

## Faith Confirmed 2019

### THINKING ABOUT GOD



#### Is God really there?

Some people might say: ***"It doesn't matter anyway..?"*** *Is God really there..?* This is the most important question in the whole universe. The answer you give will affect your whole life. Either God is there – or God isn't. There's no half way. If God is there, then there is meaning and purpose in life. God calls us into friendship and into a Christian way of life and Christians believe there is a life beyond this life. However, if God is not there, then the whole meaning of life is changed and this is it and you have to find that meaning from within yourself. You can please yourself if you like. There is no joy or pleasure or hope greater than you have now – this is all life offers.

Others may say: ***"It's just a matter of opinion..."***

People think this way because it is the way they want to think. It's really much more comfortable. It gets you off the hook. Once you admit that God may be there, life becomes much more challenging. You need to look further at what God is like and what God's purpose for your life may be. Belief in the God who made heaven and earth is not a matter of opinion.

Belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is at the heart of the Christian faith for we believe that Jesus is God's Son. Jesus reveals to us that God is our Father, and that God is available to us through the Holy Spirit. You won't ever be asked if you completely understand all this. But you are asked whether you believe and trust. This is called faith. It is a different sort of knowledge. It is the knowledge of being known and loved, and of loving in return.

As we seek to answer questions about God it is worth knowing that we believe the Christian faith is not a human invention. There are signs of God's existence and handiwork in creation for anyone to read (Acts 14.15–17). But we believe in the way we do because God has come to seek us out and has made himself known to us. Or to put it another way, God longs to be in relationship with each and every one of us. For Christians, belief in God is a matter of evidence. When you begin to look, there is a great deal of evidence and it all points one way.

**'I believe in God'** - There are many different ways to sum up the evidence that points to God's existence. This is just one way: **Seeing God in creation** - Have a think about the things you find the most amazing about creation and the natural world. You may like to use **Psalm 8** as a starting point for reflection:



*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*  
(Psalm 8)

Consider these questions:

- ❖ The universe had a beginning. *How and who began it?*
- ❖ The universe has order and beauty. *Who arranged it?*
- ❖ The universe shows evidence of design. *Who is the designer?*

#### God as Creator

All the evidence of our senses and of the sciences points us towards there being a creator, to God, who made the heavens and the earth.

The first book in the Bible is Genesis and here we read an account of creation. Although most Christians don't believe it all happened literally as written, we understand this to be a guide to God's activity in the world, bringing life into being:

*'In the beginning. when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God (the Spirit of God) swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.'* (Genesis 1:1-6)

### Seeing God in yourself and others

Again, we can see God in ourselves and each other. Just think for a moment about the things you find wonderful about yourself and about people in general. Then ask these questions:

- ❖ Everyone has a sense of right and wrong – a conscience?  
This is true the whole world over. *Who put it there?*
- ❖ All men and women have an inbuilt need to worship someone or something. *Why is that need to worship there within us? Who put that need there?*
- ❖ All people long to experience love. It can be the most powerful force in our lives.  
*Where did it come from?*

### Knowing God for yourself - Where are you on your own inner journey?

Christians believe that God made the universe. We believe that humankind is special within God's creation. And we believe that God has shown us what he is like, through the Bible – which is a record of God's relationship with many thousands of people over several thousand years. God then continued to show us his love for us through the life of Jesus Christ. God, the maker of heaven and earth, calls us into friendship through Jesus. And knowing God changes our whole lives. If we agree that God made the world then surely *we need God in our lives!*

### We need God in our lives      *The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother*

A vital part of coming to know God is realizing how lost we are. Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons, to teach us how we all, in some way, wander away from God's love. We rebel and we do not begin to return home until we realize our need for God again. The story is in the second part of the Bible known as the New Testament and it was a story told by Jesus as recorded in Luke's Gospel. All of us in our lives are on two journeys. There is an outer journey – which involves things like our school, work, friendships and significant relationships. There is also an inner journey – which involves our relationship with God. The story of the lost son is about our inner journey. (Take a look in a bible at *Luke 15: 11-32*).

Questions for reflection on the parable of the Prodigal Son; where are you in your journey of life and faith? ...

- *Running away?*
- *Living far away, having a good time?*
- *Sensing your need of your heavenly Father?*
- *Turning around to come back?*
- *On your way home?*
- *In the arms of your Father?*
- *Like the elder brother – you've been a Christian so long you take it all for granted and ask, 'when is it my time?'*
- *Learning to take your place in the family?*
- *None of these or several of them?*

- *How easy or difficult do you find it to think of God as Father or parent?*



### How do we know that we need God?

Our need for God is often well hidden but the need for God is there in everyone.

*O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*  
St Augustine

### The God-shaped space in your heart

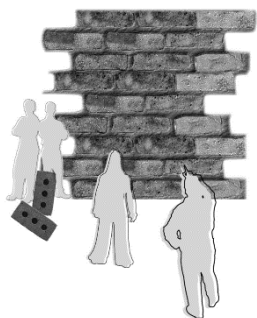
God calls us into friendship. If we don't have that relationship with God, something is missing. There is a space, an inner restlessness in our lives. Some people spend their whole lives trying to fill that space with all kinds of things but in the end, nothing will satisfy, except the living God. You can recognize that inner space in your own life by asking yourself these questions:

- *Do I have a sense of purpose?*
- *Do I have a sense of inner peace in my life?*
- *Do I have a longing to be loved?*

God promises to give to each one who comes home a new sense of purpose, of peace and of love.

### The chaos in creation

All through history, people have longed for stability, security, peace, freedom and justice. We have only to look at the world around us to realize that these things are hard to attain. Something deep within us cries out to God for salvation not simply for ourselves but for the whole world. But sometimes we build walls which get in the way of knowing God, even when we believe God is there!



### The walls we may build

Part of the mystery of being human is recognizing our capacity for harm as well as for good. The Bible reminds us that at times we can have a sinful nature and be tempted to put ourselves first before others or God. This means that, although we know that God is there, we can choose to have nothing to do with the love God offers to us. Hence, we can build walls to keep God out, because we choose to be separated and cut off from God. Some examples include:

- ❖ **Pride.** We often don't admit that we are not number one as we can struggle to surrender to God's love for us. Pride is often the root of human failure or sin and therefore tragedy throughout human history.
- ❖ **Guilt.** The wrong things we can choose to do and to say have a serious impact on other people and on ourselves too. We think that God cannot forgive us or give us a new beginning - but we are wrong about that because God loves us first! God will always welcome us home. We are forgiven and loved.
- ❖ **Unwillingness to change.** Yes, we can be stubborn and coming to God means change – all sorts of change. Much of the time we do not like the idea, so another part of the wall goes up. But God longs to overcome that separation and calls us home to be in his presence and know his love for us!
- ❖ **Business and circumstances**  
Being busy is something most of us have to cope with, but it can also be an excuse. Making time for our spiritual relationships is important too, even in times of challenging personal circumstances. God longs to walk with us through life's ups and downs.

### Our longing for eternity

One day each of us will die. We don't like to think about it and we often avoid talking about it but during this Faith Confirmed journey we will. Over a lifetime, most of us don't want to die, although for some life can be so difficult they do ask that question. The Bible says that God

has put eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3.11) – a longing to live! Through Jesus the offer of eternal life is made to all and that is exciting and compelling all at once. But we are free to choose how we respond to this offer of life. Christians believe that God loves the world and that God loves you and is calling you home, to be in his presence for ever. How exciting that call of love is.

God Is Love!

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-16)*

God is Love: let heav'n adore him;  
God is Love: let earth rejoice;  
let creation sing before him,  
and exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation,  
he who spread the heav'ns above,  
he who breathes through all creation,  
he is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and he enfoldeth  
all the world in one embrace;  
with unfailing grasp he holdeth  
every child of every race.  
And when human hearts are breaking  
under sorrow's iron rod,  
then they find that selfsame aching  
deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness  
sin afflicts the souls of all,  
God's eternal loving-kindness  
holds and guides us when we fall.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is Love, so Love for ever  
o'er the universe must reign.

*Author: Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) who was an English organist and composer.*

God of Love,  
We thank you for the gift of creation and your presence with us in the world around us.  
We long to know you more, that we may walk with you and you with us,  
discerning your presence with us, meeting you in the broken bread.  
Grant that as we journey together, we may grow in our knowledge of you  
and your love for us. This we ask in your Holy and wonderful name, world without end, Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.