against belief.

"That moment haunted me for several days. Did I not consider myself a scientist? Does a scientist draw conclusions without considering the data? Could there be a more important question in all of human existence than 'Is there a God?' And yet there I found myself, with a combination of willful blindness and something that could only be properly described as arrogance, having avoided any serious consideration that God might be a real possibility."⁴

The misuse and abuse of science to avoid God will continue. We will always have people make the nonsensical claim that *science says or science shows there is no God*. Can science really tell us anything about God? After doing his own investigation, here is what Collins, who later became a Christian, says on this issue:

"It also became clear to me that science, despite its unquestioned powers in unraveling the mysteries of the natural world, would get me no further in resolving the question of God. If God exists, then He must be outside the natural world, and therefore the tools of science are not the right ones to learn about Him."⁵

From Copernicus to Collins, honest scientists and science, itself, have no problem with God. Only dishonest scientists and those who don't believe in God want to destroy science for their benefit. You cannot stop people from talking nonsense, but don't make them take you for a fool. If anyone tells you that *science says or science*

4 Collins, Francis (2006). *The Language Of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence For Belief*. Free Press, New York, NY. P.20.

5 Ibid.,p.30

shows there is no God, simply ask one question: What caused the big bang? And leave it at that.

PHILOSOPHY AND GOD

Philosophers and theologians talk like they only use words from the *Scripps National Spelling Bee Contest*. Because this is philosophy, you can expect to see some strange words, like *theodicy*, *relativism*, and *naturalism*. As I stated at the end of the *Introduction*, I will try to provide very simple definitions for these words in context so that the reader can easily follow the discussion. The philosophical arguments that touch on the existence of God are many. It is neither practical nor necessary to deal with all of the philosophical arguments here. Even the issues that would be considered, morality and theodicy (the problem of evil), will be dealt with just sufficiently to provide a basic understanding.

If there is no God, then how do you decide morality? How do you determine if something is morally wrong or morally right? Christian morality is established on the teachings of Christ. The overall moral and spiritual truth that we believe should guide humanity is found in the life and teachings of Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when he said:

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

Some people want to avoid Jesus and God by claiming that there is no such thing as truth. That is where the philosophical problem begins.

Let us remember what is at stake here. If there is no such thing as truth, then nothing Jesus said is true; or it is only true for those who want to accept it. Everything about Christianity is false; or it is only true for those who want to accept it. All the claims of the Bible are false; or they are only true for those who want to accept them. So, although the discussion here is philosophical, make no mistake,

the existence of God, the credibility of Christianity, and a lot more are at stake here.

Is there really no such thing as truth? By truth, we are talking about moral truth, truth about right and wrong or good and evil. Is there really no right or wrong, and it really just depends on the person? If right and wrong are up to each individual, that is called relativism because your truth is related to your point of view. Let us look at a real-world example to see why relativism is not practical. Suppose Christians decide that it is morally right to arrest all those who don't believe in God, put them in prison, and let them work on farms that produce free vegetables for only Christians. Would anyone say that Christians should be free to do that? What if people who don't believe in God want to do the same thing to Christians; we would say that is morally wrong.

That is the problem with relativism. It is a nice-sounding but misguided philosophical nonsense to say, *"you stick to your morality and let me stick to my morality."* Whether we like it or not, your morality will impact society, and therefore, impact me; and my morality will impact society, and therefore, impact you. That is why morality cannot be left up to each person or group. We can not even leave it up to society. That is dangerous.

Suppose a society says that women should always be paid less than men. Will we say that is morally right because that is what society has decided? No. When we answer, No, then we reject relativism and admit that morality cannot be left to the individual, group, or society to decide. If two societies have opposing moral views, how do you resolve conflicts? For example, one society may celebrate polygamy and child-bride but condemns homosexuality. Another society may celebrate homosexuality but outlaw polygamy and child-bride. If every society is entitled to its own morality, then no society has the right to condemn the morality of another. With relativism, every behavior is acceptable. This is what moral relativism allows.

The only way to avoid moral relativism is to have an objective

moral standard, a moral standard that does not depend on you, me, or anyone else, not even society. The only possible source left for an objective moral standard is God. If God does not exist, then every behavior is permissible. What a horrible world this would be. Whenever the source of any moral principle is something or someone other than God, it becomes relative. Since God is the only source of an objective moral law, morality requires God.

If you abandon God or decide that God does not exist, you by default accept free-for-all morality. You accept that people should behave in whatever manner they like as long as it pleases them. You can stick to your morality, but you will have no right to condemn other people's morality, no matter how offensive it may be to you. There are very serious implications for society if God does not exist.

Now, let's look at theodicy or God and the problem of evil. Theodicy is a word that comes from two Greek words, *Theos* (meaning *God*) and *dike* (meaning *justice*). Christians say that God is good, just, loving, and almighty (has the power to do anything). Theodicy deals with this question: *How can there be a God such as the Christian God - good, just, loving, and has the power to do anything - but allows evil to exist?* There are two answers to this question that are used against the Christian God.

The first answer is that evil exists because there is no God. Very interesting. If evil exists because there is no God, that is admission that there would be no evil if there is God. In other words, only God can stop evil. If only God can stop evil, and there is so much evil in the world, then the world needs God. So, even if God did not exist, a smart world would be forced to create God just to stop evil. In other words, the existence of evil does not disprove, but demands, the existence of God.

In addition to this failed attempt to use evil against God is the biblical view there is evil because some people reject God and others live like there is no God. When people began to populate the earth after creation, God allowed people to live by their own rules. There were no religious laws to live by; and God did not interfere in

people's lives. How did that go:

Genesis 6: 5 *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Evil exists, not because there is no God, but because people either deny or ignore God. Evil says nothing about God; it says a lot about who we are as humans if we live without God.

The second view that uses evil against God allows for evil and God to exist on the condition that evil exists either because God is not good so He allows evil, or because God is good but is not powerful enough to stop evil. The main problem with this anti-God theodicy is that it has not been able to define evil without God.

In the online version of Merriam-Webster dictionary, the very first definition of evil is: *morally reprehensible: SINFUL, WICKED*. Yes! That is the problem with evil: it has a moral component to it. If evil is connected to or associated with morality, and objective morality cannot be defined without God, then evil also cannot be defined without God. Evil is not relative. The answer to the question, *what is evil*, cannot be *it all depends on one's perspective*. If evil is relative, then there is ultimately no evil because what may be evil to one person may be good to another. If there is really no evil, then evil cannot count against the existence of God because evil, itself, does not exist. Either evil destroys relativism or relativism destroys evil. They don't like each other. Both evil and morality need God.

If you reject God and believe that there is no heaven or hell or anything supernatural, and that nature is all there is, then you believe in metaphysical naturalism; and evil would be a problem for you too. Evil is determined only within a value system. In other words, we will consider an act to be evil if it is done to a life we consider to have value. For example, a person can kill a thousand houseflies with chemicals everyday just for the fun of it and neither the person nor the act will be considered evil because houseflies have no intrinsic value. Their lives are meaningless. On the other hand, if that same person

kills another human being, not to mention a thousand human beings, with chemicals just for the fun of it, both the killer and the act will be considered evil because of the worth of human life.

In the naturalistic view, there is no meaning or purpose or worth to any life, including human life. In other words, human life is no different from the life of a housefly. If that is the case, then killing a human should not be any different from killing a housefly; but that is not the case because, whether they want to admit it or not, people who reject God speak of evil only because they recognize there is intrinsic worth to human life, a worth that cannot be established without God.

With science, morality, and theodicy all pointing to the possibility or the necessity for God, an intelligent person has to, at the very least, accept the possibility of God or hide behind some absurdity, like nature is the only reality. As long as we are Christians, our faith will always be challenged, sometimes challenged to the point of us wanting to give up on God. Don't ever give up on God. If you do, then you by default accept moral relativism, evil, and the devaluing of human life. No life is lived in a vacuum. You either live with God and the consequences of faith, or you live without God and the consequences of godlessness. It's your choice.

GOD: OUR FATHER

The Christian confidence in God's existence is independent of the claims of science and the arguments from philosophy. After all, the Bible came into existence centuries before modern science and the *Big Bang theory*. Christian belief rests solely on what is revealed in the Bible and does not need approval from science, and definitely not from philosophy. We should move forward with absolute confidence in the knowledge that God exists, and real science and philosophy have absolutely nothing to say against that. Our goal here is to understand what it means that God is our Father, the One to Whom we direct all our prayers.

One of the unique things about the Christian faith is not that we hold God in total awe and reverence; it is that this God, in all of

His glory, majesty, and awesomeness, reaches down to us in such a personal way that He wants us to see Him as Father. You will fail to appreciate this awesome privilege we have if you do not recognize that, of all the ways that God could have chosen to relate to us, God chose to relate to us through love.

If you remember nothing from the discussions in science and philosophy, and nothing else from what follows, this is the one thing you must know about God: *God is love*. Christians know this, believe it, and proclaim it; but unfortunately, this is an expression too many of us take for granted because we really don't understand how important it is to our understanding of God. If we don't understand what it means that God is love, we will never have the slightest idea why God does anything, including answering some prayers and not answering others.

Let us go to the Bible to hear what it has to say about God:

1 John 4: 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Love is the essence of God. Love is what God is made of. Love is the essence of the Divine nature. What does this mean?

When we talk about human nature, for example, we are not talking about the flesh, blood, and bones that make up the physical human body. Dogs, cats, pigs, cows, horses, and lots of other animals are also made up of flesh, blood and bones; but they do not have human nature. Human nature is not our physical parts. There is that intangible quality, something we just cannot fully grasp, that makes humans human. So, when we say that love is the essence of God's nature, all we mean is that love is what makes God God. Everything

that God does is done out of love, with love, for love, and in love.

If you don't understand the power of love in God's action, you will always be frustrated with your life of prayer and faith. If it is any consolation, you should know that being frustrated with God is nothing new. It is a long and enduring part of the life of faith. Old Testament prophets, like Jeremiah (12:1-2) and Habakkuk (1:1-4), could not understand why a good and just God allowed evil people to prosper and violence to reign unabated. Jonah was frustrated that God allowed the evil people of Nineveh to repent and escape judgment.

Our relationship with God will always entail some degree of frustration because we expect our good and almighty God to swat away every instance of injustice and evil and also calm every storm, earthquake, tsunami, pandemic, or other natural disasters as if we are in a Divine daycare and God is here to keep us from every hurt. That is not the case.

You might ask: *God is our Heavenly Father; so why doesn't He take care of us like we are His children in His daycare?* That is a very good question. God is our Heavenly Father, but we got kicked out of His daycare - Paradise - a long time ago when our first parents, Adam and Eve, chose not to obey His rules. One question that always follows the disobedience of Adam and Eve goes something like this: *If God knows everything, and He has the power to do all things, then God would have known that Adam and Eve would disobey Him. Why didn't God create people who could not disobey Him?*

This is another good question; but if you understand that God acts only out of love, with love, for love, and in love, then the answer to this question would be easy. Let's consider the creation of Adam and Eve and then their disobedience. Nothing limits God other than His love, mercy, grace, and other ways through which God chooses to limit Himself. These are limits only in the sense that they are self-imposed. In creating Adam and Eve, God chose to arbitrarily limit Himself by love. In other words, in creating humans, God wanted creatures that could freely choose to love Him as He freely loves

them. So God created humans within the limits of reciprocal love.

Let us be mindful of the fact that humans were not the first rational beings to be created. God already created angels; but angels are servants. Servants cannot interact with a master in the same manner that a master's children would interact with the master. God created us so that we may become His children and He would be our Father. Now, working within the limits of love, let us consider what kind of humanity that could be created to freely love God. (Let me confess that I learned some of the ideas that follow from watching the television broadcasts of the late Christian apologist, Ravi Zacharias. The ideas are not coming from a book or a website; therefore, I don't have a source to cite. It is important, however, that I give credit where it is due. I take full responsibility for all errors that may exist in my presentation.)

First, God could have chosen not to create humans at all. There would have been no disobedience, fall, and original sin to make the cross necessary; however, if humans did not exist, then there would not have been that segment of creation that could freely express love for God. So, although God had the option of not creating humans, that is not an option that would have accomplished the expression of Divine love.

As a second option, God could have created humans who would do only what is good. In other words, God could have created humans who could love and obey Him and never sin. God could have done that, but that would have imposed a limit on humans: no real free choice. We would be like computers and robots that only do what they are programmed to do except in a case of a malfunction. Because God is good and perfect, humans would have no potential for evil, a sort of malfunction. If we were such creatures, we would not have a choice about anything we do. Two problems immediately present themselves.

First, in the absence of choice, there would be no moral responsibility. All our actions and reactions would be predetermined and involuntary activities for which we can neither accept credit nor

take blame. We would function like a computer that only does what it is programmed to do. It cannot take credit or blame for its actions, even if it malfunctions.

The second problem is that in the absence of choice, our love for God would not be genuine but involuntary, forced, or programmed. We would, at best, be nothing but Divine animated toys. You can love a toy but the toy cannot love you back. Our relationship with God could not involve us freely choosing to love God if we were created without the ability to choose. In order for us to freely choose to love God, we also needed to be able to have all the negative options of choice, including the options to reject, deny, and not to love God.

So God created humans with the ability to make choices without being forced. This is often characterized as freedom of choice. Our choices include the options to love God and surrender to His will or reject God, deny His existence, and live with moral relativism. We are absolutely responsible for what results from the choices we make. Only in this situation of choice, in which God can be rejected and evil can exist, is true love possible. This is why God created us with the ability to choose, an ability which we all acknowledge is a good thing.

The issue that we have to contend with is whether or not we believe freedom of choice - or free will - is a good thing. If we believe that free will is a good thing, then we cannot blame God for giving us a good thing. God gave us free will so that that we will freely love Him. If we misuse free will - a good thing - to disobey God or even reject God, again, we cannot blame God.

Look at it this way. An airplane manufacturer produces perfectly functioning airplanes to transport people from one location to another. Airplanes are not wrecking balls. If people misuse the airplanes and crash them into buildings, like on September 11, 2001, we don't blame the manufacturers. The same thing applies to perfectly working cars. If they plow into people, the manufacturers are not blamed. So, we cannot blame God when we misuse the good thing God gave us.

Free will is the ability that distinguishes us from all other living

things. Adam and Eve used a good thing, choice, to disobey God and bring sin into the world. We cannot blame God for the first couple's disobedience anymore than we can blame manufacturers for the misuse of their products. If you do not agree that free will is a good thing, then there is an option, one that God would really love. Surrender your will to God.

We were created to be God's children. In Eden, God was Father. God provided everything that Adam and Eve needed. Like spoiled brats, they wanted to live at home in Paradise and be taken care of without living by the rules. Like a good and loving Disciplinarian, God would have none of that. So He kicked them out of Eden. In their disobedience, they broke the fatherly bond between God and humanity; and since then, God has been trying to repair the bond. How do we get back to God as Father? Only through Jesus. There is no other way. We must return to Jesus' proclamation in John's Gospel:

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

There are two very important things we must take away from this proclamation in John. First, there is no other way to God as Father but through Jesus Christ. Jesus did not say, *I am one of many ways to the Father*. No other religion, not even Judaism from which Christianity emerged, or Islam which came after Christianity, offers such a deeply personal relationship with God.

Is Christianity exclusive in this regard? You bet it is. Some people may say that there are many ways to God, and it is arrogant for Christianity to claim that it alone offers the only way. We cannot engage every foolish claim against Christianity. Paul said: *But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*(2 Timothy 2:23). Other religions have other ideas about God and gods, but no religion, except Christianity, presents God as Father; therefore, Christianity remains very unique, totally exclusive, in this manner.

The second important point about Jesus' claim in John is that we must accept, recognize, call, and relate to God as Father. There are so-called "Christians" who insist that God should not be referred to as Father because it is supposedly sexist, patriarchal, and misogynistic to think of God only in masculine terms. In these so-called progressive churches, God is referred to as "Father and Mother" or *Parent*.

In the Gospels, Jesus called God *Father* more than 150 times. Not once did Jesus call God *Heavenly Mother* or *Heavenly Parent* nor did Jesus insinuate in any way that we have the theological license to call God whatever we want in order to satisfy some form of political correctness. God is not Father to Jesus alone. God is also our Father. In the only prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, he identified God as *Our Father*.

I cannot imagine the degree of arrogance it takes for people to call themselves Christian and claim to know God better than Jesus does; and they want us to accept whatever idea of God they find "appropriate". For Christian theology, the only standard is Christ. Period. Anyone who disagrees with the teachings of Christ has the absolute freedom to walk away from the faith. Just think about the absurdity of someone disagreeing with Jesus Christ and claiming to be a Christian.

I understand and sympathize with the goal of wanting to be inclusive. The truth of the matter is there is no religion more inclusive than Christianity. Paul proclaimed to the Christians in Galatia that there is equality among all believers because, in Christ, there is no distinction based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender:

Galatians 3: 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We must be very careful that we do not engage in idolatry by creating and worshipping a god that does not exist, but rejecting the one true God because He is not popular for the times. We do not

change God to fit the times, we must change the hearts of people so they can recognize that God is for all times because God does not change (Malachi 3:6). The message of Christ does not change to fit the times because Jesus does not change for the times. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). The message of Christ does not change to fit any cultural fad because Christ is above culture; the message of Christ does not change for the times because Christ transcends time; and the message of Christ does not change for any purpose or group because, as all United Methodists Youth know, *Christ Above All*.

The idea that God as Father is part of an ancient and outdated patriarchal culture is theological nonsense. Human nature and human behavior have not changed since the dawn of history, neither should God. Beyond the benefits of science and technology, the modern humanity is not that much different from the ancients. The increase in knowledge has contributed only to the improvement of human physical conditions and not its moral condition; instead, the increase in knowledge has increased the human options for evil and immorality.

Unlike the ancients, we do not sacrifice our children at the altars of idols; but we extinguish the pulse of life of millions in the womb before they even get to take their first breath. We tolerate this form of infanticide in the idol worship of a *woman's right to choose*. We don't stone people for adultery. That's so barbaric; we know better. We license brothels and prostitution, celebrate pornography as art, and tolerate all kinds of deviant sexual proclivities in the name of equality.

We don't believe in sin because we know better, always confusing material progress with moral progress. We have pills, creams, potions, and lotions for everything that ails the body; yet, with the astronomical explosion of knowledge and the rejection of sin, the modern society is afflicted with the scourge of rape, burglary, mass murder, fraud, extortion, kidnap, racism and hate crimes, chemical dependence (aka drug addiction), financial scams, sexual assault,

sexual exploitation, and a host of crimes that make ancient societies look like paradise.

Decent parents are terrified to watch television with their little children because the airwaves are polluted with violence, vulgarity, nudity, and pornographic images. Where is the moral improvement of humanity? Is this the world for which God must change? It is so sad that people buy into this nonsense that the Bible is an ancient book for ancient people. Frankly, the modern world could benefit a whole lot from following this ancient book. Instead of trying to change God to conform Him to this violent, evil, and immoral modern world, we should seek to understand why God chose to be Father; and this so-called modern world will benefit. Let's return to the Bible.

After the creation, we were in Paradise with God. He did not make us like angels who worship and obey; neither did God make us like robots without independent thought. We were not content. We wanted to *be like God, knowing good and evil*. We became *like God*, so God basically said, *"OK! You wanted to be like Me. You are now like Me. Let's see how you would do without Me."* That didn't go well at all. We earned the flood.

After the flood, God began the gradual process of bringing us back to Him. The history of salvation began. First, God implanted in our moral DNA the awareness of Him without Divine guidance – no written laws to live by. After all, we know right from wrong. From Noah to Moses, the closest thing we have to a Divine law is what could pass for an injunction against murder.

Genesis 9:6 (NIV) *"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. .."*

The absence of Divine laws does not mean that Divine laws did not exist. It is just like natural or scientific laws. The laws of motion and of gravity did not begin to exist only after they were discovered by Isaac Newton. They always existed as long as nature

itself. The same is true for Divine laws; they have always existed, but God wanted humans to discover His laws by using the power of their minds.

People who set aside their arrogance and humbly searched for God were given the grace to live in accordance with God's unwritten laws. Although there was no organized religion, a priesthood existed before Moses and the *Ten Commandments*. Melchizedek was *priest of God Most High* (Genesis 14:18 NIV); and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was also a priest (Genesis 3:1 & Genesis 18). There were no written laws but God's laws were written on the hearts of humanity. This is a clear case where a plea of ignorance was no excuse.

Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other Canaanite nations were destroyed because they had no excuse for their sinful living. Humanity had demonstrated to itself that, even with the ability to know right from wrong, it could not avoid evil. God allowed humanity to prove to itself its inability to overcome evil. And it did so in spectacular fashion. God knows that humans will not always obey Him because of their free will; yet, God will continue trying to lovingly bring humans back under His care.

The next stage in the history of salvation began with the creation of a covenant community, a small group of people who would be, to the rest of humanity, an example of how to live right with God. God chose the Israelites for this privilege. He gave them His laws and showed them how to live in obedience. When they went astray, which was very often, God sent prophets to warn them to take corrective actions.

After centuries of warnings, the Israelites proved that, even with God's guidance, as long as human effort is involved, humanity will always fail to maintain a peaceful and morally upright society. God threw down the gauntlet on the Israelites. He punished them. The Israelites were captured by the Babylonians who destroyed every vestige of Israelite national identity. More on this in chapter 5.

As the Israelites experienced despair in their existential crises, God promised a new covenant, a new way that He would relate

to humans. This time around, God would not be Judge. No more would human salvation be dependent on obeying a set of laws and implementing rituals. God would be our *Father* Who loves us unconditionally that He would offer us a path back to Him while we were still being disobedient to Him (John 3:16 & Romans 5:8).

God sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world to initiate and explain this new relationship. Although Jesus, God's Son, was also fully God, Jesus took on the full human nature (1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7) and did what no other human had been able or willing to do: completely surrendered his will to God. The Apostle Paul explains it like this:

Philippians 2: 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Why did Jesus go through all this? Why didn't he just stay in Heaven with his Father? Jesus did it for us. He did it so that we could be adopted in God's family (Ephesians 1:3-6), and like him, each of us could become a child of God and all of us would be children of God.

1 John 3: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

This is the God of Christianity. This is the God that Jesus revealed. This God is Father and we are striving to be His children. If you do not want the God who is Father, then you do not want the God revealed

by Jesus. In other words, you are rejecting Christ and Christianity. That is your choice, but spare us the hypocrisy of calling yourself a Christian and rejecting God as revealed by Christ.

For the believer, the existence of God is not the problem and should not be the problem; but sometimes it justifiably becomes the problem because of doubt resulting from an honest prayer not being answered, or the believer not experiencing God in the here and now as He is revealed in the Bible. How you deal with doubt is extremely important in determining how doubt impacts your faith.

When God does not come through for us when we need Him and honestly call on Him, sometimes we almost forget that He is our Heavenly Father. All the evidence for God seems to go back into the farthest corners of our minds; and we are forced to confront important questions about our beliefs. Rejecting God is never the answer. Rejecting God is like a shot of whiskey to the alcoholic or a whiff of cocaine to the drug addict. It fools one into thinking it is the answer when, in reality, all it does is make you feel good temporarily while hiding the real problem and making the problem worse. To settle for a life without God is to sell yourself short and settle for a delusion.