

# ⇒ MY ⇒ PROBLEM *with God*

## Message 1 | Why you need God

- New logo!
- Welcome back college students!

I took a class in college called “New Testament Criticism.” I was at a public university in the south and the professor was a very well known...critic. He told us day 1 that his goal was To convince us the NT was not the word of God, and then spent the entire semester attempting to shred the authority & authenticity of the new testament apart. He did it with passion and charisma and it ended up being the most challenging class I’ve ever taken. But then, the last day...he shared his “testimony.” He used to be a baptist minister. But he came to a point where watching the news he kept seeing bad thing after bad thing. And not just evil done by someone, but natural disasters like Tsunami’s wiping out 230k. And he said to us “I just couldn’t believe in a God that could let that kind of senseless tragedy happen.” His problem with God was what seemed like senseless suffering in the world and then that led him to questioning the bible and he found he had alot of problems with it too. These are both fair & real questions. Why do bad things happen? Can you really trust the bible?

Of course my professor isn’t alone in having some doubts. Most honest people have some kind of doubt that becomes a real barrier to fully accepting the Christian claim of who God is. Most Christians, if they are honest, have some doubts or questions about certain aspects of their faith that just don’t make sense to them. Alvin Plantinga says There is an unbeliever within the heart of every Christian.”, “It isn’t necessarily the strength of the arguments that rattles us, but the way they resonate with the unbeliever in each of us.” And that’s ok! Faith without a little doubt is blind faith. We need to explore and consider what we believe.

So, We are taking 6 weeks together to let doubt be ok. Doubt is always ok around here, but for these 6 weeks we are digging into it a little. The series is called “My Problem with God.” We don’t presume we will cover all doubts or problems in 6 weeks. But we do hope we will get the conversation started and provide thoughtful responses to some common problems with God like those my professor had. Christian, I hope you get challenged to understand why you believe what you believe. Non-christian, I hope you too are challenged to doubt your doubts a little bit and open yourself to the possibility of Christianity being true.

If you are new with us, you picked a great time to come. I want to challenge you to something right out of the gate: I want to challenge you to plan on sticking with us for this entire series. For one, I’m convinced it takes 4-6 weeks to figure out if a church is a fit for you. It sometimes only takes 1 to figure out it isn’t, but usually a few more to figure out it is. Second, use that time to jump into a

community group and really dig into this stuff we are talking about. Our groups are going to be digging further into this stuff each week. You can join one today after the service.

Also I am leaning on various resources to inform this study. I'll do my best to post helpful articles & resources each week. We also keep detailed citation notes in our sermon manuscripts so that anytime I am referencing someone's work you can go back and dig further if you are so inclined. A lot of today's material comes from Tim Keller's book *Making Sense of God*.

Ok, let's get going.

We are starting with: **Why you need God – Week 1 title slide**

The rest of this series is going to be spent pressing the Christian faith on some of the more common problems people have with God. Today will be a little different because we are going to make a case for why you need God. After all, if he doesn't exist, and he doesn't matter...well then all our other problems with God aren't really that important. So we are going to make a case for the existence of God and the deep need we have for him. The predominant view in our age is that we don't really need God. In fact, the more we bring God into things the more problematic things get. Many of you work in such contexts or you grew up in a family that way. Family reunion...mom stops the car and before you get out she says now remember: we don't talk about God & politics. Cause Cousin Kirby will start in on his conspiracy theory

about us never going to the moon because he doesn't believe in the moon, thinks its just the reflection of the sun. And somehow its all Jimmy Carter's fault. So to be civil lets not bring God into anything. Let's relegate God to personal preference.

This prevailing worldview is commonly referred to as the secular worldview. A secular *person* is one who does not know if there is a God or any supernatural realm beyond the natural world. Everything, in this view, has a scientific or natural explanation.<sup>1</sup> A large number of people hold to this view in our day and even if you don't hold to it, it tends to be the view the prevailing view of the age we live in.

I'm going to compare this view to the Christian view of the world. I'm going to do that by showing you the four movements or "acts" of the gospel message. I've found the more I've shared the gospel right here in Charlotte that many people have heard things about Jesus but never really heard a clear explanation of the gospel message. I think this is incredibly important for us to get the most out of these 6 weeks. If nothing else, you'll finally be able to honestly and fairly evaluate the Christian message and know where your problems with it actually are!

So we'll look through the 4 movements of the Christian message to see several cases FOR God & why we need

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (pp. 2-3). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

him and where it challenges the secular view that is inherently an argument AGAINST the existence of God and need for him.

**Big Idea: If God is real, you can only know him on his terms, not yours.**

### **1<sup>st</sup> movement: Creation**

Seems like the best place to start is right in the beginning with the creation of the world. Both Christianity and Secularism have an explanation for the creation of the world. Let's start with the secular view.

**If there is no God, there is no supernatural, only the natural so we have no ultimate purpose.**

In 1877 British mathematician and philosopher William Kingford wrote a paper titled "The Ethics of Belief" where he articulated what has become the modern day voice of this view on why we cannot believe in God: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence," and by "sufficient evidence" he meant empirical verification that would convince any reasonable person who is capable of assessing it.<sup>2</sup> That empirical observation is the only arbiter of what is real and factual.

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<sup>2</sup> William Kingdon Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," Contemporary Review 29 (December 1876–May 1877): 289, [www.uta.edu/philosophy/faculty/burgess-jackson/Clifford.pdf](http://www.uta.edu/philosophy/faculty/burgess-jackson/Clifford.pdf).

For example: I know water freezes at 32 degrees because I've seen it happen repeatedly and I can test it to verify. If you cannot prove via tangible systematic evidences that God exists, he must not exist. This is why people who hold to the secular view often get frustrated at religious people because "How can you believe in something you can't see or prove exists?" This understanding of truth is fundamental to the secular worldview.

In fact most people who think this way aren't mean spirited. They often feel their lack of faith as a burden they carry and many will say they wish they could be convinced God exists. You have to understand 98% of atheists and agnostics are not evil people out to take God down, they are simply unconvinced people who can't take God seriously. Because they can't see, taste, touch, or hear any evidence of God. Many who used to be religious but lost their faith will attribute it to, in some way, just saying they followed the road map that an empirical investigation laid out for them.

I want to offer a couple of problems with this view:

**"There is no god" is a faith claim.** American philosopher Christopher Evans writes, "Science by its very nature is not fit to investigate whether there is more to reality than the natural world."<sup>3</sup> In other words,

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<sup>3</sup>C. Stephen Evans, Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense: A Response to Contemporary Challenges (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 23. As cited in:

empirical observation is a system closed to only the natural world. So there is no way to *prove* OR *disprove* anything beyond the natural world. Therefore, both the ideas that there IS a God, or that there IS NOT a God, are both faith statements.

### **Human emotions & experience call for more.**

When you take a hike up the mountains for example and you get to a good lookout and you peer out over the land below...there is something that triggers in you that calls that beautiful. Or maybe beauty for you is a piece of art or a piece of music. Maybe its when Rose let's Jack drown so she can survive on the largest door that has ever floated in the atlantic ocean in titanic and you just cry. How could art, or maybe food, affect us so deeply sometimes we even describe it as a spiritual experience? The unexplainable & so varied response to beauty is a big reason many philosophers have closed the door on the secular worldview.

### **Christianity says the supernatural created the natural, and we have a great identity & purpose.**

The Christian faith begins with the claim that there is a God and that he created the world. Now we aren't going to get into *how* he created it this weekend. There is a weekend coming up where we will talk more about scientific study & why it is indeed compatible with the Christian faith ok so you'll have to hold that issue for the

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Keller, Timothy. Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical (p. 35). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

moment. The Christian message begins with Genesis 1:1

[1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Most of us, Christian or not, know this opening line. The Christian Faith says beauty is the work of an incomprehensibly beautiful God.

Psalm 19.1 "the heavens declare the glory of God & the sky above proclaims his handiwork!" Beauty isn't random, it's very purposeful! You want to know why you think things are beautiful? Why humans desire to create beautiful works of art? Because we are made in the image of a beautiful and complex God. He gave us the ability to create beauty and the emotional faculties to perceive beauty so that we might see HIM THROUGH IT ALL!

It goes on to say that God's crowning achievement was that he created mankind.

Genesis 1:27

[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2 says he put mankind in a garden to work it and to keep it. It goes on to say he walked with them in the garden. It shows you that you and I were created for a relationship with God. Where like these first two people we walk with him. These two people were full and lacking nothing internally because of their relationship with God. They were at complete peace and joy with eachother, and they were in harmony with their surroundings. This is

what we were created for. To know and walk with God! That sense of purpose you search for...you can't find it in empirical evidence, you can only find it in how you relate to God! See a strictly natural view of the world can tell you what a human is, but not what a human ought to be.

If there's no God, your ultimate purpose in life is "avoid death." As long as possible! Sounds so exciting. Even epicurus the originator of secular humanism as we know it said everything we do, we do it to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. Avoid death! That is the chief end of man in a worldview with no God. But something in us tells us there is a greater purpose. That's why we need God.

The bible says you are an image bearer of God! That's your identity. AND GOD LOVES HIS CREATION. GET THAT? The great opening truth of the Christian gospel is that GOD LOVES YOU! And...you have a purpose: You are meant to know God, to worship him, and in so doing have a fullness to your life that is a reflection of God himself. You are meant to experience love, hope, beauty, friendship & forgiveness. That's God telling us the human experience is far more than the natural world can explain.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> movement: The Fall**

Both Christianity and Secularism have an explanation for evil and suffering. Again lets start with the secular notion that God does not exist:

**If there is no God, there is no real "good and evil," and death is just a part of life.**

The famous Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky said it this way in his rather long-winded depressing but brilliant

novel The Brothers Karamazov: "Without God and the future life . . . everything is permitted, one can do anything."<sup>4</sup>

In other words, if no higher authority exists, it can't decide how we live, so we decide it for ourselves. This is SOOOO common in our day. But it creates such a giant contradiction with how we live our daily lives that kindergartners are starting to call us out on it. On the one hand we say:

1. **We are relativists.** All ideas are acceptable and what's good for you is what's good for you. "YOU DO YOU"

YET:

2. We have very strong moral convictions about our relativism that we believe others should uphold and we condemn them if they don't. We don't actually live by our relativism. In theory we are relativists but in practice we cling to moral absolutes...even though we can't say why.

I read a story about a kindergarten teacher, she is a Christian, who was instructed to teach her class some basic moral values like unselfishness. But, she was instructed, don't bring any religious reasons into it since not everyone agrees with you. Seems sensible on paper.

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<sup>4</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), p. 589. As cited in Keller, Timothy. Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical (p. 177). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

But in practice as she instructed her 5 year old students not to be selfish one said “why?” “Well because some things are right and some are wrong.” “Says who?” Ummmmm...people. “what people?” “Well...society” “Who is society?” GO CUT SOME TRIANGLES AND LEAVE ME ALONE! Basically she had to teach values without a foundation because they were just what some people have agreed to say.

See the problem? you can't say “good and bad” are relative to the individual and at the same time say its BAD for example, for a person to be a racist. After all, Why is it bad? Because it hurts that person's feelings? Why should we care if it hurts their feelings? If there is no God, no moral absolute...then everything is permitted. The second we start to be honest with ourselves we realize this view creates a sort of moral schizophrenia that we can't actually hold up to. That's why we need God.

**Christianity says God determines good & evil, and death is the justice payment for sin.** God created us and called his creation “good.” In God's perfect design there was a notion of good and evil. Things man was to do, and things he was not to do. And the story goes that mankind did what he wanted to do instead of what God told him to do. This is what the bible calls sin. And when the first people sinned, their sin corrupted the world for everyone else.

[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— Romans 5:12

The bible says that we are under an obligation to live by a certain moral standard. One that reflects the character of God and a standard that he put down. BUT, and this is important, each of us at some point or another chose to live our own way. This is what the bible calls sin and says **“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” – Romans 3.23.**

And if you think there is a God, which I think many of you do, Then it follows this God has authority to set how we are to live. And if we rebel against that authority...if we break the moral code, then we are owed justice right? And the bible says that penalty is death. Death is not a part of life, death is the consequence of sin. Eternal separation from the God we are supposed to walk with. You and I are dead in our sins. This is the most offensive claim Christianity makes in our culture. But somewhere inside you realize that you cannot believe in God yet you yourself be the arbiter of what is right and what is wrong. It doesn't hold. We are dead in our sins...

Francis Schaeffer – invisible recorder – Our own standards are much more difficult than God's. At least God has a plan to redeem you from where you broke his laws. What's your plan to rescue yourself from your own hypocrisy? Which leads us right to Movement 3

### **Movement 3: Redemption**

Let me switch over and talk first this time about the Christian message. Movement 1 was God created you & loves you. Movement 2 is that you are dead in your sin. Movement 3 is that God loves you so much he didn't

leave you to suffer the consequences of your sin. Let me explain via Romans 6.23 -

[23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

If you do agree you have sinned at some point in your life. That there is a right and wrong and at some point you've been in the wrong...then you fall into this category of sinner. We all do. And as Martin Lloyd Jones says...God is so good he has to punish every sin. If a judge looked at someone breaking the law and said "aww just let it go" we'd say he's corrupt. And at the same time God wants to forgive us because he is so Good! So your sin has to be paid for and at the same time God doesn't want you to pay for it.

See he sent Jesus to die for your sin. And because, as Christians claim, Jesus never sinned...he didn't have any sins of his own to die for. So he was free to be a substitute for your sin. If you stain your shirt & ask me for a shirt to borrow...And I offer you a shirt covered in stains I've made...that doesn't really help you. You need a clean shirt. Jesus is the only one in history with a clean shirt and he offers it to you. He takes the penalty for your sin. And God looks at you and says because he has paid the penalty...you are now free!

Christianity says Jesus died in your place so that you can be forgiven of your sins.

John 3.16 says it was because God so loved the world. The whole world. Which means....listen

closely...Christianity says God is a God who can redeem any life. No matter how much of a mess you've made, there is a God who loves you and who has power to forgive you and redeem your life. Some of you desperately want that to be true today.

See what this means!?! It means you can find forgiveness...and you can find power to forgive others. Some of you are holding onto some real pain and its in the gospel where you can finally find the power to forgive because you now have been forgiven of so much! On top of this: The Christian gospel says that because God created, loves, and offers forgiveness to every person it means every person is worthy of dignity, love, and a chance at redemption. We adopt the orphan because we were once outcast in our sin but God adopted us. We become great proponents of social justice because we believe every person deserves dignity & a second chance. After all Christians are the people of the second chance!

If there is no God, your worth is entirely based on your productivity and there is no real escape from your sins.

This may sound brutal but if you are only a composition of molecules, any idea that you or your family are valuable is an illusion you have created to cope with life. People often blame religion for injustices in history and with good cause. But the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Stalin slaughter way more than any one tyrant ever and it was under the secular worldview that people don't matter. Peter Singer, the Princeton University Chair of Ethics,

says its perfectly acceptable to kill off anyone who is a burden to society.

It's the same view that CBS celebrated last week in an article talking about how Iceland has almost eliminated "Down Syndrome Births."<sup>5</sup>

On top of the fact you have no inherent value, if there is no God you really do carry your sins with you. Yes you may do some good later in life to try and outweigh the bad...but your sins, and the sins of others done to you...they stay with you. You can't meditate them away, you can't exercise them. You must be set free from them. That's why we need God.

#### **Movement 4: New Creation**

Steve Jobs, when he was nearing his death said "it's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience . . . and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives..."<sup>6</sup> Jobs, like so many who ascribe to the secular worldview, feel that it just falls short of explaining life and especially death.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland/>

<sup>6</sup> "Walter Isaacson, Steve Jobs (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 571. Quoted in James K. A. Smith, How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), p. 13. Keller, Timothy. Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical (p. 16). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

If there is no God, there is no ultimate hope for the world and death is the end. We avoid it as long as we can but in the end, we will die and its like the screen of our life just goes off. The end.

The Christian message could not differ more sharply here. First off, the gospel says that death is not the end and we have eternity with God waiting on those who receive God's forgiveness. We are going to get into it in the last message in the series but the gospel says death is but a nap. In fact the bible refers to death as an enemy but in the new testament especially starts to talk about it as a nap. Because people wake up from a nap. And that means that when we suffer in this world we don't lose hope because something greater is awaits us!

[18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

And listen when I stood with my best friend who lost his son at 1 day old, when I sit beside people's bedside dying ....in Christ they are not LOSING the battle! Death has lost its sting its just a nap and they will wake up in eternity with God! And one day we will, 1 thessalonians 4 tells us...we will be reunited with these people. And in the end of days Revelation 21 tells us there will be a new heavens and a new earth which means in the end GOOD will win out over evil! And I believe that is the deep down longing of the human heart.



See the message of the gospel is that you can stare into death and tragedy and see through it to the glorious hope that awaits us on the other side.

So what are you going to do with all this?  
Here is the thing I think most people in this room need to work through. See most people are not thoughtful athiests, they are functional athiests. By that I mean most people would never say “there is no God” but day to day they function as if he doesn’t exist.

But if you remember our big idea for today:

**If God is real, you can only know him on his terms, not yours.**

So either you have to fully embrace with your life that there is no God & throw off the religious façade, or you surrender to the truth that there is. And if there is no God, it means you have to ascribe to the position that I’ve tried to show you today is actually at its core a faith claim. And one that is far more irrational and hollow than Christianity is.

But if you say there is a God, you must be open to him setting the terms for your life. The gospel says you have meaning, purpose, that you are more hopelessly lost in your sin than you ever realized and at the same time more loved by God than you ever dared believe. Will you give your life to Christ?

You say...to do so would be a leap of faith. And what I’m telling you is that what you currently believe is a leap of faith. Everyone places faith in something. The gospel is

the beautiful story that tells the true story of the whole world. Will you believe it?