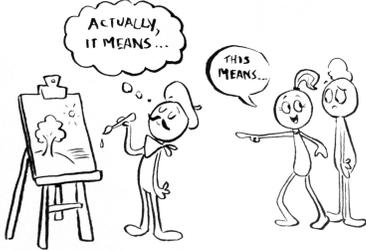


Think For A Minute - What gives life meaning?



What's a person? In both science and philosophy, defining a "person" has been one of the most hotly debated questions throughout history. This is especially true in today's culture! For example, is a person a biological machine – the product of the cosmos, or are we something more than that? This is one of life's most important questions because ultimately we're asking, "Does my life have any meaning?"

Allow me to illustrate what I learned years ago about discovering life's meaning with a picture my son drew. Coming home from work, I found one of his masterpieces taped to his bedroom door. It contained two large stick figures and two small ones. The two large stick figures were circled with a line through them. I could have guessed at what the picture meant, but I might have been wrong. I could have given it personal significance (subjective meaning) but I would be no closer to understanding its intended meaning (objective meaning). So, I did the one thing necessary to know the meaning of anything. I asked the author: my son.



This is important to understand. Meaning is a quality people give things. Things don't have meaning in and of themselves; persons give things meaning. This is true of all meaning – even my life. After a few questions, I learned the drawing was meant to keep mom and dad out during wrestling matches with his younger brother. That wasn't going to happen.



A good example of objective meaning is language. You can view letters and words as art, such as in calligraphy, but we all understand that letters and words have intended meaning. Without understanding the meaning attached to words, the markings have no significance and the language can't be read. If you've ever studied a foreign language you've experienced this but when someone reveals the meaning of the words the language comes alive. In the same way, life has meaning that needs to be revealed. Because we didn't create ourselves, we don't know the objective meaning or purpose we were made for. It's a question for the author.



The Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal said, "Only two kinds of people are reasonable: those who, knowing God, serve Him with their whole heart; and those who, not knowing Him, seek Him with their whole heart." Not surprisingly, any attempt to understand the meaning of life naturally leads to a search for the author of life – God.



Written by Andy Steiger
Illustrated by Dave Wiebe

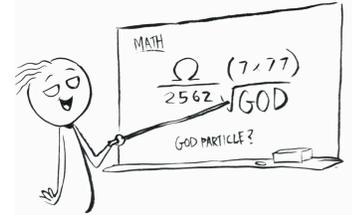
Think For A Minute - Does God exist?



People's answer concerning God's existence vary from: theism (God exists) to agnosticism (not sure if god exists) to atheism (no god exists). Interestingly, statistics consistently demonstrate that the vast majority of people, even in secular European countries, believe a god does exist. More than that, history has demonstrated that humans have never needed to be taught to believe in a god.

Belief in God comes naturally to many of us but how do we know God's existence is true? Can we prove with 100 percent certainty that God exists? Can we prove anything exists with that level of certainty? Can God's non-existence be proven?

A more realistic definition of "prove" that we all naturally use to determine our beliefs is probability. We determine if something is true by it being more probable or more likely than its negation. This is the standard in criminal cases. In an investigation there is no absolute certainty of 'who done it'... only degrees of likelihood, defined as beyond all reasonable doubt, on which a case is built and a jury deliberates. The same is true of God's existence.



When we ask, "Does God exist?" we are seeking to examine the evidence and determine if the belief is reasonable. Tipping the scales of evidence becomes a verdict for belief. As we accumulate evidence we become more grounded in that belief.

What then is the evidence we are examining? There are two forms of knowledge: facts and experience. In daily life we are continually developing beliefs from the factual and experiential knowledge we acquire. This is where Christianity stands distinctly from other religions. It is weighed by experiential (relational) and factual (teleological, ontological, cosmological, moral law, resurrection...) knowledge of God. In fact, the Apostle Paul made it very clear in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ was not raised from the dead, your faith is worth nothing..." The New Testament is full of authors who went to great lengths to demonstrate their experience and the facts.



The growth and spread of Christianity was due to the early Christian's experience of the risen Christ, and their knowledge of the facts surrounding Jesus. This led people not only to believe in God, but also to experientially know God (Matt. 20:24-28).

People asking the question, "Does God exist?", need to carefully weigh the experiential and factual evidence. At the age of seventeen, in a quiet moment of deliberation, I played out a courtroom drama in my heart, soul and mind that had been in session for years, and only I could be the judge. Yes, I concluded God does exist. Not only did the facts lead me to that answer, but more than that, the experience of God brought me into a relationship! Belief in God then is trusting what you have good reason to believe is true.

Christians need to balance their experience of God with the facts supporting it, so that their conviction grows, allowing them to positively influence those of competing beliefs. The exciting purpose of the church is to equip disciples to do as Jesus commanded, "... love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind."

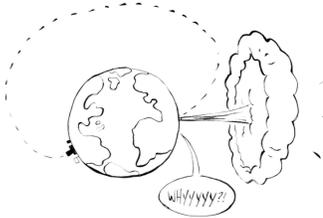


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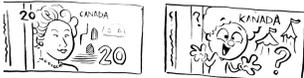
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Think For A Minute - What is evil?



A good friend once told me how his brother, having come back from humanitarian work in Africa, had given up on God. He could not make sense of how an all-good, all-powerful God would allow the evil he had witnessed. He therefore concluded, God must not exist.

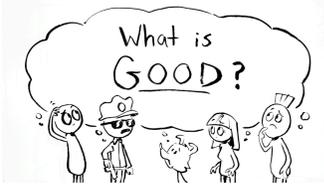
This is a common conclusion, which concerns me. Evil far from disproving God's existence is in fact some of the best evidence for God! Without God, the question "Why is there evil?" becomes unanswerable because it is unintelligible. When a person says to me, "I can't believe in God because there is too much evil in the world." my initial response is to ask a simple question: "Exactly, what do you mean by evil?"



I find that many people have not given evil much thought and aren't exactly sure what they mean by it. Simply put, evil is the corruption of something good. For example, counterfeit currency is the corruption of real currency. Now notice, you can have real currency without counterfeit currency but, you cannot have counterfeit currency without real currency.

Similarly, evil is the corruption of good. You can have good without evil but, you cannot have evil without good. Evil is that which should not be. By calling something evil, people are saying that something should not be that way. This assumes there is a way that things ought to be. It's no surprise then that the subject of evil naturally leads to a question of first importance: How should the world be? or, more precisely, What is good?

I believe Christianity correctly bases goodness in God, who is good and is the source of all good. But does this mean that goodness is at the whim of God? For example, could God call rape good? No, He cannot, because goodness comes from God's nature and God cannot change His nature. God is good.



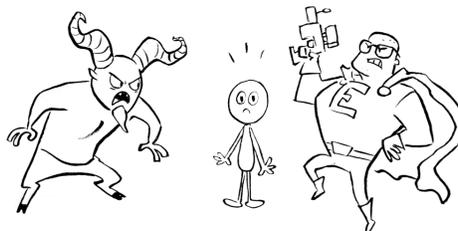
Now please notice what I'm *not* saying. This does NOT mean people need to believe in God to be morally good. That is obviously not the case; however, it does mean that God needs to exist in order for there to even be such a thing as morally good. Without God, there wouldn't be a standard of goodness; there wouldn't be a way things "ought to be". The truth is, we are all acutely aware that some standards are wrong for everyone, like torturing children, and some standards are right for everyone, like loving children. These values are beyond opinion and taste because they reflect a higher law, an objective standard based on God's existence.

This is why the initial statement made by my friend's brother concerns me. The very passion with which he condemned the evil he experienced in Africa demonstrates his awareness that the world should not be that way. Yet, without God, there is no particular way things ought to be.



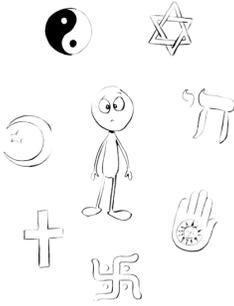
We should run toward God not away from Him in times of evil and suffering. Not only can God heal the wounds caused by evil but, He alone can give us the moral justification to do the very thing we so desperately desire - to condemn the evil of this world!

Written by Andy Steiger
Illustrated by Dave Wiebe



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Think For A Minute - Do all religions lead to God?

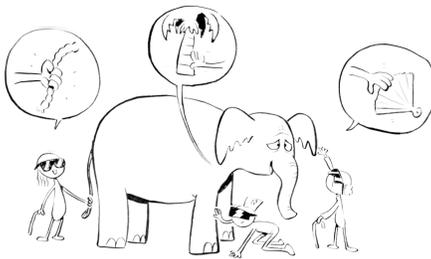
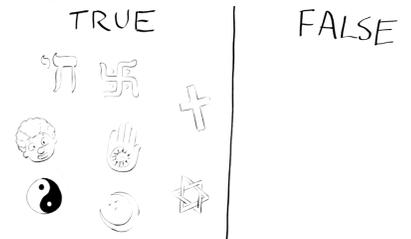


A popular question in our climate of widespread religious diversity is this: “Do all religions lead to God?” The charitable nature of the question fits nicely into our postmodern upbringing, where we’ve been taught, that religious truth is a matter of preference until further reflection reveals a problem. The question actually reflects two major assumptions about religion: 1) God exists. 2) God can be reached.

Most religions, however, do not share this belief. Buddhists, strictly speaking, do not believe god exists nor are they trying to reach god; Muslims believe a god exists but they don’t think their god (Allah) can be reached. Assumptions aside, what is really being asked is this: “Are all religions true?”

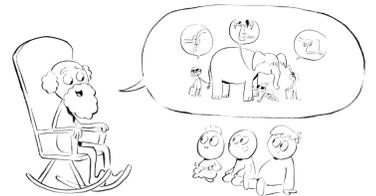
But this raises an immediate problem. What if I made up a religion? Would it then also be true? Often we skirt the logic by saying, “Well, your religion is true for you and this is true for me.” In this case, the person has merely replaced the word “meaningful” with “true.” I think we would all agree that religions, even made up ones, are meaningful to those practicing in them. But are they true?

Can the Buddhist be correct that God does not exist and, at the very same time, the Christian be correct that God does exist? Can God be reached and, at the same time, not be reached? Logic tells us that all religions could be wrong or only one religion is true while the rest are false. Logic does not allow for the possibility that all religions are completely true.



What if the world’s religions only appear to be contradictory? Often the Hindu parable of ‘The Blind Men and the Elephant’ is told at this juncture to demonstrate. Three blind men encounter an elephant: one man feels an ear and calls it a fan, another feels the leg and calls it a tree and a third feels the tail and describes it as a rope. The reality is an elephant being described from three different perspectives.

At first the parable sounds convincing until you realize it’s flawed. All the blind men were wrong. They described reality incorrectly and in the process make an important point. Only one person could SEE the one truth – the storyteller! The narrator is the only one who understood reality correctly – IT’S AN ELEPHANT! This raises an important question: How do we gain the storyteller perspective? In other words, why follow blind men if there is someone with sight?



There is only one person in history that claimed the storyteller perspective and then proved it – Jesus Christ. Unlike people who grope blindly for truth, Jesus spoke with the authority of seeing. In fact, He didn’t just claim to know the truth; He claimed to be the truth (John 14:6)! Jesus didn’t only claim to be the storyteller but the story itself, reality – God.

The reality Jesus taught was that no religion leads to God. Religion is like the blind leading the blind. Jesus explained that man cannot reach God, but God, through Himself, reached man.

Written by Andy Steiger
Illustrated by Dave Wiebe



Think For A Minute - Is Jesus God?

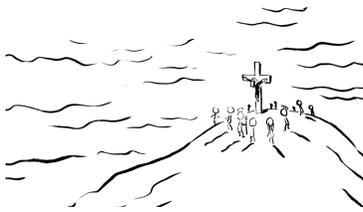
Is Jesus God? Search the Bible and you will never find Jesus say exactly, "I am God." But then again, how could he? The New Testament was written in Greek but Jesus spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. For a Jew, God has only one personal name, which out of respect and reverence is kept unpronounceable, having no vowels - YHWH. Thus, God's name could only be written. Sure, Jesus could have called Himself "*Theos*," the Greek word for *god*, or "*EI*," the Hebrew word for *god*, but there were many gods! The people would have asked, "Which god are you claiming to be?" Jesus wasn't claiming to be a god, but the *only* God - YHWH, the God of the Jew's.



How then would a 1st century Jew speak of God? The same way you speak of anyone whose name you can't say - you describe them. The Hebrew names for God that are found in the Bible are actual attributes of God.

For example, *Elohim* means "all powerful one" or *El Shaddai* means "all sufficient one." Even at the burning bush, when God reveals His name to Moses He says, "I AM that I AM," meaning "self-existent."

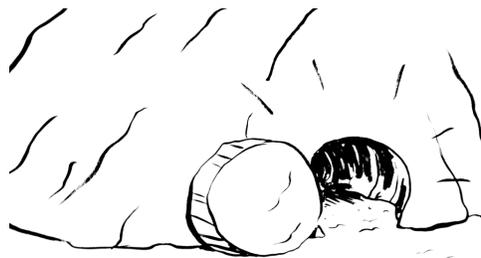
Jesus referred to Himself as God repeatedly throughout the Gospels, by claiming and demonstrating the attributes of God. For example, in Mark 2, after a paralytic is placed before Him, Jesus forgives the man's sins. The Jews understood that only God could forgive sins and accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus then demonstrated His spiritual authority by healing the man physically. For a Jew, this was unthinkable. Although Jesus had made a claim of deity, God did not strike Him dead; but instead, Jesus was able to heal the man!



When Jesus was arrested and put on trial in Mark 14, Caiaphas the high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Notice Caiaphas didn't say the name YHWH.) To which Jesus replied, "I AM and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus not only made a claim of self-existence (see also John 8:58) but then claimed a prophecy, from the book of Daniel, of God's coming judgment upon Himself! There was no confusion for Caiaphas who, tearing his clothes, found Jesus guilty of blasphemy and condemned Him worthy of death.

Jesus clearly defined Himself with the attributes of deity, which is the name of God that crosses language and culture. Everyone knows who the all-powerful, self-existent one is. It is a claim on reality and the Jews understood it. They were not confused as to who Jesus claimed to be, only if His claims were true.

That's what makes Jesus so unique. He did more than claim to be the author of life - He proved it. In fact, this was how a Jew knew if a prophet was telling the truth, their prophecy would come true. Jesus foretold his death and resurrection (Matt. 20: 17-19). On the cross, Jesus demonstrated God's love through His life and death. Three days later, Jesus demonstrated God's power by returning to life, eternal life; proving He was who He had been claiming to be - YHWH. The resurrection launched Christianity and is the hope on which it stands.



Written by Andy Steiger
Illustrated by Dave Wiebe

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Think For A Minute - What is the meaning of life?



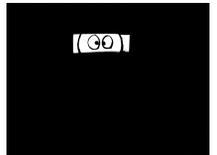
What is the meaning of life? Driving down the highway, I confronted this question head on when a deer ran out in front of my car. I only had time to scream before sending Bambi heavenward and setting-off an airbag explosion in my face.

The shock of that 'near death experience' did NOT bring visions of my possessions, nor a renewed passion for consumerism. It brought what matters most in life into sharp focus - my relationships. I thought about God, my wife, children, family and friends.

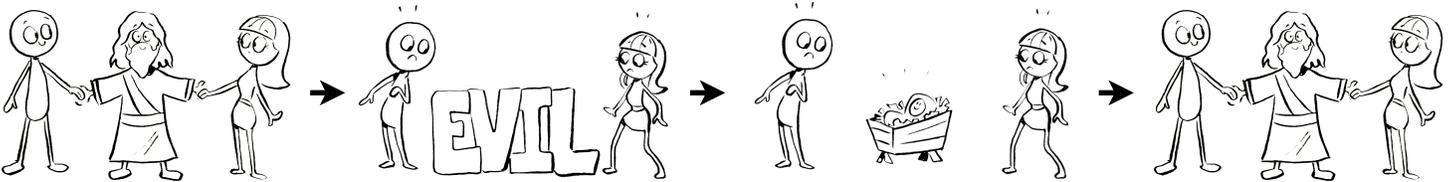
Death has a way of reminding us that relationships are what really matter in life. Notice that people who are closest to death care least about possessions. Instead, they surround themselves with the people they love. Intuitively we know relationships are what really matter. We long for relationship with both God and people. It's what we were created for and we will not be satisfied until we find it.



Consider this, relationships are even how we punish people. Break the law and you are taken out of relationship - prison. Misbehave in prison and you're put into solitary confinement. Isolation from people is torture, but separation from God is hell. Read the Bible and you'll notice it is a narrative, from beginning to end, of God and His people. The

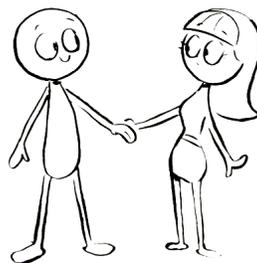


incarnation of Jesus Christ demonstrated the lengths to which God would go in His love story to reach His beloved (Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus taught that people were created for relationship (Mark 12:28-31).



However, evil has separated us from God and each other creating a world of broken relationships. So, God made war on evil through a baby in a manger. Jesus would go on to defeat evil on the cross so that through Him people could fulfill the meaning they were created for – relationship with God and each other. So although human relationships will provide people with some level of meaning, it will never satisfy. The Bible explains that people were created for more than human relationships and that our heart will be burdened, until it rests in God (Matt. 11:28-30).

Heaven is not the p.s. to our life story but everything we live and hope for – love perfected. Relationship with God and people is not something you need to wait until heaven to find, but through Jesus Christ you can experience both, right here and now (John 14)!



*Written by Andy Steiger
Illustrated by Dave Wiebe*