

# Ultimate Questions

## *A series of Bible Studies*

### Introduction

Life is full of questions, matters of job security, marital possibilities, financial status, family responsibilities, political affiliation, place of study plus all the daily choices of life especially life in a new country.

Some of these important and immediate questions can hide or distract us from the ultimate questions. Questions that are common to humanity the world over.

These could be summarised as:

- What is real? (The material cosmos, gods or God)
- What is that reality like? (Is it created or autonomous, chaotic or orderly, matter or spirit, objective or subjective)
- What is a human being? (A machine, an animal, a god, or created in the image of God)
- What happens when we die? (Extinction, transformation, judgement)
- How can we know anything? (Part of evolutionary process, revelation)
- How do we know what is right and wrong? (Choice, socialisation, revelation?)
- What is the meaning of history? (Chance, accident, purposeful?)

*(taken from 'The Universe Next Door' by James Sire)*

The aim of these studies is to introduce the Christian response to some of these questions.

Together we will examine different parts of the Bible and discover:

1. What God is like (Psalm 139)
2. What does it mean to be human (Genesis 1 & 2)
3. What wrong with the world (Genesis 3 and Mark 7:17-23)
4. How can I know anything?
5. Is there hope?

When this series is over there will be the option of studying one of the biographies of Jesus to examine his life and teaching.

The studies should:

- (a) Answer basic questions
- (b) Show God's desire for a relationship with human beings
- (c) Begin to clarify Jesus relationship to God and prepare the way for a study of a Gospel
- (d) Show need and the possibility of reconciliation.

The studies are loosely based on Discovering Jesus by Ada Lum (IVP).

# Ultimate Questions

## Study 1

### What is God Like? (Psalm 139)

How we answer the questions is God really there and what is he like will affect our whole lives.

Some of the group may have been taught about God by their families, friends, schools, TV, neighbours. Others may have never thought about God, or perhaps have a religion or ideology that does not have a 'god'

This study aims to introduce some of the characteristics of God.

Contact point (the aim of these starters is to get people speaking from their own experience and background and provide a quick point of contact between their lives and the text).

What is your concept of God? How has that been formed? (if they have one). If they have no concept of God then how has that conclusion been formed?

We get hints about what God is like from:

- The design and order of the world we live in, its beauty and variety, the careful and exact balance of much of nature
- The moral order – our ability to discern right and wrong
- Humanities hunger / design to know God
- The person of Jesus Christ
- God's self-revelation in the Bible

### **Background**

The Psalm is written by David who was king of Israel about 1000 years before Jesus Christ was born. David's story can be found in the books of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles in the Bible. He wrote about his adventurous lifetime of knowing God in many of the poems of the psalms, which express profound truth in terms of personal experience.

### **Read Psalm 139**

(NB. The psalms like all poetry uses picture language to communicate realities. The psalm is written in stanzas or sections, each contribute an idea to the theme of the psalm.)

### **God knows everything 139:1-6**

- **In what personal ways does David demonstrate that God is all knowing?**

(David refers to God as Lord (Yahweh), the name given to Israel as the special name by which they were to call him after they entered into a covenant with him. It stresses God's sovereign, eternal and personal nature.)

- **How do you respond to the fact God knows all about everyone including you?**

### God is everywhere 139:7-12

- **Is there anywhere David thinks he can go in the whole world to escape God?**  
(The vertical and horizontal extremes (verses 8-9) symbolise the whole of creation)
- **How does the fact that God is everywhere and is not limited by cultural, geographical or political boundaries make you feel?** (Does it reassure? Threaten? Surprise? Shock?)

### God is all powerful 139:13-18

- **What does David use as evidence to God's creative powers?** (We will think more about what a human being is in a later study).  
NB. Verse 15 'secret place' is a picture for the maternal womb
- **How do you explain the amazing detail of the human body? What do you find most amazing?**
- **In verse 16 how else does David describe God's relationship to his life?**  
(‘Your book’ is a picture of God's sovereign knowledge of a person's life span.)  
This causes David to praise God. David is totally known by God, he is not an accident or mistake, he is not forgotten. How do you respond to such a personal God.

### God is holy

- **David is aware that not all the people around him delight in God. How does he describe these people? What is David's attitude toward them?**  
(Make sure you can explain the different terms – wicked, evil, enemies of God)
- **What does David ask for in verses 23-24?**
- **Although he hates what God hates what does this request suggest he knows about himself?**  
(David is not like God, he is not perfectly good.)

### Summary

How does this description of God compare to your concept of God or what you assumed Christians believed about God?

These are just some of the characteristics of God reading the Bible will introduce you to many more.

# Ultimate Questions

## Study 2

### What does it mean to be human?

Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15-25

#### Contact point

- How would your friends and family answer the question 'what does it mean to be human?'
- What other viewpoints exist?
- What do you think?

#### Context

Many are surprised to discover that the Bible defines our humanity. The creation story recorded in the early chapters of Genesis (the first book of the Bible) tells us about human nature – who we are and what we are made for.

Genesis means 'origin, source, creation', it tells of the origins of the universe, the world, humanity, human institutions (e.g. marriage), nations and the people of God. It is commonly thought to be written by Moses, which is why it has been called the First Book of Moses, making up one of the five books known as the Pentateuch or Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Genesis puts the law giving of the next four books into context.

Like all books of the Bible Genesis is primarily theological describing who God is, how and why he acts and how he deals with humanity. It is done through vividly told stories - historical narrative. Throughout Genesis God is the central actor, often speaking and acting displaying his power and character. This would be in sharp contrast to the localised gods of paganism. God is Creator, Lord and Judge.

Christians disagree as to whether the early verses of Genesis are literal or figurative, try not to get side tracked into the creation vs evolution debate but focus on the meaning of the text.

#### Read Genesis 1:26-31

##### 1. Made in the image of God.

- Having created the material and animal world and declared that it was good God creates humanity. In verses 26-27 what does the writer repeatedly state about the creation of humanity?
- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
- What is God's reaction to the creation of humanity? (Vs 31)
- What implications are there for us in this amazing fact?

**Note:** 'image of God' – in reasoning, relationality, creativity, morality, representation / stewardship, communication. (Some guidelines to our thinking might be Representation, Relationship and Resemblance).

##### 2. Made male and female.

- What do man and woman have in common in vs 26-30?

**Note:** both created in image of God (vs 26-27), both given task of ruling earth (vs 26), both blessed by God and called to be fruitful (vs 28), both provided with food by God (vs 29).

- 2:18-25 expands the creation story of Genesis 1 focusing on the relation of man and woman. What is the first thing God declares 'not good' (vs 18)? Why?

**Note:** God is relational at the core of his being. Man must reflect this in his humanity.

- What is God's response to this? What is the man's response to the woman God created? How is their relationship described?
- The Bible tells that both male and female are created equal yet with diversity. Does this surprise you? Is this equal worth and value seen in our societies?

### **3. Made to know and rule with God.**

- What has God provided for man and woman? What do these gifts tell us about God?

**Note:** a perfect creation to live in (1:2-25), role (1:26, 28), food (1:29), companionship (2:24-25).

- God entrusts humanity with 'ruling' his creation. What responsibilities does this bring?

### **4. Made under authority.**

- Do you think it is possible to be both loved and free and be given limitations?
- What limitations does God give man and woman in 2:16-17? Why?
- How do we respond to limitations?
- God in his kindness and wisdom provided for their security within boundaries, maintaining friendship with God was based on acknowledging these and living in obedience to them. The consequences of not doing so we shall discover next week.

## **Summary**

What are the practical implications of these truths about what it means to be human?

# Ultimate Questions

## Study 3

### What's wrong with the world?

#### Genesis 3 & Mark 7

#### Contact point

The world we experience is far from what we saw in last week's study was initially created. If you had power to eliminate one 'evil' what would it be?

#### Context

In our last study we saw that humanity was made to relate to God, each other and the physical world. Unlike the rest of creation man and woman were created in God's image. God provided abundantly for them with only one limitation, 'you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. A tree representative of total knowledge, that is they must not try to play God.

#### Read Genesis 3

#### 1. They disobey God (vs.1-7)

- Identify the steps that lead up to them eating the fruit.

**Note:** they slid there rather than a sudden act. Satan begins with the woman and the man says nothing, he introduces doubt about God's goodwill and authority with a mistaken question (vs1). She distorts God's command by adding to it (vs2). He contradicts God's Word (vs4) She considers the attractive possibility (saw, looked good, drawn to wisdom) and ate and gave some to the man (vs 6).

- What are the immediate results?

#### 2. God seeks them out. (vs 8-13)

- What is the immediate impact of what they have done on their relationship with (a) each other (vs.7, 12-13) (b) God (vs. 8-11)
- Not only do they hide from each other they also hide from God. God knows everything, so knew where they were so why do you think he asks the question 'where are you?' (vs 9)

#### 3. The consequences (vs14-19)

- Turning their back on God's ways brings consequences, which of these do you see in the world today?

#### 4. God holds out hope. (vs 15, 20-24)

- What is our reaction when people hurt us or break friendship with us?

- God had given the man and women an open friendship with him, provided for them yet they reject him. What would you expect God's reaction to be?
- How does he react? (vs.21-23)
- In vs. 15 God prepares them and us for the ongoing struggle between himself and Satan and for the His ultimate triumph.

## 5. What about now?

While that may explain what originally went wrong with the good and perfect creation, what explains to the mess we read about in our newspapers today. Rejecting God's ways is not limited to the first man and woman, every member of humanity since has done the same.

### Read Mark 7:14-23 (cf. Romans 3:10, 3:23)

#### Context

The religious leaders of the time had many rules and regulations that had built up over the years that they thought they had to keep to remain pure / clean. They believed keeping these rules made them acceptable to God. They judged and criticised the followers of Jesus for not keeping these rules. Jesus rebukes them as hypocrites, keeping rules yet letting go of the true teaching of God. Jesus teaches the crowd that the real problem is not ritual but moral and that it is not caught like a germ but is inside of each human being.

- Where does Jesus explain that evil comes from? (vs. 20-21)
- How do you feel that this is Jesus' diagnosis on all human beings? Do you think there is any way that you can make your heart 'clean'?

#### Summary

The world is not as God originally made it, rebellion and suffering entered as a result of humanity turning its back on God. Each subsequent generation has followed the same path. Our friendship with God is broken because of the 'evil' in our heart shown in our actions, attitudes and choices. We live with no reference to God. We cannot do anything to 'clean up' our hearts – just try over the next week to live perfectly! Next week we will look at God's solution to the problem.

# Ultimate Questions

## Study 4 Is there hope?

The aim of this study is to begin to introduce more of the basic elements of the Gospel particularly Christ's death. It will not unravel every aspect of his death (!) but focus on how in the face of sin and rebellion humanity know peace with God and pave the way for studies in a Gospel.

### Contact point

What are you hoping for in the future? Why?  
How is this hope affected by difficulties and suffering?

### Context

We have seen that although once in perfect relationship with God sin and rebellion have entered humanities relationship with each other and primarily with God. Sin affects every human being, from every nation in every point of history. It flows not from externals but from our hearts. Paul outlines some of the ways sin is seen in Rom 1-3 and concludes that both Jew and Gentile sin (Rom 3:23) and are under God's just judgement (the qualities of which are seen in Rom 2:1-16). It is impossible to rectify this situation by obeying rules, even Abraham was justified by faith. (You will find the story of Abraham in Genesis 12-25).

Our study for the first time is in the NT. Explain that the NT records Jesus life (4 biographies), the spread of his message, letters of teaching written to early believers and hope about what is still to come. Paul is the author of many of the 'letters' we are looking at one he wrote to a group of Christians in Rome.

### Read Romans 5:1-11

What words do you not understand?

#### 1. The problem

- Paul uses a number of words to describe people before they had faith in Christ, what are they? (powerless, ungodly, sinners, enemies, under wrath)
- How do each describe humanities situation before God?
- What have you learnt from other studies is the cause of this situation?
- How does it make you feel to be described like this?

#### 2. God's solution

- What ways do human beings on a national or individual level seek to make peace or reconcile with an enemy?
  - Do any of these solutions work with God?
  - How does Christ's death (Matt 27:45-54, Luke23:26-49) demonstrate God's love for us? (5: 8, John 3:16, 1 John 3:16, 4:9-10)
  - What is the outcome of trusting Christ's death for an individual's relationship with God?
- Reconciliation v10 (Col 1:21-23)
  - Peace v1
  - Justified v1, 9
  - Hope v2, 5 (1 Peter 1:3)



### 3. The response

- In what ways do you exercise faith in daily life? (e.g. sitting on a chair)
- How does an individual receive all that is offered in Christ?
- Hope is often used in English to describe something we wish might happen ('I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow'). In the Bible it is used to describe a future certainty. Have a look at Eph 1:13-14, 2 Cor 5:5)

### Summary

Christian hope focuses on the person of Christ who we will now move on to study in one of the biographies of Jesus.