



THE PROBLEM OF GOD

Week Three

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for being here with us. Help us to use this time to connect with you and each other. We want this group to be a place where we can grow in faith and friendship. Amen.

Leader Instructions: If you have new members in your group, here are some additional questions for you to go over with your group.

- Have you been a part of growth groups at EastLake before?
 - If not, tell us what made you sign up for a group this time around. If so, tell us what your previous group experience was like.

Icebreaker

- By nature do you find yourself interested in science or not? If so, tell us how your interest in science plays out.
- What is the most beautiful thing you have seen in creation or nature?

Talk it Over

This week is week three of our new series, The Problem of God. A foundational idea in this series we want everyone to keep in mind is that faith is not intended to be religious, wishful, magical thinking. Faith is not about blindly following something or avoiding all questions or doubts. This means each of us has permission to think critically or question issues surrounding faith, God, the Bible, and so forth. We can do this even as we nurture our faith stories because faith is not about 100% certainty. In fact, when we talk about faith we are talking about having enough confidence to commit to a course of action because of a reasonable level of trust. Christian faith is simply reasonable confidence in the evidence of Jesus.

- Did you grow up in a home that talked about faith? If so, what were some of the ideas that you were taught?
- How inclined or comfortable are you with asking questions about faith? Why is this the case?

The invitation laid out for each of us in this series is that we each stay open to following where the evidence may lead us — instead of pushing for where we hope the evidence leads or where we feel the evidence should go.

- This week we looked at the idea that there is a difference between “I cannot believe” and “I don’t want to believe”. Have you ever struggled with not wanting to believe something? If so, tell us about that experience.
- With the last question in mind, what would you say the difference is between “I cannot believe” and “I don’t want to believe”?

This week we looked at some common misconceptions people have about who God is. Here is a quick overview of those ideas:

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1. A bodyguard god: The belief here is that nothing bad will happen to us because god will protect us.
2. On-demand god: This is the god who answers all our prayers the way we would.
3. Boyfriend/Girlfriend god: This is the idea that we will always feel god near; he will keep us warm; we will always feel his presence.
4. Guilt god: This is the belief that god controls through guilt and fear. This is a god who stands against anything that is enjoyable. He is oppressive. He loves us, but he doesn't like us very much.

- Of the four various gods depicted above, which one have you believed in before or currently find yourself believing in? Where do you think that idea came from?
- What sorts of complications might come from buying into any of the common misconceptions of God listed above?
- The big idea we are looking at in these misconceptions is that God is so much more than just these things. In other words, while there is no question that God can be close, protective, full of loving conviction, and ready to answer our prayers, he is so much dynamic. He is bigger and greater than the little boxes we try to put him in. In light of the four misconceptions we have looked at, what are some ways you can enlarge your view of who God is?

Will someone read our theme verse Hebrews 11:1 out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

An additional common misconception people often have about God, faith, and the Bible is that they oppose science. It's the idea that God is anti-science and each of us must pick between religion and science.

- Have you ever experienced some level of religious teaching that positioned science as an enemy? Or have you ever experienced some level of scientific teaching that positioned religion as an enemy? Tell us about that experience. What did you observe?
- How difficult or easy is for you to honor science for what it is and religion for what it is? Why is this the case for you?
- Why do you think it's so hard for some people to make space for religion and science to co-exist?

This week we looked at two big questions involving faith and science. As we look over those questions now, let's keep in mind that the point of this group is to create space for us to process openly and honestly. We aren't here expecting to have all our questions answered, but rather we are here to grow in friendship and to become more comfortable with the idea that God can handle our honest processing.

Question One — The Cosmological Question: What caused everything that exists?

- Have you ever considered this question? If so, what sorts of ideas or questions have you come up with?
- Why do you think the answer to this question matters so much to some people?
- When it comes to your personal faith, how much does it matter to you whether or not God started everything?

Will someone read Genesis 1:1 (NIV) out loud for us? Will someone else read Psalms 8:3-4 (NIV)? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

- With these verses in mind and looking at your own life, how do you see science and faith working together?

Question Two — The Moral Question: What caused humanity's desire for morality and meaning?

- Have you ever considered this question? If so, what sorts of ideas or questions have you come up with?

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- Why do you think the answer to this question matters so much to some people?
- When it comes to your personal faith, how much does it matter to you whether or not God is to credit for our quest for morality and meaning?

Will someone read Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

- In what ways have you seen eternity depicted in the human heart?
- There is a tension between being willing to ask honest questions when it comes to our faith and being willing to grasp the reality that there are some things about God we may never know. How has this tension played out in your life?

Will someone read Nehemiah 9:6 (NIV) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

The point of the Bible is not to teach us about science or creation, but to point us to the heart and love of the Creator. Which leads us to this week's closing question: If the evidence we find leads to a God of love, how will you respond?

- Have you ever experienced God through creation or nature? Tell us about that experience.
- How might science, creation, or nature help us grasp clues about God's love?
- What would your answer be to the question, "If the evidence we find leads to a God of love, how will you respond"?
- Has your answer to this question transformed at all throughout this series?

Closing Prayer

Leader Instructions: Feel free to lead this week's closing prayer using the prompt below or praying your own prayer for the group. You can also ask your group if someone would like to share a quick, simple closing prayer.

God, thank you for allowing us to bring all that we are to you. You welcome our questions, thoughts, and heart. Help us to be honest with you and ourselves about the ways we are struggling to understand you. And in the struggle, help us to find hope and rest in your love. Help us to respond to your love as we walk through this life open, aware, and curious. Amen.

Closing Reminders For Our Group

- Let's each commit to attending the next four group meetings.
- As a group, let's make sure we have all our group logistics squared away for next week. For example, who wants to bring snack next week? Are we all set on when we meet next? Are there any childcare details we should talk about?

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.

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