

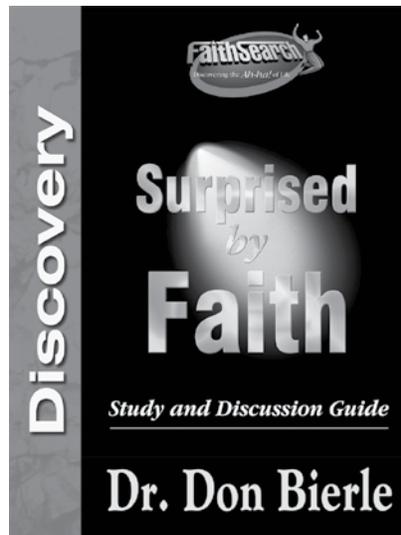
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 2

Proposing an Infinite Answer

Discovering the Fingerprints of a
Purpose-Giving God in History



- **Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide***
- **Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch Discovery Presentation***



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PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 2

Proposing an Infinite Answer

Discovering the Fingerprints of a Purpose-Giving God in History

Getting Focused

Materials:

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 2
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 1, pages 23-31*
- PowerPoint® slides: through *Discovery #2* (slides 15-19)
Chapter review: slides 20-21

Key Points:

1. A purpose-giving God must be infinite and personal.
Only an infinite and personal God is capable of providing ultimate purpose and meaning to the finite. A finite god, limited and without omniscience and omnipotence, would be dependent on something outside itself that is capable of explaining where it came from, why it exists, and what its eternal destiny is. Furthermore, an impersonal god would be incapable of intelligibly communicating purpose verbally to humans or forming a personal relationship with them. Only an infinite God—one who is absolute and perfect—and a personal God—one with intellect, will and emotion—is truly independent and capable of knowing and revealing ultimate purpose to the finite creation.
2. Christianity is the only religion that claims a God who is both infinite and personal, and is also able to be historically verified in the physical world.
Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism have a concept of god which is infinite, but not personal. Western religions, such as of Greek and Nordic peoples, have a concept of gods who are personal, but not infinite. Judaism, Islam and Christianity all claim a God who is both personal and infinite. However, Christianity is unique from the other two in claiming that the personal and infinite God became a human being and lived on earth.
3. Three conditions must be met to test the claim that Jesus is God.
The first condition which must be met in order to test the claim that Jesus is God is the existence of trustworthy eyewitness records about Him. Are the New Testament writings—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—historically reliable? Second, there must be a method of proof which will lead us to a reasonable verdict about the claim. A legal method would best fit our needs. Finally, the seeker after God must be honest and objective with the evidence. We cannot say, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!”

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

* Page numbers are from the third edition of *Surprised by Faith*. In the second edition, see pp. 18-26.

Glossary of Terms Used:

Agnostic: one who believes that any ultimate reality, such as God, is unknown and probably unknowable

Infinite: that which is independent of and before everything else that exists; unlimited; absolute

Personal: a being who has intellect, will and emotion; capable of rational communication and relationship

Religion: a worldview based on one's position regarding four things: God, the material universe, mankind and history (It does not refer to Christian denominations such as Lutheran or Baptist.)

Proof: the means and evidence to demonstrate something to be true (e.g., scientific proof, legal proof)

Incarnation: the embodiment of God in the person of Jesus Christ; the union of Divine nature and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ; assumption of human form by God

Here's where we're headed



The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own **Ah-ha!** Discovery number two.

Making the DISCOVERY

This discovery is the "heart" of *FaithSearch* Discovery—the key issue of Christianity. The incarnation sets Christianity apart from other religions because its claim about God is historically testable.

**Ah-ha!
The DISCOVERY**

#2 Christianity alone claims we can know that God exists because He came to earth physically as the man Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago!

Introduction

To better understand his (Dr. Flew's) point, draw a triangle in the margin on this page (for our physical world) and a circle (for God) above and separate from the triangle.

A Testable Strategy

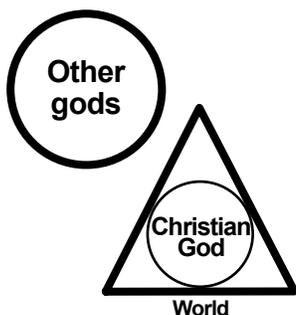
Draw a circle inside the triangle you placed in the margin and label it "Christian God." Label the previous circle you drew above the triangle "Other religious gods."

Read 1 John 1:1-3 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. What is the apostle John's excitement regarding his time as a disciple of Jesus? Identify three human senses that he refers to in his relation with Jesus (SBF, p.23). What does this prove?

His excitement is that he was an eyewitness of the Word of Life who is eternal and came to earth from heaven. As proof, he said that he heard him with his own ears, saw him with his own eyes, and touched him with his own hands. This demonstrates that Jesus was not an illusion or mystical spirit (ghost) but truly "became flesh" and lived on earth as a human being about 2,000 years ago.

Subjective question on page 14 of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 14 of the *Study Guide*



Author's Note.

You should emphasize to your group that in Christian theology God is a Trinity. In the circle and triangle illustration on the previous page, this means that the circle is both outside the triangle (like the claims of the "other religions") and inside the triangle at the same time. The Christian God is infinite and eternal. At a specific point in history He became flesh in the person of Jesus the Christ so that He was no longer "invisible, intangible and illusive." This is why the objections of Dr. Flew's parable does not apply to Christianity. For Christianity, there should really be a circle outside the triangle and one inside the triangle to indicate that our God is both infinite and incarnate—as John the apostle said, "...what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands..." That's the uniqueness of the God of the Christian faith!

Two Essential Characteristics of God

Read Genesis 1:27 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. How does this Bible truth of the Christian faith make sense of your underlined answers and explain humanity's uniqueness in the universe?

Only "God" was circled above because He alone is infinite. None of the creation shares that quality. However, "God" and "people" are underlined because people were created to be in God's image—to share in His personal nature (with intellect, will, and emotion). That sets people apart from the rest of the creation—a uniqueness which makes a personal relationship with God possible.

Explain in your own words why it is proposed in this chapter that God must be both infinite and personal in order to explain our existence and be adequate to solve our problem of the lack of ultimate purpose and meaning. Read the discussion below for assistance.

We have concluded that everything in the world is *finite* with only relative values and no ultimate purpose and meaning. Starting from the finite, we cannot know where we came from, why we are here, and what our destiny is. Only if an *infinite* God exists can absolute values and ultimate purpose exist. But for us to know that God exists, and discover what He alone knows and understands, He must be *personal* so that He can communicate these absolute values, and ultimate purpose and meaning to us personal beings in the world. His personal nature also explains the origin of our personal nature, and also explains how we can know God in personal relationship.

The Critical Difference of the Christian Claim about God**An Optional Question for Additional Discussion**

Muslims and Jews claim to know God through messages He gave to prophets, but Christians claim to know God because He walked the earth as a human. Why is the difference in these two claims significant when it comes to testing the claim that God exists?

This is the heart of how Christianity differs from other religions (see SBF, pp. 20-22). The apostle John said that "no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only... has made him known" (John 1:18). This is a reference to Jesus. The claim that Jesus is the incarnation of God is testable because it took place among eyewitnesses in history. We can apply reason and logic to the legal evidence to analyze the Christian claim that Jesus is God.

Subjective question on page 15
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 15
of the *Study Guide*

Authors Comment

The origin of the personal nature of people is either from the impersonal chemicals by chance (undirected evolution) or we were created by an eternal and personal God in His image (designed with His same nature). A third alternative is to deny our personal nature entirely, i.e., to maintain that we are only machines. The point being that the explanations for the origin of our personal nature are limited to only two—the random processes of evolution or the purposeful design of an infinite and personal God.

Author's Comment

There is yet a third argument for the existence of God which is readily available to everyone. This is the revelation of God in the natural world—the argument of design. I have addressed this subject in detail in a book and seminar entitled, "Making Sense of Creation and Evolution." A brief presentation on this subject and the other two above are also included in my DVD entitled "Revealing the Fingerprints of God." Each argument serves a specific purpose; that is, design reveals *that* an

(continuation next page)

Author's Comment (cont.)

intelligent Being exists, the evidence of history reveals *who* the intelligent Being is, and personal experience establishes a *relationship* with the God of design and history. See also the second question below and the shaded discussion provided on p. 18 in the *Study Guide*.

If the three conditions for a reasonable testing are satisfied (SBF, pp. 23-25) then faith in God can be reasonable through the following logic: 1) The New Testament writings are demonstrated to be trustworthy first-century, historical records; 2) These records provide satisfactory eyewitness evidence of Jesus' humanity—He ate, slept, grew tired, wept, etc.—and His claim to deity, e.g., His resurrection from the dead; and 3) The existence of God is assured by His physical and personal appearance on the earth, and the final ascension of the resurrected Jesus from earth to heaven.

Testing the Claim that Jesus is God**An Optional Question for Additional Discussion**

Which can be used as evidence in a court of law: an eyewitness account or hearsay?

An eyewitness account

Why?

Because hearsay cannot be validated and the source is not available for cross-examination.

How is this important to the first condition needed to test legally the claim that Jesus is God?

We must be assured that the New Testament writings about Jesus are from eyewitness sources, not derived by hearsay in later generations.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

Do you agree that the validity of the Christian faith can be explored rationally? Why or why not?

People will vary in their responses here. Many even in the church view faith as "blind" or accepted arbitrarily without reference to evidence or sound thinking. They will say that if we have reasons or evidence, we wouldn't need faith. It should be noted that we are not talking about "rationalism," the view that reason itself is a source of knowledge and the supreme authority in all matters of reality. The question is whether the Christian faith is consistent with reason and observable facts, that is, that it can be tested for legitimacy in a rational, wise, and judicious way. Consider the apostle Paul's comments about faith in 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 and Romans 10:8-17. His position in the former is clearly that if eyewitness testimony and the resurrection are not factual certainties, then our faith is in vain and worthless. In the latter passage he teaches that faith must have a certain object to be valid, and that faith is only as good as its object (you must know *about* Jesus before you can believe *in* Him). Chapter 7 in **FaithSearch** Discovery will address this issue in greater detail (chapter 4 in *Surprised by Faith*). Raising the question now can stimulate thought and anticipate future discussion, but a final conclusion regarding this question should be delayed until later.

Application and Reflection

In view of what you have learned in this chapter, how would you answer someone who said they thought all religions were basically the same?

Subjective question on page 18
of the *Study Guide*

It is uninformed to say that all religions are basically the same. An essential difference identified in this chapter between Christianity and Eastern religions like Hinduism is the personal nature of God. Christianity differs from Judaism and Islam in claiming that the founder of its faith, Jesus, is God incarnate rather than only a prophet like Moses or Muhammad. There are other major differences that will be revealed in later chapters of *FaithSearch* Discovery. These include the greater historical integrity of the biblical records, the basis of salvation being grace vs. works, and the entrance into the Christian faith not resulting from human will or resolve but resulting from a miracle of new life and the actual indwelling of God the Holy Spirit in the believer. All religions are clearly not the same, and Christianity has several important differences from other religions.

How could the discovery in this chapter make a difference in your approach to persuading others to believe that God exists? Explain.

The approach to knowledge of God proposed in this chapter is through the historical incarnation of God to earth as documented by eyewitnesses to the event. This evidence of history is objective in nature and can be confirmed by anyone with an honest desire to know the truth about God. The alternative is a more subjective approach of testimony (your experience of God) that is, persuading others to consider the reality of God because He has changed your life in some way. While subjective experience is a valid apologetic evidence, used alone it is not as persuasive to the skeptic. Coupled *with* the more objective historical evidence for God, it can be a helpful supplement in persuading others to believe that God exists.

List three reasons, intellectual and otherwise, that someone may give for not believing in God.

Possible intellectual factors might be: 1) The conflicting claims of many religions often confuse people, resulting in uncertainty whether all religions are right, or none is right, or how anyone can know; 2) Many don't accept that the alleged holy books like the Bible are trustworthy records; 3) Some struggle with the problem of evil—if God created all things, and God is good, where could evil have come from? 4) If there is a loving and all-powerful God, why is there so much suffering and pain in the world?

Polls in the U.S.A. continue to indicate that over 95% of people believe in the existence of God. The problem is that most do not know God as a personal and loving being in their life because they are ignorant of the way to God, that is, Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the author's personal conviction that the critical intellectual factors that keep people from a personal relationship with God ("faith," in the biblical sense) are skepticism of the truthfulness of the New Testament records (SBF, chapter 2) and skepticism concerning the historic incarnation, i.e., that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man (SBF, chapter 3).

Factors other than intellectual ones may include: 1) The moral factor—the person won't acknowledge and repent of sin; 2) The lifestyle factor—the person believes God will cramp their style, and they don't want to change; 3) The emotional factor—the person has had a bad experience with religious people, or with suffering and pain (e.g., a mother died of cancer; a whole family was killed in an auto accident; has a retarded son or daughter, etc.); 4) The pride

Subjective questions on page 18
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 18
of the *Study Guide*

factor—the person won't surrender to God or acknowledge their need (addressed in detail in SBF, chapter 6).

Read Psalm 14:1a and then Romans 1:19-20 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. What evidence has God provided for His existence so that He can declare the atheist is “without excuse” in not believing? Read the following discussion to help with your answer.

This is answered more fully in the shaded discussion that follows this question in the *Study Guide*. In essence, the argument is that features in the natural world can best (only) be explained as resulting from intelligent action. These features are identified as those that show “specificity,” that is, reveal coding or a message such as the ordering of letters in a sentence or book. No scientific observations or experiments have shown that chance is capable of specificity. So when we observe the genetic code (the sequence of genetic letters) that make up a 3.1 billion letter blueprint for a human, God says in His Word that we are “without excuse” if we deny the obvious—that an intelligent Designer must have caused it.

Subjective question on page 19
of the *Study Guide*

Is it possible (without contradiction) to be a New Age religion practitioner and also be a Christian? Read the following discussion as a basis for your answer.

Again, consult the shaded discussion that follows this question in the *Study Guide*. New Age views are not compatible with biblical Christianity. Even the impersonal nature of God that New Age practitioners teach is a contradiction of significant proportion. The concept of karma rather than sin, reincarnation rather than one death for each life, and the final authority being man rather than God, are other differences which cannot be reconciled. Why would anyone suggest that they can be both New Age and Christian at the same time? It is the author's view that those who make such a claim are either illiterate about the teachings of the Bible or have a low view of (or have rejected) its authority. Their claim of “tolerance” of alternate religious views is actually unbelief in the final authority of God and His Word revealed to us. Others in the New Age “pick and choose” which parts of the Bible they will accept.

Confirming the Discovery

Bible confirmation on page 19
of the *Study Guide*

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided here in the margin. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the Discovery in this chapter.

Matthew 1:23 Jesus' virgin birth was prophesied hundreds of years before it happened (Isaiah 7:14) and the name given Him would identify His true nature as God.

John 1:1,10,14 The apostle John identified Jesus as God, as the creator of the world, and as God incarnate as man. He existed from eternity as a person, God in essence, and in unique relationship with the Father.

John 17:5 Jesus, Himself, in His own prayer with the Father, claimed to have existed before there ever was a world, and to have existed as God.

Romans 1:19-20 God has provided additional clear evidence of His existence by leaving Divine fingerprints of intelligent design in His creation.

Choose one of the following to answer:

If you do believe in an infinite and personal God, how would you answer the question, “What difference has my belief that God exists made in my values and the way that I live my life?”

Answers here will vary. Many Christians will respond that their faith has given them peace with God, confidence of eternal life, ultimate purpose and meaning, a positive change in their thoughts and behavior, the power to say “no” to sin, greater acceptance of others, victory over bad habits, etc. The answers will be mostly personal ones. These changes may have great societal benefits as well, but that will usually not be the focus of a true believer in an absolute God. Belief in the existence of an infinite and personal God changes the way believers view the finite world; even moreso, it changes the way they see themselves in that world. No longer are they insignificant specks in a vast universe, but special people created by a God who loves them and has prepared an eternal destiny for them of indescribable beauty and possibilities.

If you do not believe in an infinite and personal God or are uncertain, how would you answer the question, “What positive benefits have I experienced in my life that are a result of my skepticism or atheism?”

The goal of this question is to ask the person who considers agnosticism or atheism to be reasonable positions, to reflect on the practical positive outcomes of these views on their life. The answers here will vary. Some people may include comments that it has freed them from religious dogma and superstition, that it has given them a real sense of self-determination and a control over their own destiny, and that it has led to a less judgmental and exclusive viewpoint that promotes peace in the world. But these responses don't actually address their “heart,” that is, how have these views given them assurance of ultimate purpose and meaning in their life? Have they promoted dignity of life and ultimate value? The answer is that these views cannot provide this because they are temporal in nature, hence, can only provide temporal answers and values—benefits for the reform of society in the “here and now.”

Subjective question on page 20
of the *Study Guide*

Author comment

Note that the paragraph which follows the verses in the *Study Guide* is a summary of the main points of these verses.

Subjective question on page 20
of the *Study Guide*

Looking Ahead

Related Reading

- Clark Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), Chapter 1
- Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), Chapter 2.

