

BIG QUESTIONS

A photograph showing the back of a young man with dark hair, wearing a blue, red, and white plaid shirt. He is in a classroom, facing a teacher who is blurred in the background. The teacher is wearing an orange button-down shirt and black pants. A student's hand is raised in the foreground on the left side of the frame.

vineyardyouth

BIG QUESTIONS

WELCOME!

to Vineyard Youth Curriculum

Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you—the in-the-trenches leader to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It's important, it's needed, and it's laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!

--Vineyard Youth

Why This Topic?

Part of our discipleship as followers of Jesus is growing in our ability to think about our faith. As teens get older and go to college, they will face many challenging questions from a secular society. How will they answer? In these talks, Patrick attempts to give teens an understanding of some of the Big Questions they will face as they grow in their faith. We think these talks will produce great conversations for you and your teens to address the questions they are probably wondering about, but maybe haven't asked yet.

Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader

In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we'd like to keep in front of you:

Plug in your stories wherever you can. These are bare bones here. You add the meat!

Experiential learning lasts. We've tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out—take some risks!

Humor is key. It's hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor.

Context matters. We don't know what's going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray and think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers. How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

These Lessons Are on Video!

Go to www.vineyardyouthusa.com/resources to view the video teaching for this series. Each lesson is taught by Patrick Campbell, and you can follow along with the written version.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

INTRODUCTION

LESSON

IS THERE A GOD?

Discussing the existence of God is a huge task. With so much to contend with in today's society it can seem daunting to even present this topic. Before you begin preparing, I want to encourage you that the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the awe of God, and we as leaders are conduits. Take time in preparation meditating on the following verse. Read it slowly, as often as you like, and allow the words to wash over you.

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge." Psalm 19:1–2 (NASB)

The existence of God cannot be proved or disproved.

The Bible says that we must accept by faith the fact that God exists: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

If God so desired, he could simply appear and prove to the whole world that he exists. But if he did that, there would be no need for faith. John 20:29 says, "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (NIV)

To look at the existence of God, we must scale down the questions.

Is There an Argument for the Existence of God?

We must begin with the most basic abstract question: Why do we have something rather than nothing at all? These are a few of the basic questions of existence: Why are we here? Why is the earth here? Why is the universe here rather than nothing?

A theologian once said, "In one sense man does not ask the question about God, his very existence raises the question about God."

We must consider four possible answers to why we have something rather than nothing at all.

1. Reality is an illusion.
2. Reality is/was self-created.
3. Reality is self-existent (eternal).
4. Reality was created by something that is self-existent (eternal).

Which is more plausible? Let's look at each of these in turn.

Reality Is an Illusion

- A number of Eastern religions believe this (Buddhism).
- Rene Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." In other words, I think, therefore I am not an illusion.
- Illusions require something experiencing the illusion.
- You cannot doubt the existence of yourself without proving your existence. It is a self-defeating argument.
- When I was in high school and began exploring Buddhism, the monks I met were lovely people. They said that life was an illusion so I shouldn't be concerned with life. But I couldn't get past the hurt of getting dumped. And success and failure have emotions attached to them that I couldn't just not feel. For me, this eliminated the possibility of reality being an illusion.

Reality Is Self-Created

In philosophy there are statements labeled as "analytically false" statements, which means false by definition (i.e., the cat prepared my taxes; George Clooney was the best Batman; the Falcons will win a Super Bowl).

The possibility of being self-created is one of those statements: **something cannot be prior to itself.**

- If you created yourself, then you must have existed prior to you creating yourself. In evolution they call this "spontaneous generation"—something coming from nothing.
- David Hume (a famous 18th-century philosopher) said, "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without cause."
- Since something cannot come from nothing, self-created is ruled out.

DISCUSS

Before we go to the final two, what do you think so far? Do you agree or disagree that reality is neither an illusion nor self-created? Have you heard people suggest that it was self-created?

Reality Is Eternal or Created by Something That Is Eternal

These are the two remaining choices.

- Jonathan Edwards (18th-century preacher) said, "Something exists, nothing cannot create something. Therefore, a necessary and eternal 'something' exists." (Smyth)
- The atheist's paradox: The atheist that ridicules the believer in God for believing in an eternal creator must embrace an eternal universe.
- Interesting question: Where does the evidence lead? Does it point to matter before mind or mind before matter?
- All key scientific and philosophical evidence points away from an eternal universe and toward an eternal creator.
- From a scientific standpoint, the universe had a beginning, and whatever has a beginning is not eternal.
- Whatever has a beginning has a cause, and if the universe had a beginning, it had a cause. A few pieces of evidence for this are the second law of thermodynamics, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and the radiation echo of the Big Bang.
 - Example of the Big Bang: Illustration with plastic bag and a glass bottle. What I do is take a grocery bag, you will probably want plastic and double up the bag. I then take a glass bottle and place it in the bag. The bottle represents all the planets, space, people, all of creation. I then smash the bag on the ground (make sure students have moved far back from you, from time to time glass may come out the bag) I then open the bag and I may use a long pan and I ask did I create anything from just smashing the glass? The answer is obviously "no." This demonstrates that there has to be some form of intelligent design to create all these things. Life is not by accident.

- An effect must resemble its cause. No atheist can explain how an impersonal, purposeless, meaningless, and amoral universe accidentally created beings (us) who are full of personality and obsessed with purpose, meaning, and morals. Philosopher J.S. Mill (not Christian) said, "it is self-evident that only mind can create mind." (Houdman)
- The concept of an eternal universe is eliminated, which leaves us with only one rational and reasonable conclusion: that an eternal creator is the one responsible for reality as we know it.
- A logical set:
 - Something exists.
 - You do not get something from nothing.
 - Therefore, a necessary and eternal "something" exists.
 - The only two options are an eternal universe and an eternal creator.
 - Science and philosophy have disproved the eternal universe.
 - Therefore, an eternal Creator exists.
- Lee Strobel, famous author and speaker who has researched evidence-based claims to faith, said, "Essentially, I realized that to stay an atheist, I would have to believe that nothing produces everything; non-life produces life; randomness produces fine-tuning; chaos produces information; unconsciousness produces consciousness; and non-reason produces reason. Those leaps of faith were simply too big for me to take, especially in light of the affirmative case for God's existence...In other words, in my assessment the Christian worldview accounted for the totality of evidence much better than the atheistic worldview." (Strobel)
- "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard." Psalm 19:1–3 (NASB)

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SOURCES

For the Leader:

Before you answer the small group questions, watch the YouTube video, "Pulse of the World on God."

1. Tonight's video notes that there has been an 11 percent decrease in the belief in God over a 20-year period. What do you think contributes to this?
2. In the video did you identify with anyone's expressed views? What was the view and why do you feel a connection with it?
3. What makes it easy to believe in God? What makes it hard to believe in God?
4. What role—if any—did God play in your family? How does your upbringing impact your beliefs now?
5. What has convinced you that God either does or does not exist?

Houdmann, Michael, and J.S. Mill. "Questions About God's Existence." *Questions about God: the 100 Most Frequently Asked Questions about God*, WinePress Publishing, 2013, pp. 5–6.

Smyth, Egbert C. "Jonathan Edwards' Idealism. With Special Reference to the Essay Of Being' and to Writings Not in His Collected Works." *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1897, pp. 950–964. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3153285. Accessed 6 Aug. 2020.

Strobel, Lee, and Jane Vogel. *The Case for Christ: a Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. Zondervan, 2017.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

INTRODUCTION

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

All of the topics in this series are challenging. It's not up to you to prove anything but rather to talk though the ideas, questions, and thoughts that we all wrestle with. Remember that we depend on the Holy Spirit to guide these discussions. In preparation, meditate on the following passages.

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." John 14:15 (NASB)

Last week we tackled whether there is an argument for the existence of God, and we discovered that scientifically and philosophically we can argue for the existence of God. This is where we began, and tonight we will look at the Bible. How reliable is the Bible? Is all of it true? How do we know?

To begin we have to ask ourselves by what criteria we are judging the Bible. We must use the same criteria by which we judge historical works. Reliability is a question of truthfulness and accurate copying. Writings that are historically and factually correct and that have been faithfully preserved over time would be considered reliable.

Here's what the Bible says about the Bible: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NLT)

Here's what Americans believe about the Bible:

Eighty percent of Americans believe that the Bible is sacred literature; 43 percent believe that the Bible is accurate (a 37 percent drop).

LESSON

Reliable and Inspired by God

Let's look at the argument that the Bible is reliable and inspired by God and is more reliable than any book in antiquity.

1. Archaeological Evidence

There are several instances of archaeological evidence supporting the details found in the Bible. Here are a few examples:

- Archaeological findings in the 1920s confirmed the presence of cities much like Ur, described in Genesis 11.
- Engravings discovered in an Egyptian tomb depict the installation of a viceroy in a manner that exactly matches the biblical description of the ceremony involving Joseph (Genesis 41:39–42). Skeptics doubted the existence of the Hittites (Genesis 15:20; 23:10; 49:29), until a Hittite city, complete with records, was found in Turkey.
- Tel Dan ("David") Stela—the ninth-century B.C. inscription that furnished the first historical evidence of King David outside the Bible.

2. Evidence Based on the Scribes

- The original manuscripts have not survived. We don't have the actual writings of Paul from his hand or the poetry of David in the Psalms. Like most books, it has been copied and collected to form one work.
- To be a scribe in the ancient world was painstaking and meticulous work. Consider their devotion to accurately copying the Old Testament:
 - They counted the letters and words of each book they copied.
 - They counted the number of times a letter was used in each book.
 - They counted the middle letter and middle word of each book.
 - They numbered anything that could be counted. The number system was a way of error checking.
 - They had a reverence for what they wrote; if it was not accurate or it was worn out from use, it was buried.
 - The scribes believed that whatever had the sacred name of God associated with it needed to be of the utmost quality.
- Because of this meticulous quality control, they were not concerned with copies. Any manuscript carefully copied and checked would be authentic regardless of its age.
 - Oldest copy dated to 900 AD until 1947 when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.
 - They had all of the Old Testament except for one book (Esther).

DISCUSS

- The Dead Sea Scrolls were 1,000 years older than the previously known manuscripts.
- When compared with the newer manuscripts, they were almost identical. Of the 5,600 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, there is an accuracy rate of 99.5 percent. Of the 0.5 percent textual variations, most are spelling or grammatical differences. They're so insignificant that they don't alter the message in any way.
- There are 10,000 Hebrew manuscript copies of the Old Testament and 5,600 Greek copies of the New Testament, and the accuracy is unrivaled.
- If we compared the literature of the ancient world, the Bible outweighs them in quality and quantity.
 - The Bible has the most copied manuscripts of the ancient world; second behind the Bible is Homer's Iliad with 643 copies.
 - Plato only has 7 and Aristotle only has 40.

So far we have covered archaeological evidence and manuscripts. Have you learned anything new, or have you had any new questions come up because of what you've heard?

Unity of the Scriptures

A supporting line of evidence for the Bible's divine origin and reliability is its unity in diversity. Though composed by many people of diverse backgrounds over many years, Scripture speaks from one mind.

If we set aside the account of Job (the oldest book of the Bible), the earliest book of the Bible would have been written no later than 1400 BC and the latest before AD 100. That is a 1,500-year difference!

There are 66 Books in the Bible and 17 apocryphal/deuterocanonical books (secondary canon). These books have perhaps 40 different authors of different backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations. Most of the books are written in Hebrew or Greek, with small portions of Aramaic.

The Bible covers hundreds of topics/genres in literature, including history, poetry,

parable, allegory, apocalyptic, epic, and didactic literature. Yet they are all united with one central theme: Jesus. These 66 books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, and creation to the summation of all things.

The central theme through this whole drama is the person of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, Christ is anticipated, and in the New Testament, Christ is realized.

Such incredible unity is best accounted for by the evidence of a divine mind, which the writers of Scripture claimed inspired them. This mind wove each of their pieces into one mosaic of truth.

Think about the game of Telephone. Why is the original message rarely the same at the end? Because someone changes it. The Bible remains the same from beginning to end: It's all about Jesus!

Evidence of the Authors Giving Their Lives

People will often flip on their loyalties if their lives are on the line and they don't believe in the cause. Many of the prophets were threatened and even killed but never recanted the truth (Matthew 23:34–36; Hebrews 11: 32–38).

- Jeremiah was put in prison and threatened to with death.
- Peter and the other 11 apostles including Paul were imprisoned and martyred (except John). John died in exile in the prison colony of Patmos.
- People will sometimes die for false causes they believe to be true, but few die for what they know to be false.
- The biblical witnesses died for proclaiming that their message came from God.
- All the people throughout time who have willingly put their lives on the line for the word of God serves as additional evidence that the Bible is the Word of God.

Final Thoughts

What points to the Bible's reliability?

1. We have archeological evidence.
2. We have the steps and the lengths the scribes would go to in producing and authentic work so much so that it is the most authentic book in all antiquity.
3. A book that spans over 1,500 years with over 40 different authors yet keeps the same conclusion points to unity.
4. We have the deep belief of those who willingly gave their lives for what was written in it.

Evidence points to the Bible's reliability, but evidence only takes me so far.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Faith continues where evidence stops. And faith is something that we all must acknowledge and grow in on our own.

1. How would you describe your current connection with the Bible?
2. What part of the Bible do you have the most difficulty believing or sharing with others?
3. Hebrews 4:12–13 says, “For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.” (NLT) What do you think it means when the text describes the Bible as living or alive? How can a book be alive? How, exactly, does the Bible detect our attitudes and thoughts?
4. What continuing questions or roadblocks get in the way of you being able to trust what God says in the Bible?
5. If the Bible is truly the Word of God and can be trusted, what are we going to do with it?

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

STARTER LESSON

WHO IS JESUS?

This week in preparation meditate on who Jesus is to you. How did you come to know Jesus? Dig in and reflect on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Meditate on the following passage in preparation.

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 (NASB)

Have students close their eyes while you relate Matthew 16:13–16 as a first-person narrative. Ask students to reflect on who Jesus is. Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?

Let's start with **1 Corinthians 15:14–18:**

"And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God--for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!" (NLT)

Our entire faith hinges on what we know and what we believe about Jesus. Often you'll hear people say they wish followers were more like Jesus. This is an indictment to us who call ourselves Christ followers. So we need to know who this Jesus was. In this lesson we will look at the historical Jesus and ask the question Paul asked: **Was he the Messiah?**

The Image of Christ

Before we begin to dig into the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus, we first must undo the image of Christ that is presented in the Western world. Every image of Christ was made to represent the ruling majority. That is why Jesus, especially in Europe but also in America, was represented with blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin, with very European features.

The idea behind creating this image was to connect the majority with a "relatable" version of God. The long-haired, bearded image of Jesus that emerged beginning in the fourth century AD was influenced heavily by representations of Greek and Roman gods, particularly the all-powerful Greek god Zeus. Jesus then began to be represented in long robes.

As the church grew in popularity and number, especially among government leaders, an image was needed to galvanize people. The images of Christ were made to look like the majority in order to unite people, but also to put under subjection those who did not follow or were yet to convert.

The Bible is not clear on what Jesus looked like. According to the Gospels, Jesus was a Jewish man born in Bethlehem and raised in the town of Nazareth, in Galilee (formerly Palestine, now northern Israel) during the first century AD. We know Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23), but the Bible tells us virtually nothing about what he looked like - except that he didn't stand out in any particular way. When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane before the crucifixion (Matthew 26:47–56), Judas Iscariot had to point Jesus out to his soldiers among the disciples - presumably because they all appeared similar to one another.

The Bible warns us not to make any images to be worshipped: "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea" (Exodus 20:4, NLT). Why is that? We are to worship God not the images of God.

Who Was the Historical Jesus?

As we discussed last week, the New Testament (and its 5,600 manuscripts) is a reliable record of the events of Jesus. If the New Testament is unreliable, we have no hope for any reliable knowledge of Christ. However, there are also non-Christian sources that support the existence of Christ. Many of them were contemporaries of Jesus, and some lived soon after him.

Read this from Tacitus, a first-century Roman historian who was known as one of the most accurate historians of the ancient world:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the exquisite tortures of a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. (Tacitus, 15.44)

Note the references to Christians named after Christus (Latin for Christ), and the discussion of Christus suffering extreme penalty under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius (reigned from 14 AD–37 AD). Luke 3:1 (NLT) says, "It was now

the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene."The "superstition" that made its way to Rome was most likely the resurrection of Jesus.

We also have evidence from Josephus, a Jewish revolutionary who changed his allegiance to the Romans in the Jewish revolts. He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Josephus became a historian and wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* (early 90s AD), and refers to James, "The brother of Jesus, who was called Christ." This confirms the New Testament facts that there was a man named Jesus who was known as "Christ" and had a brother named James.

Josephus said, "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats... He was [the] Christ...He appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him." (Josephus)

Around 52 AD Thallus wrote about the "strange" events after the crucifixion: "On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. An eclipse of the sun."

This correlates with Luke 23:44–45: "By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle." (NLT)

There is also evidence of Jesus' existence from political figures such as Trajan and Hadrian, other Jewish sources other than the Old Testament, Gnostic sources, and Gentile sources that support the existence of Jesus. With the New Testament and other sources we have enough to say yes, Jesus existed, but the question that remains is this: Is Jesus the Messiah?

DISCUSS

What do you think of what you've heard so far? Does anything you've heard challenge what you've thought beforehand about Jesus? Does anything encourage you in your faith?

Jesus Messiah

The term Messiah is uniquely Jewish. Messiah means the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. It also means deliverer or chosen one. Therefore, in order to provide evidence we must use the Old Testament. We must look at the prophecies of the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New Testament. Here are a few key prophecies about Jesus:

- Born of woman:
· And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15 (NLT)
- But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. Galatians 4:4 (NLT)
- The seed of Abraham
· "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Genesis 22:18 (NASB)
· "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" Matthew 1:1 (NASB)
· "God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say 'to his children,' as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says 'to his child'— and that, of course, means Christ." Galatians 3:16 (NLT)
- A descendent of David
· About God's covenant with David: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."
2 Samuel 7:12–13 (NASB)
· "Behold, [the] days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land." Jeremiah 23:5 (NASB)
- "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:" Matthew 1:1 (NASB)
- Worker of miracles
· "Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come [with] vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you.' Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the

lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah." Isaiah 35:3–6 (NASB)

· "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." Matthew 9:35–36 (NASB)

· Let's take a closer at miracles. Remember we are using the Bible to provide evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Miracles were used to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet. When Moses was called by God, he was given miracles to prove he spoke for God (Exodus 4). Elijah on Mt. Carmel called fire from heaven (1 Kings 18). Nicodemus acknowledges this about the miracle-working power of Jesus in John 3:2 (NLT): "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Conclusion

I believe the evidence points to the divinity of Jesus and to Jesus as the Messiah. We see that not only do we have historical evidence, both biblical and extra-biblical, for the existence of Jesus but also the prophecies of the Old Testament of his messiahship being fulfilled in the New Testament. We know that the New Testament is the most reliable source of information in antiquity. And yet many will still wonder. Many will doubt.

God wants to engage our hearts as well as our minds, but when we neglect one area over the other, we will never have a full picture of who God is and all he wants to reveal of himself to us today. We can never be the witnesses of the Gospel until we know why we believe what we believe. Until we really begin to spend time with God, study God's word, and pray, we will continue to be afraid to profess our faith and shrink back and wait for the promise of heaven in the form of death, which

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

SOURCES

1. In your opinion who are the most relevant historical figures that walked this earth? Why?
2. Does it matter whether Jesus actually lived, as long as his teaching is carried out? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Jesus was a God in the form of man or just a good man with good teaching?
4. What words or actions of Jesus are currently impacting your life? Why do you think those words or actions are impacting you?
5. Jesus seems to be a very polarizing figure in history. Why do you suppose that is?

Josephus, Flavius. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. First Rate Publishers, 2015.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

INTRODUCTION

LESSON

This week in preparation, meditate on who the Holy Spirit is to you and the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. Spend some time with the following passage.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God." 1 Corinthians 2:12 (NASB)

In this part of our study we will look at the Holy Spirit. Everything we have looked at we can reason is true. There is an argument for the existence of God. We reason that the Bible is true. We can look at Jesus and know that he existed and if the Bible is a reliable document, then that would support Jesus. But the Holy Spirit ties all our reason together and creates faith within us.

Without the Holy Spirit all of this is just head knowledge that does not transform us, making it almost worthless. The Holy Spirit is critical to our faith. Some question or suggest that the Holy Spirit may simply be an impersonal force of some kind, a source of power controlled by God but not fully a person himself. Others suggest that perhaps the Holy Spirit is just another name for Jesus, in spirit form, apart from his body. This week we are going to look at who the Holy Spirit is, what his purpose is, and what role the Holy Spirit plays in apologetics.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God (that is the short answer). He is the third member of the Godhead or Trinity. He has emotions and a will. He has his own "office" or role. However, he does not operate apart from the Father and the Son but rather in conjunction.

Genesis 1:2 (ESV) says, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." And verse 3 says, "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." Notice the change in the two verses. Verse 2 says the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters, and in verse 3 God is declaring light. One could argue if they were one and the same, then the same language could be used. However, this signifies a difference between the two. God is one entity and the Spirit of God is another.

As Genesis 1 recounts the story of creation, it speaks of God creating and then in verse 26 the language undergoes a small but important change: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (ESV) This is the first use of a plural word showing that there was more than one at the creation. We saw previously that the Spirit of God was present and so was God. This I believe illustrates that the Spirit of God is a separate office/entity but is also God and works in conjunction with God. Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." (ESV)

The Holy Spirit has emotions. Paul warns in Ephesians 4:30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (ESV) The word grieve, which in the Greek is lypeo, means to make sorrowful or to affect with sadness, or offend. This illustrates that the Holy Spirit is separate and has his own emotions because Paul makes sure to say the Holy Spirit of God and not God or Lord. This doesn't mean that we can offend the Holy Spirit and not God the Father and God the Son but rather that the Holy Spirit also has emotions and that he is to be recognized individually as well as in union. It is the great mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit has a will. In Matthew 12:32 Jesus said, "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (ESV) Here Jesus shows the individuality between himself and the Spirit of God and their will. We may not fully understand how this works, but this verse shows that they are two distinct persons of the Trinity.

What Is the Purpose of the Holy Spirit?

I believe we can answer both this question and the question of the Holy Spirit in apologetics here. First, we understand that the Holy Spirit is a helper in conversion and regeneration. Here's what John 16:7-11 says: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (ESV)

Jesus has to leave, and here is where the mystery of the Holy Trinity, can make sense. God the father sits on the throne. Jesus the Messiah, Son of God, sits at the right hand of the Father but intercedes for us on our behalf with the Father. Jesus said in Matthew 28:20 "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (ESV)

That leads to the question of how Jesus can be with us and with the Father. The answer is through the Holy Spirit. This is what we mean when we say and believe that God is with us. The Holy Spirit is God and although they occupy three different offices/roles, they operate as one.

So What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

1. The Holy Spirit is the Helper that plays the pivotal role in conversion, which is our individual turn to God. He reveals and convicts of sin. Do you ever feel badly when you've done something you know you shouldn't have done? That is the Holy Spirit convicting your heart. He also reveals righteousness, meaning he will lead us to what is right. You may sense this when you know something is wrong but everyone is doing it—yet deep inside you just don't feel right. He also reveals judgment—in particular that the ruler of the world (Satan) stands judged but that we are not judged as God's followers. There is no judgment for those who are in Christ, only conviction.

2. The Holy Spirit is the Helper that plays the pivotal role in regeneration, which is the miraculous transformation and implantation of spiritual energy. John 3:5–6 says, "Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'" (ESV)

Jesus made it very clear to Nicodemus that regeneration, being born again, is essential to being received by God. It cannot be done through human means (that which born of the flesh is flesh). In other words, it cannot be re-created. It is uniquely from God and is different for every believer. In John 3:8, Jesus described the work of the Spirit this way: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (ESV)

Each of us, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is being transformed for God's glory. The more I yield to the work of the Holy Spirit, the more I'm transformed. The less I yield, the less I'm transformed. This is why Christian maturity is not always based on age.

3. The Holy Spirit empowers. John 14:12 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." (ESV)

Can you imagine what the disciples thought about this declaration that they would do greater things than Jesus did in his earthly ministry? They had to be aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings and yet Jesus said they would do greater. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). He explained that the power to do greater will come from the Spirit (v.8).

Shortly after this Peter preached and three thousand believed. As far as we know, Jesus didn't gather that many converts in his ministry. And of course, it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that the apostles went and boldly proclaimed the Gospel even to the point of death. Many others throughout church history did the same. The Holy Spirit is the one who emboldens you when you stand confidently against evil, even if you have to stand alone.

4. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own." (ESV) The Holy Spirit is able to affect us more profoundly because he dwells within us and can get to the very center of our emotions and our thinking.

5. The Spirit can lead to all truth. John 16:13–14 says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (ESV) This is where the study of apologetics and the Holy Spirit meet. God does want to deal with our **heads** and our **hearts**.

Knowledge of God should lead to transformation, not just information. Information is useless if you can't apply it. Reasoning helps to prove but the Holy Spirit leads us

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

MINISTRY TIME

to live with faith. There are some things that cannot be proven with reason alone. Where reason fails, faith stands.

For this lesson, it is important to take time to invite the presence of the Holy Spirit into the conversation and your time together. This is especially important if you have students who have had little experience with the Holy Spirit.

1. Share experiences you've had with the Holy Spirit. (For the leader: If no one has any to share, then share your own.)
2. Share something that confuses you about the Holy Spirit.
3. Do you believe the Holy Spirit is necessary to be a follower of Jesus, living a Christian life? If not, why do you feel that way? If yes, can you share some specific ways he helps you?

Take some time to do a moment of imaginative contemplation. Choose one of these passages to read aloud slowly, and with emphasis: Acts 2:1–4, Isaiah 6:1–7, or Ezekiel 37:1–10. (I advise using three different translations for the readings preferably (Amplified, NASB, and the Message) but it's entirely up to you. Simply keep the students in mind as you choose.

1. Have students close their eyes and picture the passage as you read it.
2. Encourage them to pay close attention to detail: the sights, smells, sounds, and feelings.
3. Have them pay close attention to where they are in the scene.
4. When you finish, ask the following questions: Where were you in the scene? What words or phrases stood out to you? What feelings or impressions did you have?

WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson includes:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to reveal and experience the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions each week.
- A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.
- Planned activities to help students hear God for themselves.

Why This Topic?

Part of our discipleship as followers of Jesus is growing in our ability to think about our faith. As teens get older and go to college, they will face many challenging questions from a secular society. How will they answer? In these talks, Patrick attempts to give teens an understanding of some of the Big Questions they will face as they grow in their faith. We think these talks will produce great conversations for you and your teens to address the questions they are probably wondering about, but maybe haven't asked yet.

About the Author

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Patrick Campbell is originally from Chicago, IL and currently lives in Kennesaw, GA where he currently serves as Student Pastor at Cobb Vineyard. Patrick is also an itinerant speaker and World Cultures teacher at Whitefield Academy. Patrick's enthusiasm for teaching the word of God and desiring to see others transformed by it, is evident by his delivery of the message of the gospel. He is happily married to Nisha, his wife of 17 years and has two children PJ (15) and daughter Jordan (13).