

If God Exists - How Can We Know?

Signposts to God

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A Sunday school teacher once asked his class "What is faith?"

A young boy enthusiastically called back **"Believing something you know isn't true"**

Does believing in God mean kissing my brains good-bye?

Is it a dream or a wish or a desperate answer to attempt to give meaning to my existence?

And if God exists can I really know anyway?

This is probably one of the most profound and significant questions that faces every human being.

It has been discussed and debated over centuries

Sincerely switched on people passionately hold opposing views.

Why do some people seem so certain and others so skeptical?

Where do you stand?

If you believe God exists, how do you know?

If you believe he doesn't have you weighed up the evidence?

Are there things that have happened in your life that make it hard to believe?

What I'm wanting to do tonight is to briefly suggest 5 signposts or types of evidence that point to the existence of God.

Then we've asked four different people to talk about what were and are the significant signposts for them The significant factors that led them to believe in God's reality

So that's where we're heading.....

A couple of introductory questions:

1 Can we really know anyway?

It's not possible to put God in a test tube and do repeat experiments to prove His existence.

But there are many things we accept that can't be scientifically verified.

-in a scientific sense we can't prove Napoleon

-we can't re-run the Universe and observe things again

We know and believe many things without being dependent on scientific proof.

-Some things we see and experience the effects of

-we can't measure things like love or justice

Think about how we come to conclusions in the legal world

-we usually can't "prove" guilt or innocence beyond any doubt

-what we can do is weigh up the evidence and look at reasonable doubt and certainty.

Likewise we cannot prove God's existence beyond all doubt - we can weigh up the evidence

If the evidence is so strong - that it becomes "beyond reasonable doubt" we have some responses and decisions to make.

And potentially we have a whole new way of understanding life and living.

One of the things I enjoy about preparing and thinking about topics like this - is the conversations I have. I am someone who often thinks by bouncing ideas off other people and I was discussing this question "Can I /How can I know God exists?" with one of my colleagues at work.

Her response was that because I have already made a decision that I believe God exists - that I couldn't in fact address the question. That because I believe I will only see the evidence that backs up what I already think....

My response would be that one of the key reasons I do believe is that the evidence does stack up for me.

If something is true - it is true whether or not I believe it.

In looking at the evidence this will either further confirm what I believe or challenge my beliefs.

I have no desire to hold on to something which doesn't add up.

I am not afraid to look at the evidence because I have no desire to base my life on something which is just wishful thinking or wrong.

Yes I may be more likely to see evidence that points to the conclusions I currently hold - but that doesn't mean I am blind to other evidence.

SO I can and I need not fear examining what I believe - if it is true it will stand up - if not I don't want to hold to it anyway.

A second question to ask ourselves is....

Do we want to know the answer?

How open are we to finding "truth" whatever the consequences may be??

If God exists - and there is strong evidence - what could that mean?

Might it mean changes in the way I live?

We can choose not to believe, and not to acknowledge the evidence is there simply because we do not want to or we are aware of what the consequences might be.

So lets have a look at some of the evidences or signposts that point to the existence of God....

Different ones have these have been particularly significant for people at different times and in different cultures..

For each of us different ones may be more or less significant

- **Cosmological**

The first is what we call Cosmological evidence (Cosmos - being the Universe)

The fact there is something (a universe - that exists) needs an explanation.

Basically this is the whole thing of cause and effect - which we observe all the time.

If I water the garden (or it rains) the plants grow...

There is a cause behind each corresponding effect. ... so we have the question - what caused the first cause...

The 2nd law of thermodynamics - that things run down - go from structure or chaos - also points toward the universe having a beginning.... a cause

We eventually go back to an uncaused cause - something or someone who by nature is not an effect, but is eternal - without beginning and not reliant on anything else...

God is described in the Bible like this:

"God's eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation

God has shown what these are like by all He has made"

(Romans 1:20)

God is described as being eternal - without cause - with no beginning and end

The fact the universe exists suggests there must be a first cause - this is a sign post.

- **Teleological**

The second signpost is what is often called teleological evidence.

The evidence of design in the universe - in humans, in animals, in plants, in beaches, in sunsets , in mountains- indicate a designer.

The presence of order and purpose in the Universe is everywhere and indicates someone or something ordered and purposeful behind it.

If you consider something as simple as a watch - you would presume there was a watchmaker.

If we look at the complexity and order and design a human being - or in the human eye, in even one cell, in the DNA in one cell - the order and purpose and complexity indicate not only a cause but an intelligent designer.....

Who or what gave the specifications?

The Earth itself speaks of intentional design here's just a few things

This evidence of design is a huge signpost to me of the existence of an intelligent designer.

I love being in the outdoors - whether it's walking in the bush and looking at the hundreds of different species of plants - all with their different shades of green and peculiarities - listening to all the different bird songs, watching a waterfall, going Wow at a sunset....gazing at the sky on a clear night....

Let me read you a little Steve Turner poem...

The Bible says this...

The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language

where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world.

PS 19:1-4

It's like creation bears God's fingerprints or signature.

- **Moral**

A third Signpost is moral evidence.

The fact that we all have a conscience - an innate sense of right and wrong

CS Lewis writes a lot about this and about how universally people appeal to the same sense of right and wrong.

When we say things like *"That's not fair"*, *"you promised"*, *"you lied to me"*

We are appealing to a behavioral standard we expect others to recognise..

There are things we know inside of us that are right and wrong - things that are wider than cultural norms.

Yes we can dull our consciences by continually ignoring them - but we all have them.

This is another signpost - a signpost to somebody behind the Universe who has placed this conscience, this innate knowledge of right and wrong in us.

And it is also a signpost to something of the Character of this person....

- **Humans**

A fourth signpost is that of this whole process itself.

Our human search for someone or something outside ourselves.

There have been a range of philosophical arguments at various times - around ideas such as - that because we can conceive in our minds a being who is perfect and necessary and infinite - that being must exist (else they wouldn't be perfect). This stuff gets a bit mind blowing for me...

CS Lewis points out a bit more simply that even though someone's hunger does not prove food exists it is a powerful indicator that a person has a capacity to eat..

Spiritual hunger is an indicator that there is something or someone beyond ourselves

Augustine - a very early Christian writer talked about how our hearts are restless until they find their rest or home in God.

It can often be in the hardest and lowest times in our lives that this signpost or question kicks in

The world can be a very screwed up and painful place at times

In the brokenness something in us cries out for someone and something more.

- **Experiential**

A fifth type of signpost is that of experience.

Lots of otherwise rational, responsible people believe in and claim to experience God's reality in their lives.

They experience a God who answers prayers, who gives guidance and who comforts who cares, who is a friend.

Many people who choose to believe and trust and follow Jesus and allow God to lead their lives experience profound changes. Steve talked last week about John Newton the man who wrote "Amazing Grace" - one of the most ruthless slave traders who came to know and experience God in his life and was radically changed.

For me the changes may have possibly been more internal - although that hopefully flows out through who I am. From being someone incredibly driven and desperate to prove I was OK, while feeling like I was value less, tolerated by people, and often close to losing hope - God has begun to rework foundational stuff in my life to restore hope in me and so I am beginning to know that I am valued for who I am - not just in my head but in the core of who I am.

For me that's radical change and I'm sure there are many other stories from others here in this room who have experienced God in a real way..

So that's five signposts, or areas of evidence that can point to God's existence and reality.

The things we've talked about tonight are all things that either point us to God's existence - or if we believe in God - maybe can add weight to that for us... in terms of knowing that the evidence is strong..

However believing in God is more than an intellectual search ...

There can be big steps from believing in God rationally to knowing that he cares for us, knowing that he has a purpose for us, knowing that he is good.

So I would like to pray that God would not only increasingly make us aware of the signposts to him but that we would actually connect with him and that our hearts would find rest in him...

Let's pray:

God - wherever we're at with you,

Whether we're not sure you're even exist

Whether we know you're real but are afraid or hurt or scared of you.

Whether we're disappointed with you or excited about you....

Please show you are real to each of us... and give us the courage to keep discovering more of you.

Amen