

Is God There?

Ephesians 1:17-19

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: It turns out, all our teachers were wrong. The correct way to count is 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 — well, at least from the perspective of George Lucas. This is the order in which Lucas unveiled the Star Wars saga to the World. Partly for budgetary reasons, partly for technical reasons Lukas began with episode 4.

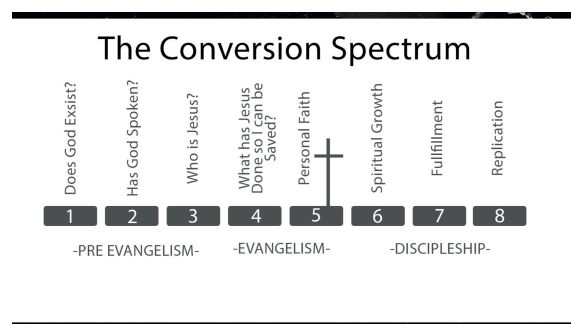
The film begins with the story of Luke Skywalker being raised by his aunt and uncle Owen on planet Tatooine. Luke's entire worldview and perception of reality was shaped by his Uncle Owen. His greatest concern was getting in the fall Harvest before he starts the Academy.

In the next scene, Luke was in search of a run away droid and is attacked by the sand people, until Ben Kenobi runs them away, saving the life of young Skywalker.

The next scene finds Skywalker in the home of Ben Kenobi. Ben tells Luke a story...a story that would radically and dramatically shifts the worldview of young Skywalker and ultimately his destiny.

HOBBIT - Interestingly, that scene was lifted by George Lucas from the Hobbit a book by J.R.R. Tolkien and the first encounter of Bilbo Baggins with Gandalf the Grey. Another book where a story teller (Gandalf) changes one's destiny.

We are in series called, **"Asking for a Friend"**. Last week we talked about how we live in a unique time in history where we may find a mature Christian living in the same household as a secular humanist. In previous generations this highly unusual, but today it has become the norm.



I presented you this CONVERSION SPECTRUM. I have received more positive feedback about last week's sermon than any I've preached in 3 years at this church. Some of you talked about this chart over lunch and

some have been saved over the course of this past week.

Today I want to help you answer the STAGE 1 Question - **IS GOD THERE?**

I believe the answer can be found in the aforementioned scene from the Star Wars Saga. I would like to talk to you today about the **POWER OF STORY** to change a heart.

In Eph. 1, Paul begins his letter with a lengthy greeting.

TEXT: Ephesians 1:15–18 (ESV)

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

HOW WILL GOD GIVE THIS REVELATION PAUL IS PRAYING FOR?

18 **having the eyes of your hearts enlightened**, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...

Notice that phrase, “having the eyes of your **heart** enlightened”. Not the eyes of your head, the eyes of your **heart**. You will see this sort of phraseology throughout the scriptures.

In Acts 26:18 (ESV) when Paul is recalling his call to ministry, Jesus says I’m calling you to... 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

God has chosen to relate to mankind **through an enlightened heart**.

Have you ever wondered why God can at times seem so **Elusive**? I mean, if he is real, why doesn’t he just perform a celestial firework show with Jesus shining in the sky as the climax, every night of the year?

In the words of **Albert Einstein**, “*God seems to prefer anonymity*”.

Well that may be true, but I think it’s better understood that God doesn’t relate to us primarily by means of the **5 senses**, but rather by means of the **HEART**.

Our primary job is to cooperate with God
in opening eyes and changing hearts
of those we are called to love.

The Bible teaches that man is born dead toward God, spiritually dead. The eyes of the heart are darkened and blind. That is why Jesus tells Nicodemus in **John 3**, he must be born again.

The NEW BIRTH is a work of the Holy Spirit - God must do it. BUT, God uses a means to that end.

- **Prayer** is a means we should all pray for people to be saved.
- **Preaching** is a means, some are called to preach the word for the conversion of souls.
- But another often overlooked way that we can all cooperate with God in bring about the new birth is the **TELLING OF TRUTH THROUGH STORY**. Positioning ourselves like the old sage on planet Tatooine.

PAUL - So we have three exhaustive accounts of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the Road to Damascus, in Acts 9, 22 and 26. It seemed that Paul believed that his greatest tool in changing the hearts of men and women was the telling of his personal story, his testimony.

JESUS - When Jesus stood before the multitudes how did he teach? Did he exposit the Old Testament as a Rabbi? Some, but most of the time when Jesus was dealing with blind eyes and dead hearts, he told a story...we call them *parables*.

DAVID - Have you ever considered the fact that in the whole bible there is really only one verse that directly speaks to the Atheist. **Psalm 14:1 (ESV)** ¹The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

The term *fool* is not meant as an **insult** or a term of **derision** but it is a classical category in wisdom literature. It speaks of the person who operates solely on what he can see with his eyes right in front of him. It is contrasted with the wise man who sees further, he sees the consequences of his decisions, ultimately he sees from God's perspective.

- The fool sees pleasure in a pill and he swallows it, without concern for the long term effects.
- The fool sees pleasure in an affair so he steps into without concern for the effect it will have on his family, his reputation.
- The fool doesn't see God right in front of him so he gives himself over to a secular worldview, without concern for the fact that one day he will give an account to a God he never saw with human eyes. He thinks his worldview is due to his great education, but he has found a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death.

How do we change that perspective? We broaden the perspective by STORY.

Heart are changed, not by winning debates, but by telling stories.

So what I want to do today is give you the **SEED THOUGHT** of ___ stories you can tell or conversations you can have in order to cooperate with God in the changing of hearts.

Generally there are three main arguments for the existence of God. **Cosmological, Teleological and Ontological** Arguments.

Rather than unpacked those three approaches from an Academic standpoint. I want to take you to an imaginary kitchen table conversation. Suppose, you are having a pleasant conversation with a friend who holds a secular godless worldview... Here are the opening you are listening for and how to redeem them to move people toward God.

1. Is Love Actually Real?

Everyone enjoys a good **love story**. I'm a sucker for them. Julie can tell you. Those Folger's commercials get me every Christmas. A son comes home from the military to surprise his mom on Christmas morning. She awakes to the smell of coffee being brewed and enters the Kitchen to see her son. Brilliant marketing, but it's also brilliant evangelism.

You see we can all *relate* to that kind of love. The love that causes a man go to go war, and causes him to want to come home again after the war is won. We all know that something special happens when we look into the eyes of our child for the first time. There is nothing we wouldn't do for them. Or maybe, it's the love we feel for another person that causes us to forsake all others and commit our lives to them.

Is love actually real? According to a godless worldview, it is not. It simply a chemical reaction produced by evolution that ensures the propagation of the species? Which resonates as true in your experience?

Ravi Zacharias once said, *"Love is the Supreme Apologetic"*

- There were really only 4 ways that a perfect God could create the World:
- a. Create Nothing at all
 - b. Create an Amoral World where there is no such thing as good or evil
 - c. Create a world where we would only choose good.
 - d. Create this world where choices are given to us to choose good or evil.

Of the FOUR possibilities, our's is the only world in which the possibility of Love exists.

Thus the most familiar verse in the Bible says, "God so LOVED the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life".

And the defining mark of a Christian is not his Theological accuracy, but his love, but by this they will know you are my disciples that you love one another.

Love is the supreme apologetic. Science can't explain it away. The Mocker can't laugh it away. If there is no God how does one account for LOVE?

The existence of God may never naturally come up in the course of a conversation. But love will. 60% of modern songs are about love. Romance fiction comprises 48.8% of all fiction books sold in North America. Love is always in the air.

How easy it is to turn a conversation, a song, a story toward answering the question - is love actually real?

People adopt a worldview by reasoned experience - most reasonable people will tell you that they have a deep, sincere love for someone. Could it be that the bear the image of their Creator - a God who IS LOVE?

Is Love actually real?

2. Is Anything Actually wrong?

Watch a person long enough and they will inevitably express **moral outrage**.

It may be over **genocide** in the far east or the **injustice** of Publix selling too much toilet paper to one customer.

It seems today, moral outrage is at an all time high, everyone is outraged about something.

But moral outrage and a yearning for a fair and just society, governed my right and wrong is an innate desire in every individual. However, this yearning is **totally senseless** based on a secular atheistic worldview.

If we are simply the long term result of the collision of certain chemicals, nothing is ultimately RIGHT or WRONG. There is no Supreme being that declares anything. There is no ultimate accountability. There is no punishment and no reward.

John Lennon called us to Imagine such a world where Heaven and Hell do not exist. When I imagine such a world, I am terrified.

If there is no God who writes his law on the heart of every man, it should make no difference if I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR or if I EAT HIM for dinner.

No Atheist really views the world in this way. They have a moral framework. They express moral outrage.

Scripture tells us that this is because God has written his law on the heart of man, they can't get away from it.

There is a God in Heaven who calls mankind to obey Him. He will hold every living soul accountable. The great injustices of Earth will be reconciled one day.

Is Love actually real? Is anything Actually wrong?

3. Is anything predictable?

The scientific method is the secular humanist's strong tower, his unbreachable wall. Since God cannot be proven by observation and interaction with the 5 senses, he must not be real. However, predictability itself is one of our greatest evidences for an Intelligent Designer.

The more we learn, the more we discover that this universe, from the expansion rate of galaxies to the coherence of atoms within a molecule - creation is so finely tuned that science is possible. Things can be measure and predicted.

Physicist Paul Davies said, “Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly, that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it as merely a brute fact”.

Robert Jastrow (Former Head of NASA’s Goddard Institute) said, “The fine tuning of the universe is the most powerful evidence for the existence of God to ever come out of science”.

Scientific observation, the very thing that many use as a reason not to believe in God, may be the best evidence we have for His actual existence.

ILLUSTRATION: As you walked into church this morning, did you notice the new sidewalks around the building? How do you suppose they got there? Do they seem to be laid with intention? Would any reasonable person assume they were the product of a random accident?

Suppose you found a **ROLEX** watch laying on that sidewalk, with its fine tuned precision, would you assume that it just, “occurred” spontaneously or would you assume an intelligent designer?

Isaac Newton said, “*In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence*”.

Friend the precision with which this Universe exists is so remarkable astounding that the chances of it occurring spontaneously are practically none existent.

That brings us to our forth question...

4. Is Anything Beautiful?

Not only is our Universe precisely tuned, but it is put together in such a way that its beauty is astounding.

The compulsion to **create** and **appreciate** objects of beauty is one of the most common experiences of the human condition. No matter where you travel on this planet, certain things are universally considered to be beautiful - whether it is the painting of Van Gogh, the composition of Mozart, or the symmetry in face of a supermodel. Objective standards of Beauty exist.

- The glory of a sunrise over the Atlantic.
- The calm of a sunset over the marsh.
- The Galaxy itself filling the night sky.

Is there any evolutionary reason for our appreciation of beauty? I’ve read papers where committed atheist try to explain it, but it’s beyond them.

Francis Collins, is one of the world's leading geneticist and director of the National Institute of Health. For years he was a committed Atheist. The thing that caused him to believe in God wasn't some great scientific argument, but it was simply looking and the beauty of a frozen waterfall.

When a person begins to acknowledge that something is beautiful, this may be an opportunity to step in as a Ben Kenobi and say, "*why do you suppose you fill that way?*" Could it be that a infinite creator is actually a great artist and in creating mankind in his image, He made us to create and appreciate beauty as well?"

Immanuel Kant, "*Two things fill me with constantly increasing admiration and awe, the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: The starry heavens without and the moral law within.*"

INVITATION/CONCLUSION:

There are so many other things that TIME will not permit me to unpack.

- We could talk about the Yearning for Meaning.
- The surprise of the coincidental.
- The irony of anger that so many Atheist seem to hold toward a God they swear does not exist.
- The compulsion to pray that we sense at our desperate moments.
- And what about the testimonies of so many people who have had a real, life altering encounter with the Divine?

But the bottom line is, with all of the realities - how will you answer the question, "Is God There?" Do it seem that life is a mere ACCIDENT? Or does the Christian world view resonate as true. That the heaven's and the earth were created by God, man was made in His image, then came the tempter and sin bringing a disruption to the created order.. then in Love God sent His son to set right all that went wrong in the beginning. One day he will return to Judge the living and the dead.

Like **C.S. Lewis** "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

C.S. Lewis said, "there are only two types of Destinies, one in which you bend the knee to God and say, "Your will be done" Or one in which you refuse to bend the knee and God says, "your will be done"