

Questions Kids Ask About God

Who made God?

How can I grow closer to God?

There are lots of religions in the world – Will all those people go to Heaven?

If God knows what we are going to do before we do it, what choice do we have?

A Sermon for Children and Youth Sunday

Preached by

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At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Matthew 18:1-5 NRSV

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all

who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Luke 2:41-52 NRSV

If you want answers in life, you have to ask questions in life. Intelligent young people ask a lot of questions. Sometimes adults get frustrated with those questions. Usually because we don't have the answers when you want them ("Are we there yet?" "Why can't I?" "What can we do for fun?") Sometimes it's because we don't have the answers at all. When it comes to questions about God we can get especially tongue-tied.

Ask us questions anyway. They make us think through what we believe. Sometimes they make us open our Bibles. Even when they are prompted by doubt, faith questions are a good thing. They challenge us to grow.

When we ask questions we show that we are interested in something and that that thing matters to us. I think one of the reasons Jesus wanted kids to be close to him was because he knew they had questions, and he took those questions as a form of praise. When you young people ask faith questions it's one way that you're praising God; I bet you never thought of it that way before.

A few weeks ago I started collecting questions that you've been asking your parents and Sunday School teachers. Some of these are surely in the "We're saving this one for Pastor Jeff or Pastor Jennifer" category. The good news is you have a lot of questions: everything from "Why did God make mosquitoes?" to "Do animals go to Heaven?" [Not mosquitoes, if I have a vote in it] to "Why is my Christian father going off to war where he may have to kill people?" Tough stuff—and that's the good news.

The bad news is that we can't begin to answer all of them today. I've picked some of the most common ones. So let's go. Who has a question?

Most things have a beginning and an end, but not God, because no one made God. God has been around from *before* the beginning of time. In fact, God *created* time! That's why the Bible starts with the words "In the beginning, God...." [Genesis 1:1] "In the beginning," says the Bible, God was already there. God will be there after time ends, too.

Think of it like this wedding ring; look very closely at it. Where does it begin? Where does it end? There is no beginning or end; it just is. That's the way God is.

Asking "Who made God?" is like asking, "What does the color blue *sound* like?" or "Can I marry *Dora the Explorer* when she grows up? No, she's a cartoon, and you're a person. You're two completely different kinds of things."

Created things – like people and rocks and trees and sermons -- have beginnings and ends. God is completely different: God always has been and always will be. Kind of blows your mind, doesn't it?

Next question:

How can I grow closer to God?

We talk a lot about "growing" around here don't we? That's because the Bible talks a lot about growing in faith. You may have heard in our scripture lesson that even Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature."

We can grow spiritually, too, but it takes some work and some patience. Think of it like growing a plant. What do you need to grow a plant?

- A seed
- Dirt
- Sun
- Water
- Air
- Fertilizer

How do you make a plant grow?

1. Prepare the soil
2. Plant the seed
3. Water it, give it sun, let it breathe so it doesn't stay too wet, and feed it from time to time.
4. Then wait.

Can we *make* a plant grow? Nope. Does poking it and prodding it and telling it to grow help? Nope. Does comparing it to other plants help? Nope. We just do our best and with God's help the seed just grows on its own. It takes patience. But usually we'll see something good come up in time.

It's like that with faith. Jesus says that we are the dirt that God's Word grows in [Matthew 13:1-9]. We can help that seed along by talking to God (in prayer), by learning what the Bible says, and by helping poor people (Jesus said that when we help them we help him). All of these things help us to grow in wisdom and stature, just like Jesus did.

Can we *make* ourselves grow in faith? We can do a lot of helpful things, but we can't make ourselves grow spiritually. Guilt doesn't help. Comparing ourselves to others doesn't help. It takes patience. We do our best and *God* gives the growth [I Corinthians 3:7]. We almost always see something good come up in time. Sometimes a giant spiritual redwood grows [Matthew 13:8]. I hope some of you grow up like that!

Who's next?

***There are lots of religions in the world –
Will all those people go to Heaven?***

Jesus told us that the way to Heaven is through him, but what about people who don't know Jesus. What happens to them when they die? I think that's your question, and it's a serious one. We've all got friends -- and maybe even relatives -- who aren't Christian. And we care about them.

The Bible says that people who are baptized and believe in Jesus will go to Heaven. It also says that people who don't believe in Jesus *won't* go to Heaven [John 3:18; Mark 16:16]. It doesn't say what happens to people who haven't heard of Jesus, but it does say that everyone will be accountable for their life [Romans 1:20-21,14:12].

The Bible also tells us that God loves everyone and wants everyone to live with Him. [2 Peter 3:9] It even says that one day everyone will see Jesus for who he really is [Philippians 2:10-12] and we will all be one big family – not Christians and Jews and Muslims -- but *one* family under God [John 10:16]. It's hard to make sense of all this.

We do know this: God is free to save whomever God wants to save, but we don't know everyone who is going to be included in that number. We also know that he has shown us the Way in Jesus Christ and asked us to point others to the way.

Think of it this way. If you wanted to go to Disneyworld, how would you get there? Let's drive. If you were going to drive from Carlisle to Disneyworld, which roads would you take? Do you know? If you asked me how to get there I'd say take I-83 to 95 and follow it all the way to the Sunshine State. I haven't yet taken that route the whole way myself, but I have it on good authority that it will get you there.

Let's say you didn't want to go that way. Are there other ways to get to Disneyworld? Probably, but I don't know about them. I can only tell you about this route, and I know it will get you there—you can look it up on this map.

Do *all* roads lead to Disneyworld? No. Some lead to Canada. Some lead to your grandmother's house or New Jersey. Does it matter what road you take? Sure. Some roads are dead ends.

Now, just for a moment, picture Heaven as Disneyworld. How would you tell people to get there? We can only point people to the road that we know. *Christianity* is the road I'm taking to meet Christ, the gatekeeper of Heaven. Do other spiritual roads lead to Christ? I don't know. Could they? I guess so. Do *all* roads lead to Christ? No, no more than all roads lead to Disneyworld. So does it matter what road you're on? Sure it does. Some roads are spiritual dead ends and most of the time you can't tell which ones

they are until it's too late. That's why it's really important to have a good map. In our case it's the Bible.

This analogy isn't perfect, but it does affirm that Jesus is Lord and Savior of *all* people, whether they call themselves Christians or not. Jesus is not *one* way to God; he is *the* Way. When we point people to Jesus we can be sure that we are pointing them in the direction. [A recent PC (USA) pronouncement on this issue is printed below].

Looks like we have time for one more question:

***If God knows what we are going to do before we do it,
what choice do we have?***

This is a question about what theologians call “free will.” And this is a tricky one. Only when we get to Heaven will we see how much of life was our doing and how much was by God's design. Personally I don't think that it was God who made me choose these bright red socks today, but I do think that he was guiding me as I prepared this sermon for you. Where do we draw the line?

First, we have to remember that there's a difference between saying that God knows what is going to happen in advance and saying that God *controls* everything that happens. Think of it this way: just because you know what will happen when I drop this ball doesn't mean you control it, does it? Nope. Knowing something and controlling something are two different things.

Second, let's remember that even though God *can* control everything, *he chooses not to*. One thing he chooses not to control is whether you love Him. God will let us walk away if we choose.

Jesus once told the story of a man with two sons. One day the younger son decided that he wanted to leave home. This hurt his father terribly, but the father let the son go and even gave the boy his inheritance in advance. What added to the father's pain was that he knew what his son was going to do with that money – he was going to blow it all. He knew that he would then lose his friends. He knew that his boy would miss home. And that's exactly what happened. It wasn't long before the son was so poor that he had to feed pigs just to get something to eat. And the son felt terrible for

what he had done. So he decided to go home. When the son finally got there his father was waiting for him, ready to throw a party, like he knew that his son was going to come home all along, like he knew it was just a matter of time before he showed on the front porch [Luke 15:11-24].

When I think of that story I know that the son freely chose to leave his father and freely chose to return. His father didn't make him do anything. But I imagine, too, that the young man never would have come back if his father hadn't prepared him for that journey when the son was but a boy; his father must have taught him something important as a kid about forgiveness and grace. I even imagine that the pig farmer might have been someone that the father knew. I think the father might have been "watching out" for his son even when he couldn't see him.

That's the way it is with God. God allows us to make choices, *even bad choices*. At the same time God does everything He can to steer us back to him. In the end, though, God wants sons and daughters, not *robots*; God won't force us to love Him. He's not going to give up on us either. When we're ready to come home, God's going to be waiting for us on the porch. There's nothing we can do to make him stop loving us.

Conclusion

Don't let anyone give you a hard time for asking questions about God. Just remind them that when Jesus was 12 years old he ditched his parents and spent three days in the Temple asking the teachers there all his questions. When we ask questions we're being like Jesus. Of course I'm not suggesting that you should run away from home and hang out at a seminary, but there are worse places you could run away to. The more questions you have, the closer you are getting to the truth. Not every question can be answered in a twenty minute sermon, of course, and some can't even be answered in a lifetime. But keep asking those questions, and you will slowly be drawn to God, the One who has all the answers. Amen.

Note:

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has taken a position on the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ that stays true to this Biblical witness:

“Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, and all people everywhere are called to place their faith, hope, and love in him. No one is saved by virtue of inherent goodness or admirable living.... No one is saved apart from God’s gracious redemption in Jesus Christ. Yet we do not presume to limit the sovereign freedom of “God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” [I Tim 2:4]. [W]e neither restrict the grace of God to those who profess explicit faith in Christ nor assume that all people are saved regardless of faith. Grace, love, and communion belong to God, and are not ours to determine.”

From *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*, Lines 155-168

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