

Why doesn't God act like I think He should?

A Doubters Welcome resource
for spiritual discussion

By
David Stiles

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About

Doubters Welcome provides free resources for Christian discussion.

Each resource guide is broken into four discussion sections (with twenty questions in each section) to help facilitate spiritual discussion.

For More Information

For more information visit our website:

www.doubterswelcome.org (coming soon)

Resources in this Series

All Christians are idiots, right?

Why doesn't God act like I think He should?

Why are Christians so judgmental?

Isn't Christianity just a crutch to get through life?

About the Author

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1

Discussion One

Causes and Effects

Introduction

Thanks for joining this *Doubters Welcome* discussion. We hope you'll enjoy your time discussing matters of life and faith with others!

Why are we doing this?

Doubters Welcome was started in 2012 to help facilitate discussion and dialog about life and spiritual matters. By providing free resources, such as this one, our hope is to foster inspiring discussions about faith and life.

Discussion Guidelines

In discussions such as this, we desire to genuinely understand the perspectives of all participants while also providing a clear presentation of Christian teaching.

The purpose of this resource is not to encourage division or to attack different religious views but rather to clarify Christian beliefs¹ and foster discussion. We encourage discussions to:

- be respectful of other backgrounds and perspectives
- allow people to “pass” on answering questions if they feel uncomfortable
- be a safe place to ask questions
- stay on track with time and subject, not diverting into tangents too far off topic

Cause and Effect

Before we explore the specific question of “*Why doesn’t God act like I think He should?*”, let’s explore the topic of *causation* – an area of philosophy and religion that looks at the cause of events.

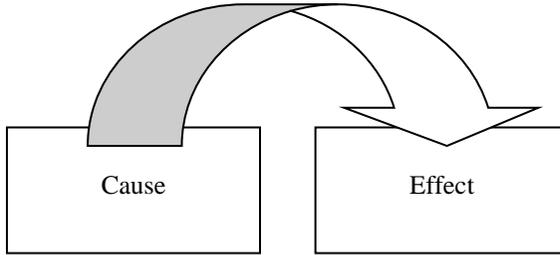


Fig. 1.1 – Cause and Effect Diagram

At first glance this concept seems easy to understand. Even a young child, for example, when asked, “Why is the book on the table?” could answer, “Because Daddy put it there.”

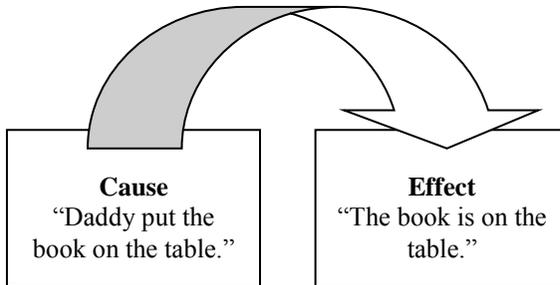


Fig. 1.2 – Cause and Effect Example

Some have found the seemingly simple concept of causation challenging. The philosopher Aristotle, for example, identified four different types of causes (material, formal, efficient and final).

Don’t worry – we won’t delve into these areas of philosophy in this discussion. Rather, we will first look at the topic of causation as evidence for God’s existence then turn the focus of our discussion to beliefs about specific causes for life’s circumstances.

The First Cause

For many centuries scholars have offered a *cosmological argument* for the existence of God.²

The cosmological argument holds that all created things have a cause and that the First Cause of the universe is God.

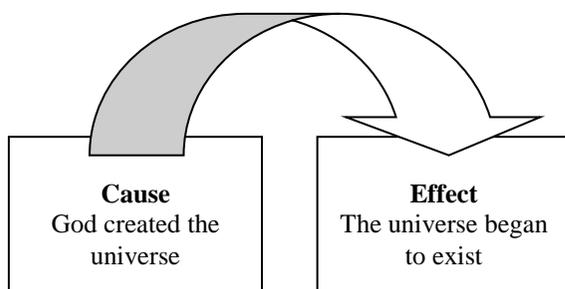


Fig. 1.3 – The Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God

Over time the cosmological argument has taken many shapes and forms.³

Questions 1.1 through 1.4 that follow will help you think more about this argument for the existence of God. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about the cause of created things?

Question 1.1 :: Do all created things have a cause?

Whatever begins to exist must have a cause for its coming into being.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.2 :: Did the universe begin to exist?

The universe began to exist.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.3 :: Does the universe have a cause for coming into being?

Therefore

(based on the previous statements in Question 1.1 and 1.2),
the universe has a cause for its coming into being.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.4 :: How logical is the cosmological argument?

As you noticed, Questions 1.1 through 1.3 asked about your views regarding the *cosmological argument* for the existence of God.

Question 1.1 asked about your opinion to the statement that whatever begins to exist must have a cause.

- **How did you respond to Question 1.1?**
- **What examples come to mind as you to think about causes for things coming into existence?**⁴

Next, Question 1.2 asked about your opinion to the statement that “the universe began to exist.” This premise has recently received a great deal of support from scientists who support the “Big Bang” theory of the early development of the universe.⁵

Discussion One

- **How did you respond to Question 1.2?**
- **What thoughts come to mind as you ponder the beginning of the universe?**

Next, Question 1.3 asked about your opinion to the statement that “therefore, the universe has a cause for coming into being.”⁶

- **How did you respond to Question 1.3 about the cosmological argument? Why?**
- **Was this a new idea for you, or similar to ideas you have held before?**
- **What thoughts come to mind as you ponder the creator of the universe?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 1.4 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How was your response similar or different to others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

Next, we'll continue our discussion about causation by exploring your beliefs about the causes of your life's circumstances.

What are the causes of events in your life?

Throughout the ages many reasons have been given for the causes of specific events.⁷

Questions 1.5 through 1.18 that follow are based on popular opinions that may be similar to your views regarding the *cause of events* and circumstances in your life. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

After you have completed Question 1.18 two additional questions will help you summarize your views and provide more details about these popularly held views.

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about luck and chance?

Question 1.5 :: Are life's circumstances due to chance?

It is really a matter of chance if something good or bad happens to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.6 :: Can our circumstances be explained by random chances?

Our circumstances can be explained by the evolutionary theory of random selection.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.7 :: Do you feel lucky?⁸

I consider myself to be a lucky person.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.8 :: Is it best to be lucky?

It is better to be lucky than unlucky.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about the causes of life's circumstances?

Question 1.9 :: Are good forces the reason for good things?

Good things happen because of a good force in the universe.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.10 :: Are bad forces the reason for bad things?

Bad things happen because of a dark force in the universe.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

How would you answer these statements about the causes of life's circumstances?

Question 1.11 :: Did God start things then stop being involved?

Life's circumstances can be explained by a God who started the universe but is now no longer involved.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.12 :: Do laws of nature explain life's circumstances?

Life's circumstances can be explained by laws of nature. There are no supernatural forces or explanations for life's circumstances.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about the causes of life's circumstances?

Question 1.13 :: Do scientific answers explain life's circumstances?

Life's circumstances can be explained by scientific explanations such as the collision of matter and antimatter.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.14 :: Are genetics the cause of most of our actions?

Genetic predisposition is the reason most people act the way they do.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Causes and Effects

How would you answer these statements about the causes of life's circumstances?

Question 1.15 :: Are your good actions the cause of life's circumstances?

If I do good, good things will happen to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.16 :: Or, your bad actions?

If I do bad, bad things will happen to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about the causes of life's circumstances?

Question 1.17 :: Is life a product of your choices?

Life's circumstances are simply a product of my decisions and choices.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.18 :: Or the choice of others?

My life's circumstances can be explained by the choices of other people (especially my family of origin).

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.19 :: How would you recap your views?

Questions 1.5 through 1.18 asked about your thoughts regarding the cause of events and circumstances in your life. Place a checkmark in the table below to summarize your views on each proposed cause.

Table 1: Popular Reasons for Events and Circumstances in Life

| Theory | Questions | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree | Proposed By |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|---|
| Chance/Luck | 1.5 - 1.8 | | | | | | Popular Culture |
| Good and bad forces | 1.9 & 1.10 | | | | | | Dualism/ Manichaeism/ Star Wars |
| A God who is no longer involved | 1.11 | | | | | | Deists |
| Laws of Nature | 1.12 | | | | | | Naturalist Philosophers |
| Scientific explanations | 1.13 & 1.14 | | | | | | Materialists/ Scientists |
| My good and bad actions | 1.15 & 1.16 | | | | | | Proposed by many religions including the Eastern religious belief in karma. |
| My choices | 1.17 | | | | | | Popular Culture |
| Others' choices | 1.18 | | | | | | Psychology |

Overview of Popular Opinions

Many different explanations have been given for the causes of specific events that people experience. Let's spend a moment to review these:

Luck/Chance

Chance and luck have been popular explanations for events for many centuries. In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, the worship of Chance and Luck flourished.⁹ Chance and luck remain popular explanations today, as is evidenced by the evolutionary theory of "random selection."

Good and Bad Forces

Good and bad forces have also been popular explanations for events for many centuries. This dualism is seen for example in the Chinese philosophy of Taoism (with its opposite forces of yin and yang) and the gnostic religion of Manichaeism. In more recent years this view was expressed in the *Star Wars* movies with "The Force" and the "Dark Side of the force."

A God who is no longer involved

Deists hold the belief in a Creator God who is no longer involved in creation. This belief holds to the "clockwork theory" – that a creator God created the universe (wound the clock) then stepped aside to let it run. This belief was very popular during the so called "Enlightenment" period in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Laws of Nature

*Naturalists*¹⁰ are those who believe that the laws of nature govern the universe. For naturalists, there are no supernatural or religious explanations or reasons for events to occur.

Scientific Explanations

Similarly, *materialists* assert that the only thing that exists in the universe is matter. For those who hold this view, scientific explanations are the only things that can describe the universe's events – such as the collision of matter or genetic causes.

My Good and Bad Actions

Some people believe that their good actions result in good outcomes while their bad actions results in bad outcomes. This view is expressed in many religions. In Eastern religions, for example, the belief in *karma* asserts that every person gets exactly what they deserve in this life and the next because of their actions.

My Choices or the Choices of Others

Similarly, some assert that life's circumstances are simply a product of decisions and choices – either their decisions and choices or the decisions and choices of others (such as their family of origin).

A Mixture of Beliefs

While the examples provided above describe individual theories, in practice most people hold a *mixture of beliefs* regarding the cause of life's circumstances.

For example, in the field of psychology, many contemporary therapists assume that problems are caused by a combination of *nature* and *nurture*. Thus, many psychologists identify genetic and other scientific causes (nature) as something that can usually be treated with medicine, while the effects of the choices of others – especially one's family of origin (nurture) – are seen as something that can be treated with therapy.

Review the chart again on page 23, then answer these questions...

- **Which of these popular views have you heard?**
- **Do you hold to a mixture of these popular views or to one in particular?**
- **Why do you hold your views? Why don't you hold other views that are listed on the chart?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Question 1.20 :: Are life's circumstances governed by impersonal forces?

In reviewing the popular views (listed on page 23), you may have noticed that many of the popular explanations regarding the causes of life's circumstances point to *impersonal* forces such as matter, motion and chance.

Yet, it is interesting to observe that most people live life assuming that they can relate to their world and to other people in a *personal, relational way*.

Rather than assuming a world that is out-of-control, illogical and governed by chance, people generally act in ways that assume that life is rational and logical.

This type of thinking, Christians would argue, assumes a world created by a *personal and relational God* – a God who has made it possible for people to think and reason together.

- **Would you agree that you relate to people in a personal, relational way?**

- **How might relating in a personal, relational way point to a personal, relational God?**

How were your responses similar or different to others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

2

Discussion Two

A God in Control

Introduction

Welcome to our second *Doubters Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

While our first discussion examined *popular explanations* for the causes of life's events, this discussion will explore how *the Bible* describes God and His role in life's events – looking specifically at how the Bible describes God as a:

- personal
- triune
- Lord

Let's look at each of these areas in more detail...

A Personal Being

Unlike the impersonal forces embraced by popular culture (such as luck or chance), the Bible presents God as a *personal* being.

To say that God is a personal being is to refer to God's *relational* nature and His *immanence* – His involvement in creation.

From the very beginning of the Bible we can observe God's personal and relational nature. In the Book of Genesis, for example, we can read of God's creation of the universe and His interaction with Adam and Eve – even talking and walking with them in the Garden of Eden.¹¹

Dr. Louis Berkhof notes that God is presented as a relational being, not just in the Book of Genesis, but throughout the Bible,

“God is represented throughout (the Bible) as a *personal God*, with whom men can and may converse, whom they can trust, who sustains them in their trials, and fills their hearts with the joy of deliverance and victory.”¹²

It is interesting to look at the words Dr. Berkhof uses to describe God:

- a personal God
- with whom men can converse
- who they can trust
- who sustains in trials
- who fills hearts with the joy of deliverance and victory

Dr. John Frame also notes that God's personal presence is described throughout the Bible. As Dr. Frame observes,

“At various points in history, God has actually...localized his presence in space and time, dwelling in a particular location.”¹³

Discussion Two

There are a number of accounts in the Bible where we can read of God appearing:

- in a burning bush before Moses
- on Mount Sinai
- in the tabernacle
- in the temple
- in the person of Jesus

...all of which point to the personal and involved nature of God.

The Bible also tells us that God's presence was *not* limited to a specific place or to a specific time in the past. Rather, we are in God's presence even today. His presence is inescapable and unavoidable. As the Psalmist explained,

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7-12)

As God explained in Jeremiah,

- 'Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. '*Do I not fill heaven and earth?*' declares the Lord. (Jer. 23:24)

A God in Control

Questions 2.1 through 2.5 that follow will help you identify some of your views regarding the personal nature of God. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

Question 2.1 :: Are you encouraged by God's presence?

I am encouraged by God's immanence – His personal presence and involvement in Creation.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.2 :: Are you aware of God's presence in creation?

I have a clear sense of God's personal presence in creation.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.3 :: Are you aware of God's presence in your life?

I have a clear sense of God's personal presence in my life.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.4 :: Are there things that get in the way of recognizing God's presence?

There are many things that get in the way of me recognizing God's personal presence in creation and my life.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.5 :: What is your reaction to God's presence?

The first questions in this discussion asked about your views regarding God's personal presence.

Question 2.1 asked if you felt encouraged by God's *immanence* – His personal presence and involvement in Creation.

- **What is encouraging to you about God's presence and involvement in creation?**

Next, Questions 2.2 and 2.3 asked if you had a clear sense of God's presence in creation and in your life.

- **What examples did you think of in recognizing God's presence?**
- **How would you like to recognize more of God's presence in creation or in your life?**

Question 2.4 then asked if many things got in the way of recognizing God's presence in creation and in your life.

- **What things seem to hinder your recognition of God's presence?**

If you feel comfortable, share your response to Question 2.5 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

A Triune God

Another important concept presented in the Bible is that God is one God in *three persons*:

- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit

This is the concept known as the *trinity* – that God is one substance and still three persons.

Thus, three distinct persons (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) share one divine nature. All are co-eternal and co-divine (which means that all three persons of the trinity have always existed and share in their divine nature).

Hearing this, you may wonder, “What is the relationship like between the members of the trinity?”

While created beings like you and I cannot fully *comprehend* or understand everything about our Creator, the Bible explains that we can *apprehend* some elements of His nature.

What we learn in the Bible is that the bond between the three members of the trinity is characterized by *love*. As the Apostle John wrote,

- “God is *love*.” (1 John 4:8)
- “The Father *loves* the Son and placed everything in His hands.” (John 3:35)

God’s love is not self-centered but always desires fellowship with others.¹⁴ Thus, God was not one being forever isolated to Himself but one who always existed as three persons.

As older theologians explained it, there exists a *communion of holy love* between the three persons of the trinity, each affirming and supporting the other.

Questions 2.6 through 2.9 that follow will help you reflect on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Question 2.6:: Had you heard of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?

I had never heard of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity before today.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.7:: Are you encouraged by the nature of the Trinity?

I am encouraged by the nature of the Trinity – a communion of love between each person in the Trinity.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.8: Would you like to learn more about the Trinity?

I would like to learn more about the Trinity.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.9 :: What is your reaction to the trinity?

The previous three questions touched on your response to the doctrine of the *trinity* – that God is one in substance and in three persons.

Question 2.6 asked if you had heard of the doctrine of the Trinity before today.

- **Had you heard about the Trinity before today? If so, when did you first hear about the Trinity?**
- **What other occasions have you heard about the Trinity?**
- **In learning about the Trinity today, how have your views of God been challenged?**

Next, Questions 2.7 asked if you were encouraged by the nature of the Trinity.

- **What is encouraging about the nature of the Trinity?
Why?**

If the relationship between the members of the Trinity can be described as a communion of holy love,

- **What do you suppose is God's desired relationship with His people? Why?**

Question 2.8 asked if you were interested in learning more about the Trinity.

- **What would you like to learn more about?**
- **What person of the Trinity would be interesting to learn more about?**
- **How would you like to grow in your understanding of God's love?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 2.9 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

The Lord God

Another important concept presented in the Bible (which is probably the most common description of God in the Bible) is that God is *Lord*.

God's Lordship is comprehensive and encompasses *all things*.

For example, we learn in the Bible that:

- God is the *Creator* of all things
- God *knows* all things
- God is *free from* all things
- God *rules over* all things
- God *brings* all things to pass

...let's look at each of these areas in more detail.

God our Creator

The Bible explains that God is the *Creator* of all things. As God explained in the book of Isaiah:

- "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God...I form light and create darkness." (Isaiah 45:5-7)

Similarly in the book of Revelation we can read that elders will gather around God's throne in worship and proclaim God's Lordship over creation,

- "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for *you created all things*, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:11)

God knows all things

In addition, we learn in the Bible that God knows *all things*. This is known as God's *omniscience* – He is not surprised by anything in creation. He knows all that happened in the past, all that is currently happening and all that will happen in the future.

As the Psalmist explained,

- “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power,
his understanding is beyond measure.” (Psalm 147:5)

Peter confessed,

- “Lord you know *all things*.” (John 21:17)

Questions 2.10 through 2.13 that follow will help you reflect on a God who is the Creator of all things and one who knows all things.

Question 2.10:: Are you encouraged that God is the Creator of all things?

It is encouraging to me that God is the Creator of all things.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.11:: What does the ability to create the universe indicate about God's power?

God's ability to create the universe tells me a great deal about His might and power.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.12:: Are you comforted by the fact that God knows all things?

It is comforting to me that God knows all things.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.13 :: What is your reaction to God's Lordship over creation and knowledge?

The previous questions in this section examined your response to God's Lordship over creation and His knowledge of all things.

Questions 2.10 and 2.11 touched on your views about God's role in creation. In reflecting on these concepts, the following passage from the book of Isaiah might be helpful:

- "Do you not know? Have you not heard? *The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.* He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." (Isaiah 40:28-29)

Question 2.10 asked if you found it encouraging that God was the creator of all things.

- **How is it encouraging that God is the creator of the universe?**

Question 2.11 asked what God's ability to create the universe indicated about His power and might.

- **What does it say about God's power that He spoke and creation came into existence?**
- **From what you have learned so far, how might God relate to the world that He created?**

Discussion Two

Next, Question 2.12 asked if you were comforted in the fact that God knows all things.

The following passage from Psalm 139 might help clarify your thoughts with how the Bible presents this concept:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it (Psalm 139:1-6)

- **What is comforting about the reality that God already knows you?**

- **In what ways does this passage speak to feelings you might have had of “earning” or “working to get” God’s interest?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 2.13 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

God is free from all things

The Bible also explains that God is free from *all things* – which scholars call God’s *solitariness* or God’s *aseity*.

God, we learn, is self-existent and self-sufficient, He is not dependent on humans. In the blunt words of A.W. Pink, “God gains nothing from us.”¹⁵ As the Apostle Paul explained,

- “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:24-25)

Similarly, God is under no obligation to man. He was not obligated to create the universe nor was He obligated to provide for it or sustain it. He is not obligated to rescue, redeem or help people and is free from any constraints that humans attempt to place on Him.

We learn in Scripture, however, that God did decide to rescue and redeem and help people. He created *covenants* – binding promises between Himself and people. These promises, we should note, are not obligations that people have imposed on God. Rather, in making these promises, God (by His own choice) brings himself under obligation to people.

“Why would God do that?” you might wonder.

....we’ll discuss God’s motives in a later discussion.

God Rules over all things

In addition to describing God as one who is not dependent on humans, the Bible also tells us that God is the Lord who *rules over all things*. As King David exclaimed,

- “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1)

As Creator and Lord, God *owns everything*. As God explained in this psalm,

“For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.” (Psalm 40:10-11)

We are reminded in Scripture that God is not weak, He is Lord of all. He is majestic. He is mighty. He is *transcendent* - ruling high above His creation. Another psalm of King David expresses the majesty of God with these words:

- “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens” (Psalm 8:1)

The Apostle Paul also wrote about the majesty of God, explaining that God is:

- “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.” (I Timothy 6:15-16)

Questions 2.14 through 2.18 that follow will help you reflect on God who is free from all things and the Ruler over all things.

Question 2.14:: How different is the Bible's description of God's self-sufficiency from your previous thoughts?

I've often thought that God needed me to help Him or do Him a favor.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.15:: Is it encouraging that God is self-sufficient?

It is encouraging that God is not dependent upon people.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.16:: Is God's Lordship over all things easy to understand?

It is difficult to understand that God is the ruler of all things.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.17:: Is it comforting that God is transcendent and the ruler of all things?

It is encouraging that God is greater than any problem I might face.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.18 :: What are your thoughts on God's self-sufficiency and Lordship over all things?

Questions in this section examined your responses to God's self-sufficiency and His Lordship over all things.

The first two questions, Questions 2.14 and 2.15 touched on your reaction to God's *aseity* – God's self-sufficiency.

Question 2.14 asked how different the Bible's view of God's self-sufficiency was from the one that you have held.

- **How different is Bible's explanation of God's self-sufficiency from the views that you have held?**

Next, Question 2.15 asked if you found it encouraging that God does not depend on people.

In reflecting on this question, it might be interesting to note that throughout the Old Testament, other gods (called *idols*) are mocked because they are made with human hands and dependent upon people.

- "A craftsman casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains" (Isaiah 41:19)

Yet, the Lord explains that gods made by human hands are powerless:

- "Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind" (Isaiah 41:29)

As you reflect on "gods made by human hands",

- **How is it encouraging is it to you that God is not dependent upon people?**

Discussion Two

- **What have you relied upon that are “made with human hands”?**
- **How have they served as “lords” or “gods” in your life?**

Next, Questions 2.16 and 2.17 asked about God’s Lordship *over all things*.

The Psalms, in particular exclaim God’s transcendence and majesty over all things:

- “...for his name alone is exalted; His majesty is above earth and heaven” (Psalm 148:13)
- “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever” (Psalm 111:2-3)

Question 2.16 asked if it is difficult to comprehend God’s transcendence and majesty.

- **In what ways can it be difficult to comprehend God’s majesty?**

Question 2.17 asked if it is comforting knowing that God is transcendent and majestic.

- **How can it be comforting knowing that God is transcendent and majestic?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 2.18 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

God brings all things to pass

Lastly, the Bible also explains that as Lord, God *brings all things to pass*. This means that by God's *sovereign will* ¹⁶ all things that occur are part of His eternal plan and purposes.

Thus, God has decreed all things that have ever occurred in the past or will occur in the future.

Many Old Testament passages point to God and His sovereign will directing events:

- “Who has spoken and it came to pass, *unless the Lord has commanded it?* Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? (Lamentations 3:37-39)
- “Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, *unless the Lord has done it?*” (Amos 3:6)

Similarly, in the New Testament we read that,

- God, “works *all things* according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11)
- “For from him and through him and to him are *all things*.” (Romans 11:36)

Discussion Two

We also read that God's will *can never be stopped*. God's will can never be thwarted or fail to achieve what God has intended to do. As the Psalmist explained,

- "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him"
(Psalm 115:3)
- "Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" (Psalm 135:6)

Similarly, the writer of Proverbs described God's will by writing,

- "The Lord works out everything for his own ends— even the wicked for a day of disaster." (Proverbs 16:4)
- "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Proverbs 19:21)

Likewise, the book of Isaiah declares that nothing can stop God's purposes and His will. As God Himself explained,

- "...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, *declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done*, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" (Isaiah 46:9-10)
- "My word —will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

A God in Control

Questions 2.19 will help you reflect on God's powerful will that brings all things to pass, while Question 2.20 will help you reflect upon what you have learned about God's Lordship.

Question 2.19:: How reassuring is it that whatever God has decreed will come to pass?

It is reassuring to me that whatever God has decreed will come to pass precisely as He had planned.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.20 :: What have you learned about God's Lordship?

In this lesson we reviewed how *the Bible* describes God and His role in life's events – looking specifically at how the Bible describes God as a:

- personal
- triune
- Lord

Discussion Two

Let's spend a moment reflecting on our discussion.

- **What is encouraging about knowing that God is a personal God?**

- **What is helpful in knowing about the triune nature of God?**

- **What is helpful in knowing that God is Lord of all things?**

- **What new things did you learn about God's nature?**

Let's spend a moment comparing the Biblical account of God's Lordship (in this discussion) and the popular views of life's circumstances (from our first discussion):

- **How are the popular views of chance and luck (and other impersonal forces) similar or different to the Biblical witness of God's activity?**

- **What is easy to accept regarding the Biblical account of God's Lordship?**

- **What about God's Lordship is difficult to accept or understand?**

- **Why might there be difficulties in accepting or understanding God's Lordship?**

3

Discussion Three

Our Responses to God's Lordship

Introduction

Welcome to our third *Doubter's Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

In our last discussion we examined the Bible's description of *God's nature*, exploring how God is described as a:

- personal
- triune
- Lord

In this discussion we will turn our attention to:

- God's desired responses to His Lordship
- popular responses to God's Lordship
- reasons why people do not respond to God as He desires

God's Desired Responses

As we discussed previously, the Bible describes God as the Lord who:

- is the *Creator* of all things
- *knows* all things
- is *free from* all things
- *rules over* all things
- and the God who *brings* all things to pass

The Bible also explains that as Lord over all:

God desires our complete allegiance and obedience.

This means that our entire lives are to be devoted to God in His service. In the Old Testament we are told:

- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”(Deuteronomy 6:5)
- “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)

Similarly, Jesus taught:

- “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” (Luke 4:8)
- “You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:13)
- “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33)

Thus, God's desired response from humans includes:

- belief in God and a recognition of His presence
- trust in God and His faithfulness to His people
- surrendering control of our lives to God
- giving thanks to God for his goodness
- obedience to God's ways

We will spend more time in future discussions on these desired responses.

The Problem of Evil

The Bible, as we will discover, presents God as:

- all good
- all powerful
- trustworthy
- Lord over all things

However, many struggle with accepting these truths about God.

One reason is what is called the *problem of evil*.

The experience of suffering and evil has caused many to question not only God's plans and purposes but also His very existence.

Questions 3.1 through 3.10 that follow will help you see some popular responses to the issue of *suffering and evil* – many which have been proposed by non-Christian religions.

After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

After you have completed Question 3.10 an additional question will follow to help you summarize your views and provide more details about this subject.

Discussion Three

How would you answer these statements about suffering and evil?

Question 3.1 :: Does the Bible describe a God who is all powerful?

The Bible explains that God is all powerful.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.2 :: Does the Bible describe a God who is all good?

The Bible explains that God is all loving and good.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.3 :: Does evil and suffering exist in the world?

There is much evil and suffering in the world.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.4 :: What does evil and suffering say about God?

Therefore

(based on the previous statements in Questions 3.1 - 3.3)

God cannot exist because:

- if He were all good He *would want to stop suffering and evil*
- and
- if He were all powerful He *could stop evil and suffering.*

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.5 :: Is God still involved in the world?

The evidence of evil and suffering actually shows that God is no longer involved in the world.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.6 :: Is God powerful enough to stop evil?

God is actually a good being, but not powerful enough to stop evil and suffering in the world.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.7 :: Is God cruel?

God is actually an all-powerful being, but the evidence of evil and suffering shows that He is mean-spirited and cruel.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.8 :: Is God irrational?

Evil and suffering shows that God is irrational in His actions. He might do one thing one day and something completely different the next.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.9 :: What does experiencing evil or suffering indicate?

Experiencing suffering and evil means that a person is under God's judgment and they are suffering for something that they did wrong.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.10 :: Is evil real?

There is really no evil in the world. We are mistaken when we attribute things we do not like as "evil."

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.11 :: How would you recap your views?

Questions 3.1 through 3.10 asked about your thoughts on God in light of suffering and evil. Place a checkmark in the table below to summarize your thoughts on each proposed theory.¹⁷

Table 2: Religious Responses to God’s Lordship because of Suffering and Evil

| Theory | Questions | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree | Proposed By |
|---|-----------|-------------------|----------|--------|-------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Evil and suffering shows that... God is not real | 3.4 | | | | | | Atheism |
| God is no longer involved in the world | 3.5 | | | | | | Deism |
| God is not powerful enough to stop evil | 3.6 | | | | | | Finite Godism |
| God is cruel | 3.7 | | | | | | Antheism |
| God is irrational | 3.8 | | | | | | Nominalism |
| God is judging an individual | 3.9 | | | | | | Proposed by many religions |
| Evil does not exit | 3.10 | | | | | | Eastern religions |

Overview of Popular Religious Responses to Evil

Many different views have developed over the centuries in response to God's Lordship in light of evil and suffering. Let's spend a moment to review some religious reactions:

A God who does not exist

Atheists assert that God does not exist. They claim that even though the Bible states that God is powerful and good, God must not be either powerful or good because of evil and suffering in the world. If He were all good He would *desire* to stop evil, and if He were all powerful, God would be *able* to stop it.

A God who is no longer involved

Deists believe in a Creator God who is no longer involved in the world. This belief holds to the "clockwork theory" – that a creator God created the universe (wound the clock) then stepped aside to let it run.

A God who is not all powerful

Similarly, a belief that is sometimes called *Finite Godism* holds that God is really a good being but lacking in power to stop evil and suffering in the world.

A God who is cruel

A very different belief, called *Antheism*, holds that suffering and evil in the world is caused by a cruel God – a God who is not all good.¹⁸

A God who is irrational

A philosophical view called *nominalism* led many to believe that God is irrational in His actions. One day He might act one way, while another day He might act completely the opposite.¹⁹

A God who is judging

Others propose that evil and suffering is always caused by an individual's sin and therefore indicates that God is judging a person.

Evil does not exist

Lastly, a very different perspective from the previous religious ideas is the belief that evil and suffering do not really exist. This view is

Discussion Three

proposed by *Pantheists* – who believe that there is no distinction between nature and God. This is a common view in Eastern Religions, New Age worldviews and even Christian Science. Those holding this view insist that identifying things as “evil” is a misclassification, as all people are all eternal beings and nothing truly bad could ever happen to us.

Review the chart again on page 64 and then answer the following questions:

- **Which of these religious views have you heard?**
- **Have you considered these positions when faced with evil and suffering in your life or in the lives of others?**
- **Do you hold to any of these views now?**
- **Why do you hold your views?**
- **Why don't you hold other views that are listed on the chart?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Reasons for Unbelief

As you reviewed the religious responses to evil and suffering, you may have noticed that these responses are all rooted in *unbelief* (to some degree or another) to the Biblical description that God is:

- all good
- all powerful
- completely trustworthy
- Lord over all things

You may have wondered,

What does the Bible say about unbelief?

The Bible explains that unbelief is embedded in three sources:

- the *world*
- the *flesh* and
- the *Devil* (also called Satan)

Questions 3.12 through 3.17 that follow will help you identify your views regarding the issue of unbelief and *why we don't believe God as He is described in the Bible*. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

After you have completed Question 3.17 an additional question will help you summarize your views.

Discussion Three

How would you answer these statements about elements in the world that are hostile to God's Lordship?

Question 3.12 :: Are there elements in our culture that are hostile to God?

I am _____ there are elements in our culture that are hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 3.13 :: Have you been personally influenced by elements hostile to God in our culture?

I am _____ that I have been negatively influenced by elements in my culture that are hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Our Responses

How would you answer these statements about elements within yourself that are hostile to God's Lordship?

Question 3.14 :: Are there elements within yourself that are hostile to God?

I am _____ there are elements within myself that are hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 3.15 :: Have you been personally influenced by those negative elements within yourself that are hostile to God?

I am _____ that I have been negatively influenced by elements within myself that are hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Discussion Three

How would you answer these statements about a spiritual entity that is hostile to God's Lordship?

Question 3.16 :: Is there a spiritual entity that is hostile to God?

I am _____ there is an evil entity that is hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 3.17 :: Have you been personally influenced by the Devil - the Bible's name for the spiritual entity that is hostile to God?

I am _____ that I have been negatively influenced by Satan – a spiritual entity hostile to God.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 3.18 :: How would you recap your views?

Questions 3.12 through 3.17 asked about your thoughts on unbelief and *why we don't believe God as He is described in the Bible*. Place a checkmark in the table below to summarize your views.

Table 3: Why we don't believe God as He is described in the Bible

| Concept | Questions | Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain | Identified as |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------------|
| Part of our culture is hostile to God | 3.12 - 3.13 | | | | | The World |
| Part of myself is hostile to God | 3.14 – 3.15 | | | | | The Flesh |
| An evil entity is hostile to God | 3.16 - 3.17 | | | | | The Devil |

Let's spend a moment looking at these responses in more detail.

Three Factors for Unbelief

1 The World

The Bible refers to the *World* as the part of our culture that is hostile to God. Because evil is widespread in our world, people are tempted to live a life in darkness and not in the light of God and His ways.²⁰

2 The Flesh

The Bible uses the term *flesh* to refer to the passions and lusts (Galatians 5:24) in each person that work death (Romans 7:5). These lusts enslave people keeping them in darkness and away from God.

3 The Devil

When the Bible refers to the Devil (or Satan) it does not envision a man with a red suit and pitchfork, but rather an evil entity that tempts and accuses people, seeking moral authority over them to keep them in darkness. It is important to note that the Bible does not present the Devil as a second god equal with our Heavenly Father, rather the Devil is a created being who is permitted by God to do evil activity for a limited time.²¹

Question 3.19 :: How have you seen these areas that are hostile to God?

Questions 3.12 through 3.18 helped you identify some of your views regarding the issue of *unbelief*.

Review the chart again on page 71, and then answer these questions:

- **How have you been negatively influenced by these three factors?**
- **Why might these areas hold such influence?**
- **Have you ever felt that you were powerless to stop the influence of these areas in your life? When?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Question 3.20 :: What have you learned about responding to God's Lordship?

In this lesson we explored:

- God's desired responses to His Lordship
- popular responses to God's Lordship
- reasons why people do not respond to God as He desires

In reflecting on these areas, consider these questions:

- **What about the problem of suffering or evil makes it difficult to acknowledge the Lordship of God?**
- **What is important in knowing that there are elements of *the world, ourselves and a spiritual entity* that are hostile to God?**
- **What new things did you learn about yourself or your world in this discussion?**

- **What new things did you learn about God in this discussion?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

4

Discussion Four

God's Reasons

Introduction

Welcome to our fourth *Doubters Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

In our previous discussion we looked at God's desired responses to His Lordship as well as popular reactions to God's Lordship.

In this discussion we will look at the reasons the Bible provides for God's actions, focusing on God's nature including:

- God's goodness
- God's knowledge
- God's power and
- God's glory

God's Nature

You may have had thoughts that are similar to the title of this booklet and asked, "*Why doesn't God act like I think He should?*"

In this section we will turn our attention to understanding why God does what He does.

As we seek to understand why God does what He does, we learn that the Bible explains that God acts *according to His nature*.

One might ask then,

“What is God's nature?”

To understand God's nature, scholars have sought to identify God's qualities and *attributes* as they are described in the Bible.²²

God's Simplicity

Before we study God's attributes in detail, it is important to note that God is not made of parts that are separate from each other that could be used to individually understand God or the things He does (such as listed in the following table).

Table 4: An incorrect view of God's attributes

| | God's Motive | | | | |
|----------|--------------|---------|----------|------|-------|
| Event | Holiness | Justice | Goodness | Love | Mercy |
| Event #1 | X | | | | |
| Event #2 | | X | | | |
| Event #3 | | | X | | |

Rather, theologians explain that God's nature is *simple* in the sense that God is not made up of separate parts. As R.C. Sproul explains,

- "It is not so much that God *has* attributes but that He *is* His attributes. In simple terms...all of God's attributes help define all of His other attributes."²³

Categories

Scholars have categorized God's attributes in different ways. This task can be somewhat difficult, as the Bible does not use an identifiable classification scheme for God's characteristics.

Traditionally, many scholars have referred to only *two* categories when referring to God's attributes, God's:

- Incommunicable attributes (that are to God alone)
- Communicable attributes (attributes that humans can have)

Although these two categories are very commonly used, there are many other ways to categorize or classify God's attributes.

Dr. Louis Berkhof, for example, categorizes God's attributes as:

- Spiritual attributes
- Intellectual attributes
- Moral attributes
- Attributes of sovereignty²⁴

Taking a different approach, Dr. John Frame categorizes God's attributes in terms of God's:

- Goodness
- Knowledge and
- Power

Let's spend a moment looking at the categories presented by Dr. Frame in more detail.

Three Categories of God's Attributes

1 God's Goodness

God's goodness means that God in His very nature is *perfectly good* and all that He does is perfectly good.

In the Bible, God explained that He would:

- make all of His goodness pass before His people (Exodus 33:19)
- work all things for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28)

God's goodness can be seen in His love, mercy, grace, patience, compassion, righteousness, justice, wrath, beauty, perfection and holiness.²⁵

2 God's Knowledge

The perfect knowledge of God means that God knows all things and acts with perfect wisdom.

God's knowledge can be seen in the fact that He speaks (as opposed to being silent) and His words are perfectly true. God's perfect knowledge also means that God has knowledge of all things that occurred in the past, are occurring in the present and will occur in the future.²⁶

3

God's Power

God's power refers to God's ability to bring about whatever He desires. His power can be seen in events such as His creation of the world, the miracles of Jesus and the redemption of sinful people.

God's power can also be seen in the attributes of:

- God's *eternity* (meaning that God has no beginning or end)
- God's *immensity* (God is not constrained by anything)
- God's *incorporeality* (meaning that God does not have a body)
- God's *omnipresence* (which means that God is everywhere)
- God's *glory* (God is glorious, full of splendor and might)²⁷

The questions that follow will help you reflect on God's attributes. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

God's Reasons

How would you respond to these questions about God's goodness.

Question 4.1 :: Are you encouraged by God's goodness?

I am encouraged that in His very nature God is perfectly good.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.2 :: Is it comforting that God works things for His good purposes?

It is comforting to me that God is working events for His good purposes.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.3 :: Would you like to focus more on God's goodness?

I would like to learn more about the goodness of God.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.4 :: What is your reaction to God's goodness?

The first questions in this section asked about your views regarding God's goodness.

Question 4.1 asked if you felt encouraged by God's *goodness* – that by His very nature He is perfectly good.

As you reflect on this question it may be helpful to remember that the Bible calls God a "*Good Shepherd*" and the message of redemption is called the "*Good News*."

It also may be helpful to reflect on these passages from the Bible:

- "Taste and see that *the Lord is good*; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." (Psalm 34:8)
- "No one is good except God alone." (Mark 10:18)

How is it encouraging to you that God is perfectly good?

Next, Questions 4.2 asked if you found it comforting that God is working things for His good purposes.

As you reflect on this question it might be helpful to also reflect on these passages from the Bible:

- “God saw all that He had made and it was *very good*.” (Genesis 3:1)
- God’s “Law is holy, righteous and *good*” (Romans 7:12)
- “And we know that *in all things God works for the good* of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

In what ways is it encouraging that God is working events for His good purposes?

Discussion Four

Question 4.3 then asked if you would like to learn more about God's goodness.

Listed below are some of God's attributes that we identified earlier that reflect God's goodness:

- Love
- Mercy
- Grace
- Patience
- Compassion
- Justice
- Wrath
- Beauty
- Perfection
- Holiness
- Righteousness

Of God's attributes listed above, which ones would you like to most learn more about?

Why would you like to learn more about the attribute or attributes you identified?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 4.4 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Next, let's turn our attention to God's knowledge and wisdom.

God's Reasons

How would you respond to these questions about God's perfect knowledge.

Question 4.5 :: Are you encouraged that God is true?

I am encouraged that in His very nature God is perfectly true.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.6 :: Is it comforting that God works things in perfect wisdom?

It is comforting to me that God is working events in His perfect wisdom.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.7 :: Would you like to learn more about God's knowledge?

I would like to learn more about the knowledge, truth and wisdom of God.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.8 :: What is your reaction to God's knowledge and wisdom?

The questions in this section asked about your views regarding God's knowledge and wisdom.

Question 4.5 asked if you felt encouraged that by God's very nature He is true.

As you reflect on this question it may be helpful to note that Jesus explained that He was the Way, *the Truth* and the Life" (John 14:6) and that God is the "only true God" (John 17:3).

How is it encouraging to you that God is perfectly true?

Next, Questions 4.6 asked if you were comforted that God is working events in His perfect wisdom.

God's Reasons

These passages from the Bible may help you as you reflect on this concept:

- “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; *his understanding* is beyond measure” (Psalm 147:5)
- God “*knows all things*” (I John 3:20)

In what ways is it encouraging to know that God is working things in His perfect wisdom?

Question 4.7 then asked if you would like to learn more about God’s knowledge, wisdom and truth.

Listed below are some of God’s attributes that we identified earlier that particularly reflect God’s knowledge:

- God’s perfect wisdom
- God’s clear speaking
- God being perfectly True in His being
- God’s being perfectly True in His actions
- God knowing all things in the past
- God knowing all things in the present
- God knowing all things in the future

Of these attributes, which ones would you like to learn more about?

Why would you like to learn more about that area?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 4.8 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Next, let’s turn our attention to God’s power.

Discussion Four

How would you respond to these questions about God's power.

Question 4.9 :: Are you encouraged that God is powerful?

I am encouraged that God in His very nature is powerful.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.10 :: Is it comforting that God is able to bring about whatever He desires?

It is comforting to me that God is working events by His power.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.11 :: Would you like to learn more about God's power?

I would like to learn more about God's power.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.12 :: What is your reaction to God's power?

The questions in this section asked about your views regarding God's power.

Question 4.9 asked if you felt encouraged that God is all powerful.

As you reflect upon his question, it may be helpful to also reflect on these descriptions of God from Scripture:

- "Yours, O Lord, is the *greatness* and the *power* and the *glory* and the *victory* and the *majesty*, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are *power* and *might*, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name." (I Chronicles 29:11-13)
- "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and *power* and *might* be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 7:12)

How is it encouraging to you that God is powerful?

Next, Questions 4.10 asked if you were comforted that God is working events by His power.

How is it encouraging to you that God is working events by His power?

Discussion Four

Question 4.11 then asked if you would like to learn more about God's power.

Listed below are some of God's attributes that we identified earlier that particularly reflect God's power:

- God's *eternity* (meaning that God has no beginning or end)
- God's *immensity* (God is not constrained by anything)
- God's *incorporeality* (meaning that God does not have a body)
- God's *omnipresence* (which means that God is everywhere)
- God's *glory* (God is glorious, full of splendor and might)

Of these, which ones would you like to most learn more about?

Why would you like to focus on that area?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Question 4.12 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Next, let's turn our attention next to additional description of God.

Summary: Five Points to Remember about God

In the previous section we learned that according to the Bible, God acts *according to His nature* and we explored the attributes of God's:

- Goodness
- Knowledge and
- Power

You may have wondered:

“Does the Bible have more to say about God's nature?”

The answer is:

Yes, there are many passages in the Bible that describe God and provide insight into why He acts as He does.

As we conclude our discussion, let's explore five important points to remember about God's nature and His purposes.

1 There is no one like God

The Bible explains that there is *no one like God*. As the writer of Exodus notes,

- “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

...therefore, there is nothing as majestic as God, no one who is as awesome and glorious. As humans, our finite thoughts do not compare with God who is infinite and knows all things.

It is important remember then that,

There are things about life and the world that God knows that we do not know.

2 God does not change

The Bible also explains that *God does not change*. As the Lord explained in the Old Testament,

- “For I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6)

...therefore, nothing can take away from God’s nature. His goodness, His wisdom, His power and glory can never be diminished. He will always be good, all wise and all powerful.

It is important remember then that,

God is consistent, reliable and trustworthy in all that He does.

3 God does things for His own purposes

The Bible also explains that God does things by *His own will and for His own purposes*. Paul explained in the book of Ephesians,

- God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:5 and 1:11)

....therefore, nothing outside of Himself can cause God’s actions, they are sovereign choices, determined by nothing but His good pleasure.

It is important remember then that,

God works events according to His eternal plans and purposes.

4

God does things for His own glory

The Bible also explains that God does things for *His own glory*. As we learn in the Old Testament,

- “everyone who is called by my name, whom *I created for my glory*, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:7)
- “My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 48:11)
- “Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power” (Psalm 106:8)

It is important remember then that,

God works events for His glory.

5

God does not always explain His reasons

Lastly, The Bible also explains that God does not always tell us *why He does things*. As Moses explained,

- “The secret things belong to the Lord our God.”
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

....therefore, there is knowledge that God has that we do not know.

It is important remember then that,

There will be events and circumstances in life that we do not understand, but we can trust that God does.

Discussion Four

The questions that follow will help you reflect on these descriptions of God. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply circle the answer that best describes your answer.

Question 4.13 :: Are you encouraged that there is no one like God?

I am encouraged that there is no one like God.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.14 :: Is it comforting that God never changes?

It is comforting to me that God never changes.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.15 :: Are you encouraged that God does things for His own purposes?

I am encouraged that God does things according to His divine plans.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.16 :: Is it comforting that God does things for His glory?

It is comforting to me that God works events in life for His glory.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.17 :: Is it challenging to know that God does not explain His reasons?

It is challenging to know that God does not always explain His reasons.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.18 :: What is your reaction to these descriptions of God?

The previous pages described the Bible's description of how:

- There is no one like God
- God does not change
- God works things for His own purposes and His glory
- God does not always tell why He does what He does

Question 4.13 and 4.14 asked if you found it encouraging that no one is like God and that God does not change.

- **What is encouraging that there is no one like God?**
- **What is comforting in the fact God does not change?**

Question 4.15 and 4.16 asked if you found it encouraging that God works all things for His divine purposes and His glory.

- **What is encouraging in the fact that God works things for His purposes and according to His plan?**

Question 4.17 asked if you found it challenging that God does not reveal His reasons.

- **Why can it be difficult embrace God's decisions?**
- **What insights from the previous pages might make it easier to embrace God's decisions?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Trusting in a Faithful God

The Bible explains that people can *trust* in God because He is faithful and trustworthy.

God is frequently described in the Bible as our *Rock* – in whom people can trust and find *refuge*.

- “My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield my horn of salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior.” (2 Samuel 22:3)
- “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Psalm 18:2)

Another common image that the Bible paints is of God being like a *potter*, while people are like *clay* in His hands:

- “Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand” (Jeremiah 18:6)

As created beings, we learn in the Bible that we do not have the right to question God because He is the creator (the potter) and we are the created (the clay):

- “Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’ Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ or to a woman, ‘With what are you in labor?’” (Isaiah 45:9-10)
- God asked Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4)
- “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay...?” (Romans 9:20-21)

God's Reasons

Thus, because we:

- do not share the same experiences as God
- do not know all that God knows
- have not existed in infinity like God
- are created beings and not God

.....we do not have the right to question God and His ways.

Another question might arise,

"What am I to do then, when I have trouble trusting God and I doubt God's existence, His nature or His plans?"

The Bible explains that people are comforted when God provides a greater sense of His *presence* and His *glory*. Glory in the Bible can be translated as "splendor" or "honor."²⁸

- To the Israelites the *glory* of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain (Exodus 24:17)
- Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the *glory* of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34)
- And (the angels) were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his *glory*." (Isaiah 6:3)

This was the case with Job in the Old Testament, who lost everything, but was comforted by God as he saw God's glory (Job 42:1 and 5).

When God reveals His glory, people gain a sense of God's splendor and majesty as well as a sense that God is present. In response, people will give thanks to God for who He is and what He has done.

Question 4.19 :: What is your reaction to God's glory?

The previous pages described the Bible's description of how:

- God is like a potter and people are like clay
- How people are comforted when they have a greater sense of God's presence and His glory

As you reflect on pages 100 and 101, how would you respond to these questions:

- **What is encouraging to you that God is our maker, as a potter is to clay?**
- **Have you ever felt God's presence or experienced a greater sense of His glory?**
 - **When have you felt that?**
 - **What was your reaction?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Lastly, let's spend a few moments reflecting on all of the topics we have discussed in this *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Concluding Thoughts

As we conclude, let's spend a moment reviewing the areas we covered in the four discussions in this resource:

Table 5: Discussion Topics in this Volume

| Discussion | Areas of Discussion |
|--|---|
| 1 Causes and Effects | Discussions around: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- God being the <i>cause</i> of the creation of the universe.- Popular explanations for the <i>cause</i> of specific events in life.- Evidence for a personal and relational God. |
| 2 A God in Control | Discussions around: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Bible's description of God being a:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal• Triune• Lord |
| 3 Our responses to God's Lordship | Discussions around: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- God's desired responses to His Lordship- Popular responses to God's Lordship in light of:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suffering• Evil- Reasons for unbelief |

Discussion Four

| Discussion | Areas of Discussion |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <p>4 God's Reasons</p> | <p>Discussions around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The reasons for God's actions - God's nature and God's attributes of:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goodness• Knowledge• Power• Glory - The Bible's description of how:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No one is like God• God does not change• God works things for His own purposes and His glory• God does not always tell why He does what He does - The Bible's description that:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God is our Rock• God is a potter and we are like clay• God can reveal His glory and His presence |

Question 4.20 :: What have you learned in these discussions?

Review the list from Table 5 (on pages 103 and 104) that lists the areas discussed in this *Doubters Welcome* volume.

- **What have you learned in these discussions?**
- **Were the topics discussed “new” topics that you hadn’t considered before, or had you reflected on these areas in the past?**
 - **How have the topics been helpful?**
 - **What has it been most helpful?**
 - **What areas have been most challenging?**
 - **Why have they been challenging?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 4.21 :: What would you like to learn more about?

As you think about the areas discussed in this *Doubters Welcome* discussion,

- **What areas would you like to learn more about?**
- **Why would it be helpful to learn more about these areas?**

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Conclusion

Thank you for joining this *Doubters Welcome* discussion. Our hope is that you found the discussions helpful in thinking about life and faith.

Thanks again for participating!

More resources are available at:
www.doubterswelcome.org (coming soon)

Discussion Four

References

- ¹ Phrases such as “Christian beliefs” and “what Christians believe” are referenced throughout this booklet. While people who profess to be Christian may hold many different beliefs than those documented here, the beliefs described in this resource might commonly be classified as *orthodox* (or common to a traditional understanding of Christianity). Others might describe the views presented in this booklet as evangelical or reformed.
- ² This argument has been made by non-Christian philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle as well as by Christian scholars such as St. Thomas Aquinas and (in more recent years) William Craig Lane and Peter Kreeft.
- ³ One very popular variation of the cosmological argument is called the *Kalam argument*.
- ⁴ Examples of causes are seemingly limitless: a book coming into existence from its author, a painting coming into existence on account of an artist, a building coming into existence by workers or music coming into existence from a composer and musicians playing instruments.
- ⁵ Evidence such as background radiation and the expanding universe have led many scientists to conclude that the universe had a beginning.
- ⁶ Christians (as well as other *theists* – those who believe in God’s existence) assert that God is the cause of the universe. It should be noted that although the cosmological argument points to a Maker, there are things about God that are not answered in the argument – such as God’s character and His nature. To learn more, Christians rely upon Scripture as our authority and source for understanding God and His purposes.
- ⁷ Many have sought to understand how people identify causes of events. In the field of psychology, for example, the study of an individual’s explanation of causes is known as *attribution theory*.
- ⁸ With apologies to the actor Clint Eastwood, who popularized the phrase, “Do you feel lucky...well do you?”
- ⁹ Some of the largest temples in ancient Greece and Rome, for example, were dedicated to the worship of Tyche and Fortuna (the names for Chance and Luck in ancient Greece and Rome).
- ¹⁰ My use of the term *naturalist* here should not be confused with the more popular description of someone who studies nature. I am referring here to those who subscribe to the philosophical view that holds that only laws of nature are the cause of events.

References

- ¹¹ See *Genesis* chapter 2.
- ¹² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941), 65.
- ¹³ John Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1994), 41.
- ¹⁴ For more on God's love, see I Corinthians, chapter 13.
- ¹⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 10.
- ¹⁶ God's sovereign will is also known as God's *decretive* will (i.e. the things God decrees).
- ¹⁷ I have relied on the teaching of Dr. Robert M. Bowman Jr. for many of these classifications. His lectures on Apologetics are available online. I highly recommend his lectures entitled "*Apologetics Methods*" and "*Introduction to Christian Apologetics.*" These (as well as many other lectures) can be found at:http://www.monergism.com/mp3/2012/03/robert_bowman_lectures_on_apol_1.php
- ¹⁸ A similar view is called *Dystheism*.
- ¹⁹ Michael Gillespie explains that the medieval nominalists focused on God's freedom to such an extent that God became *irrational*. "The world as nominalism understood it is not a beautiful cosmos or a rational Creation but the random motion of particulars: a chaos governed by an incomprehensible and changeable Divine will. This God rendered human life radically uncertain. Neither reason nor nature could provide a guide for human action, and even revelation was only as trustworthy as God's changeable will. Today He may save the saints and damn the sinners, but tomorrow He may do just the reverse." (As quoted by Ken Myers, *Mars Hill Audio Journal*, 2011).
- ²⁰ For more on "the world" and "the spirit of the world" see I Corinthians 2:12 and 3:19, Galatians 4:3 and 4:9, Colossians 2:8 and 2:20, II Peter 1:4, I John 3:13 and 4:3.
- ²¹ For more on Satan who Paul called the "prince of the power of the air" see Ephesians 2:2.
- ²² Dr. John Frame explains that understanding God's attributes can be helpful but notes that all attributes ultimately point to one attribute: *God's Lordship*. He explains that, "The attributes describe God's Lordship from various perspectives." John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002) 388, 390-92.

References

- ²³ R.C. Sproul, *God's Love: How the Infinite God Cares for His Children*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 17.
- ²⁴ Dr. Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1941), 56 – 81.
- ²⁵ There are many examples in the Bible that describe God's perfect *goodness*. One example is Exodus 34:6-7, which references God's mercy, grace, steadfast love, forgiveness and justice. Others are 1 John 4:8 and 4:16 which declares that God is love and Isaiah 6:3 that declares that God is holy. Some may be surprised to see that God's wrath is in the category of goodness, but as Dr. Frame notes, God's wrath is a matter of perfectly executing justice. Frame explains, "God's wrath is His disposition to give just punishments."
- ²⁶ There are many examples in the Bible that describe God's perfect *knowledge* and *wisdom*. For examples of God's knowledge (such as knowing all things before they happen) see: Isaiah 46:10; Amos 3:7; Daniel 2:22; Psalm 139:6 and 147:5; Matthew 6:8; I John 3:20. On God's wisdom in creation and redemption see: Isaiah 40:28; Psalm 104:24; Jeremiah 10:12; Romans 16:27. Because of his faithfulness and truth, God is frequently called a "rock" in which people can take refuge. See for example: Deuteronomy 32:4; II Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2 and 40:11, John 17:3 and I John 5:20.
- ²⁷ There are many examples in the Bible that describe God's power and might. See Genesis 14:19 and 14:22; Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 11:4 and 33:13; Matthew 5:34.
- ²⁸ In the Old Testament the word in Hebrew that is translated as "glory" is *kavod*. While the New Testament word in Greek is the word is *doxa*. In the Old Testament, God's cloud of glory led the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21), filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:43) and filled the Temple of King Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:1). In the New Testament, God's cloud of glory was on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:31).