

LEAD 360  
*Christian Theology*

Study Guide for Session I  
Part II: "The Christian Belief in God"

1. Questions to prompt thought and discussion:

- (1) What are some stated reasons why people choose not to believe in God's reality? What are some key characteristics of the "new atheists"? To whom do you think they have an appeal and why? How can they best be answered?
- (2) Identify the usual logical or rational approaches to affirm God's reality. What is their appeal? Do you think they are helpful? What significance might the transformed life of a Christian believer have upon someone open to believing in God's reality?
- (3) Distinguish the two main kinds of divine revelation in the Bible. Which one offers the most assured way of knowing God through Christ? Explain why.
- (4) Identify the two basic ways of describing God's relation to us and our world.. Which one was used by the ancient Greek philosophers and some 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers?
- (5) Why is it important to keep God's transcendence and immanence in an proper balance? What results when we do not?
- (6) Is it important to respect the biblical focus on God as personal? Why or why not? What risk do we run if we overemphasize God as personal?
- (7) Identify the Greek concepts which characterize God as eternal. What spiritual assurance do they offer?
- (8) Why is it possible to believe in a God of love and power in a world so full of evil and suffering?
- (9) What does Genesis 1:1 tell us and *not* tell us?
- (10) What are naturalistic views of the origin of creation unable to tell us? Why?
- (11) Why was the understanding of God creating the world "out of nothing" developed in early Christianity? What does this term mean and not mean?
- (12) How do beliefs in God as Creator and God as providential relate?

- (13) Look up the word “theodicy” in the dictionary and see how it applies to the question of a powerful, loving God in the presence of evil. Do you think theodices are helpful or do they merely confuse the issue?
- (14) How has God responded to the reality of evil and suffering? Why is it important not to understate this?

## 2. Recommended resources for further study:

### (1) Basic level resources:

- Claypool, John. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1974.
- Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: The macmillan Company, 1960; *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962.
- Maston, T. B. *Suffering: A Personal Perspective*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967.
- McCullough, Donald W. *The Trivlization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995.
- McGrath, Alister. *The Unknown God: Searching for Spiritual Fulfillment*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Nicholi, Armand M. *The Question of God*. New York: Free Press, 2002.
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.
- Thomas, Jim. *Coffeehouse Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2000. See especially chapter 4: “How Do We Know God Exists?”
- Thomas, Jim. *Streetwise Spirituality: Where Faith in God Meets Real Life*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2001.
- Weatherhead, Leslie. *The Will of God*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1974.
- “The Christian Face of the Scientific Revolution.” *Christian History*. Issue 76 (Vol. XXL, No. 4) 2002. Several articles describe the personal Christian faith of early scientists like Galileo, Kepler and William Harvey.

### (2) More advanced resources:

- Bloesch, Donald G. *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008.
- McGrath, Alister. *Intellectuals Who Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- Oden, Thomas C. *The Living God. Systematic Theology: Volume One*. Peabody, Maine: Prince Press, 2001.
- Stackhouse, John G., *Can God Be Trusted? Faith and the Challenge of Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Ware, Bruce. ed. *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008.
- “The Question of God”, PBS resource available for purchase and for free download on the Internet. Includes a dramatic juxtaposition of C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud and the various influences on their lives; a lively panel discussion of seven well-educated professionals, some of whom believe in God, some

don't each explaining their beliefs and non-beliefs about God. Access at:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/>

Another video resource (VHS) is: "Is There Meaning in Evil & Suffering?" produced by Ravi Zacharias Ministries. Besides Zacharias, panelists include William Lane Craig.

### 3. Personal & Group Activities

- (1) Log in your journal when the name "God" became very personal for you. What was the occasion? What impact did that experience make upon your life?
- (2) Form a discussion group of people interested in becoming Christians and select for individual reading one of the basic level books like Jim Thomas' *Streetwise Spirituality* or C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and help them understand what it means to become a Christian. Lewis' approach appeals to those who prefer to think rationally; Thomas' approach appeals more to feelings and everyday matters.
- (3) Those interested in the arts and poetic literature who struggle with the question of God's reality might find McGrath's *Unknown God* helpful.
- (4) Those struggling with some of the more difficult questions like evil and suffering might find the books by Keller, *The Reason for God* or Stackhouse's, *Can God Be Trusted?* helpful.
- (5) Those who may be grieving over the death of a loved one may find Claypool's *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* useful. He lost his eight year old daughter leukemia. He earlier wrote his doctoral dissertation on evil and suffering.
- (6) Professional and well-educated persons struggling with the question of God's reality might find the PBS documentary, "The Question of God" helpful. The dramatization of the lives of atheist Sigmund Freud and atheist-turned-Christian C. S. Lewis is good. But the panel discussions on questions about God's reality, goodness, evil, etc. are excellent. The material was put together by a Harvard psychiatrist-professor, Armand Nicholi, a Christian, who has taught the course for over 30 years. PBS makes available study guides and a wealth of other material which are excellent for prompting discussion in one to two hour segments. The material is not "pushy". Nicholi, who presides over the panel, mediates strong discussion between panelists, some who are well-known skeptics or atheists, some who appear to have strong Christian convictions. But questions are left open-ended for the viewer to decide. This documentary can be accessed on the internet and the discussion guides downloaded.