

# BELIEVING IN GOD

## KEY WORDS about believing in God

Awe	– when you feel there is something much greater than you.
Conversion	– when your life is changed by giving yourself to God.
Mystical	– making direct contact with God through things like visions.
Miracle	– something so unusual that you think only God could have done it.
Big Bang	– the explosion which scientists believe began the universe.
Moral evil	– actions done by humans that cause suffering.
Natural evil	– things <u>not</u> done by humans that cause suffering.
Benevolent	– the belief that God is good and kind.
Omnipotent	– all powerful (like God).
Omniscient	– all knowing (like God).

Christians believe that the God of the Jews, and the God of the Old and New Testaments, is one God. This one God is known in 3 ways:

1. God the Father (to whom Jesus prayed).
2. God the Son (Jesus, who came to live on earth, was killed to save people from their sins, and rose again 3 days later)
3. God the Holy Spirit (who lives in Christians today).

Christians believe that the world was created and designed by God. Sometimes God, as revealed in the Old Testament, appears to be different to the “Father” of whom Jesus speaks, but Christians believe this just shows the changing relationship between God and humans.

God’s teachings are revealed in the Bible, which is the revealed Word of God.

Christians describe God in many ways:

Judge; Ruler; Father; A great and mysterious power; Friend; Saviour; Love.

For centuries, people have argued about whether God exists.

The main arguments for God are:

1. **Design argument**: William Paley said, “If you find a watch in the street, you would say someone had made it – it had not come together by chance, so the world (which is much more complicated than a watch) must have a maker - God”.
2. **Cosmological argument**: Thomas Aquinas argued that something cannot come from nothing, so the universe must have come from someone – we call Him, God.

3. **Miracles and Experience**: Some people say that, because miracles have happened and they have experienced God, God must exist. If you pray for your friend and he recovers from cancer, you are likely to believe in God.

**But** Miracles require you to believe what the witnesses say. Also science can now explain *some* cures. Some ask why the maker of the world would allow miracles to break the laws which he had made. Others say that miracles are like tricks done by Paul Daniels.

The main arguments **against** God are:

1. **The design faults**: The world has a lot of things wrong (earthquakes, floods, diseases, etc.), so it cannot be made by a skilful and loving God.
2. **The theory of evolution**: Charles Darwin argued that life has evolved from very simple structures to reach our complex universe. Through the process of natural selection, species have adapted and changed to new and changing situations. Those species unable to survive (like the dinosaurs) have become extinct.
3. **The unfair God**: Some people claim that religious experiences are tricks of the mind – and if the miracles are true, what kind of God would allow some people to be healed and not others. This hardly seems like a God who is just and fair.

**Upbringing and belief in God**

If you are brought up by Christian parents, you will be taught to worship God, pray to God and go to Church. You may go to a Christian school. So, you are more likely to believe in God from the beginning and never even think whether God might not exist.

**Religious experience and belief in God**

(You will need all these points in a 6 or 8 mark question)

Religious experience means the way you come into direct contact with God. Any of these are likely to make you believe in God. They can be: *(fill in the spaces)*

1. It can be the feeling you get when you go to Church, or pray, or look at God's creation. ....
2. It can be a more definite feeling of God's presence, which makes you much more religious (often called conversion experience). ....  
.....
3. Seeing a miracle happen or believing from someone else that a miracle has happened. ....
4. Having a direct experience when God speaks to you in a dream or vision. ....  
.....

# SUFFERING

There are 2 types of suffering:

1. Moral Suffering (caused by humans) and
2. Natural Suffering (caused by earthquakes, floods, etc.).

No human can escape suffering. It is part of human life.

Different people respond differently to others' suffering:

- "It's nothing to do with me" or
- "I must try to help" or
- "It is their own fault" or
- "Suffering helps us to grow up".

## The Problem of Evil:

People who believe in God ask, "Why does he allow evil? If God is all-powerful, he must be able to prevent evil. If God is all-loving he must be willing to prevent evil. If God is able and willing to prevent evil, why does evil exist?"

For some people, the existence of natural suffering (suffering not caused by humans), is the reason why they do not believe in God.

Others say it is wrong to both attack God for suffering *and at the same time*, not believe in God.

## Christian Responses to Suffering:

- Suffering is a result of sin.
- Suffering is often caused by people being selfish and self-centred.
- After death, the suffering will be forgotten in the joy of a new life.
- God created people with free-will, and people chose to go their own way.
- Suffering helps us to grow into better people.
- God understands suffering – Jesus (God's Son) suffered, died and rose again.
- Out of suffering comes hope.

## Questions

1. Which of the arguments for and against God, do you find most convincing? Explain your answer.
2. How do you think a Christian would answer the 3 arguments (above) against God.
3. What is your opinion on miracles?