



FAITH IS LIKE SKYDIVING
AND OTHER MEMORABLE IMAGES FOR DIALOGUE WITH SEEKERS AND SKEPTICS
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

- 1) Think of a time when you were unprepared for a conversation with a seeker or skeptic.
 - a. What were the issues involved?
 - b. What happened? Did you draw a blank? Ramble? Tell your story.
- 2) If you were more prepared for these kinds of conversations, what difference would it make in your witness?

CHAPTER 1. FAITH IS LIKE SKYDIVING: LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

- 1) If you are a Christian, how did your faith journey begin—on the emotional side or the intellectual?
- 2) How about later on? If you've continued with your faith, is it based mostly on emotion, intellect or both?
- 3) How is skydiving analogous to the evidential stage of faith?
- 4) What's the difference between blind faith and informed faith?
- 5) How do you respond to the charge that faith cannot be supported by evidence? That faith and evidence are in separate, airtight compartments?
- 6) Practice using the skydiving and marriage analogies with a Christian friend, or with a seeker or skeptic.

CHAPTER 2. PLAY YOUR WHOLE ORCHESTRA: THE CUMULATIVE CASE FOR FAITH

- 1) How does everything in life point to God?
- 2) Describe what a “cumulative case” is. How can it be used?
- 3) How does a lawyer bring together “converging lines of evidence” to make her case?
- 4) Do you see God at work in all fields of study? How so? Talk about a favorite discipline or area of study for you, and how God might be speaking there. Examples include mathematics, literature, science and music.
- 5) How would you respond to the charge from a skeptic that unless your evidence for Christianity is confined to the scientific realm, you're really not making sense at all?
- 6) How might the analogy of the orchestra help you in conversations?
- 7) What are your favorite sections of the “orchestra”? Personal testimony? Philosophical or scientific arguments? What specific instruments correspond to them, and why?

CHAPTER 3. HOW THE WORLD CAME TO BE: THE GRAND DESIGNER

- 1) What are the three main explanations for the origin of the universe? Which one makes most sense to you?

- 2) Think of a skeptical or seeking friend. Which explanation does he or she hold to? Why?
- 3) What critique can you make of the idea of an eternal universe?
- 4) What is the main point of Kreeft and Tacelli's image of borrowing a book?
- 5) What critique can you make of the idea of the universe coming into being by itself?
- 6) What was the "blind leap of faith" that Lee Strobel was unwilling to make?
- 7) How can you respond to the question, "If the universe came from God, where did God come from?"

CHAPTER 4. THE WORLD IS LIKE A ROYAL FLUSH: A CASE FOR THE DESIGN OF THE UNIVERSE

- 1) What are the two main arguments from design mentioned in the chapter? Which (if either) do you find most convincing?
- 2) If you are a Christian, how can you show yourself to be a supporter of science?
- 3) Why is a cumulative case for faith so vital for design arguments?
- 4) What do you think of Evans and Manis's idea that subjectivity plays a big role in making arguments, and that the test of a good argument is whether it is persuasive to real persons?
- 5) **Practice**
 - a. Read again the royal flush analogy and then verbalize it to a friend.
 - b. Memorize a few of the "fine-tuning" properties and try them out on a skeptical friend. What is the person's response?
- 6) Ask a skeptical friend:
 - a. How do you explain the amazing "coincidences" in the universe?
 - b. If you believe in the multiverse theory, where did all the universes come from? What got them started? What is your universe "generator"?
 - c. What do you think of Antony Flew's conversion to theism? Could you ever see yourself following a similar path?
- 7) Why is it important to the argument from design that Collins's six radio dials are set independently from each other?
- 8) Create your own analogies for intelligent design. (Examples to get you started: the lottery, a discovery in the wilderness, a painting, perennial winning/losing sports teams.)

CHAPTER 5. JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD: A MASSIVE CONSPIRACY?

- 1) Summarize the content of each letter of MODEMS in a sentence or two.
- 2) Recall what a "cumulative case" argument is. How does MODEMS function this way?
- 3) **Self-application**
 - a. Which of the six letters of MODEMS do you find most convincing? Explain your answer.
 - b. Which, if any, do you struggle with most? Explain your answer.

- 4) **Practice:** Explain the MODEMS content to a sympathetic friend, then to a skeptic. Afterward: How did the presentations go? Where can you improve your grasp of the material? What were the responses of the two friends?
- 5) **Practice** using the analogy of a “massive conspiracy theory” with a friend.
- 6) Create your own analogy: Can you think of any other analogies for a massive conspiracy? (Hint: think of the worlds of politics and sports. Or just try Googling “conspiracy theories.”)

CHAPTER 6. THE TELEPHONE GAME: WHY THE BIBLE IS NOT FULL OF ERRORS

- 1) What objection to biblical reliability does Bart Ehrman make? Compare this situation of the Bible with other ancient writings from Josephus, Homer, Plato and Thucydides.
- 2) According to Craig Blomberg, what percent of the original writings of the New Testament are we able to reconstruct? And how does this compare with other ancient texts?
- 3) What methods do modern scholars use to weed out errors and reconstruct the original writings of the New Testament?
- 4) What are Timothy Paul Jones’s three principles for choosing the “best text” when there are problems? What does each mean?
- 5) Imagine yourself as a scribe copying extensive biblical texts. What would be some of the challenges you face?
- 6) Try playing the telephone game in a circle with some friends. Then, if you have enough people, add another circle and another. Use the same phrase with all the circles and see if someone outside the game can capture the original phrase by comparing the circles.
- 7) **Practice:** Ask several friends if they think the Bible has been corrupted over the centuries, and why they believe what they do. Then break out the telephone game analogy and hear their response.

CHAPTER 7. BROKEN WORLD: AND OTHER IMAGES FOR THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

- 1) What’s the difference between moral evil and natural evil?
- 2) What caused each?
- 3) How does the image of a broken world sum up both moral and natural evil?
- 4) **Self-application**
 - a. In what ways have you experienced suffering and evil in your life? Perhaps it’s your own health issues or those of your loved ones. Perhaps you’ve been the victim of a crime or personal attack.
 - b. How can you use those experiences to understand (and perhaps help heal) the pain of others?
- 5) How does the picture of the suffering Christ help make sense of the brokenness of the world?

- 6) **Practice** using the analogies and images of this chapter with a friend.
 - a. the Big Story
 - b. the robot
 - c. the persevering parent
 - d. the remote control
 - e. the dysfunctional family
- 7) Ask an atheist or other non-Christian friend how their worldview deals with the problem of suffering and evil. Then ask if you can share a quick version of the Big Story or another analogy from this chapter.

CHAPTER 8. CHRISTIANS BEHAVING BADLY: DON'T BLAME THE HAMMER

- 1) Name some of the worst sins committed by Christians in history or in your personal experience. How do you respond personally to these occurrences of Christians behaving badly?
- 2) **Self-application:** How do you respond to the call to take responsibility for the sins of fellow Christians—even from decades or centuries past?
- 3) **Practice:** How often have you heard the objection of “hypocrisy in the church” from friends, co-workers, relatives?
 - a. Try starting a conversation with some of them by asking their opinion of the church and its troubles.
 - b. Use the hammer analogy and get their response.
 - c. Bring up imposters, redemptive ways to use the hammer and parallels to the hammer.

CHAPTER 9. RELIGIONS ARE LIKE BOOKS: AND OTHER IMAGES FOR DISCUSSING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

- 1) What, if anything, is appealing to you about religious pluralism? What's the main flaw?
- 2) **Practice**
 - a. With a Christian friend, respond to the following statements:
 - “All religions are pretty much the same.”
 - “Pluralism is egalitarian and inclusive.”
 - “Religions are like several blind men crawling on an elephant . . .”
 - “Christians are exclusive and arrogant.”
 - b. With a non-Christian friend, ask them what they think about the presence of so many religions in the world. Then try out the following analogies for religions: books, buildings, bodies of water.
- 3) Create your own analogies. What are some other things you can think of that look similar on the surface but are quite different underneath (food, clothes on people, etc.)?

CHAPTER 10. CAN THOSE WHO'VE NEVER HEARD OF JESUS BE SAVED? THE HOMELESS PERSON ANALOGY

- 1) What is the main objection the critic is making in this chapter?
- 2) In what ways is Christianity inclusive? Exclusive?

- 3) What is prevenient grace, and how does it affect the person who's never heard of Jesus?
- 4) **Self-application**
 - a. What are your beliefs about the exclusive claims of Christianity?
 - b. In what ways do you see God leaving clues and signs of his presence?
- 5) **Practice**
 - a. With a Christian friend: Role-play a conversation with a pluralist (all religions are valid), a universalist (all humanity is saved through Jesus) and an atheist. Focus on the homeless person analogy.
 - b. With a non-Christian friend: Ask what they think of the exclusive claims of Christianity. Talk about God's clues and signs, and bring up the homeless person analogy. Ask for their response. Listen carefully and become a "clue" yourself as you show God's love.
- 6) Create your own analogies. What other things in life are "hidden in plain view"? (Think about things that might be staring us right in the face but that we fail to see, such as a potential romance, a job opportunity or other things missed because of psychological blinders.)

CHAPTER 11. HELL IS LIKE AN EMPTY PUB

- 1) Why is hell likely a place of isolation and loneliness?
- 2) What's the strongest reason to believe in hell?
- 3) **Self-application**
 - a. Do you believe in hell? Why or why not?
 - b. The empty pub image depicts hell as the absence of God. Many thinkers believe hell is a more severe experience that involves torment. What do you think? What Scriptures support your position?
 - c. Do you believe that a God of love could "send people to hell"? Why or why not?
- 4) **Practice**
 - a. With a Christian friend, talk about hell as an empty pub and what that implies: isolation, loneliness. Also, practice answering questions about hell such as the strongest reasons to believe in hell, whether hell has been used as a tool of manipulation, whether an atheist really has a "choice" about hell, and whether hell as "punishment" fits the "crime."
 - b. With a non-Christian friend, ask whether the person believes in hell, and why or why not. Try out the empty pub analogy and see what they say.
- 5) Create your own analogies. Think of other images of isolation and loneliness that would depict the idea of hell as the absence of God.

CHAPTER 12. ELEPHANT TRAPS: AND OTHER IMAGES FOR SCIENCE AND FAITH

- 1) What are the main objections of "science-only" skeptics toward faith?
- 2) What is the "presumption of atheism"?
- 3) What's a closed system?

- 4) What is parsimony or Occam's Razor?
- 5) **Self-application**
 - a. Does your commitment to science ever cause you to struggle with faith? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you see science as a gift from God? Explain your answer.
- 6) **Practice**
 - a. Ask a Christian friend to role-play a science-only skeptic. Try to explain the analogies: elephant traps, novelist, bricklayer, shrinking island, smoking gun.
 - b. With a non-Christian friend, ask the questions on p. 148:
 - What if God isn't the sort of being who is directly observable by science?
 - What if God has revealed himself to us in other ways?
 - What if God asks us to discover him on his terms rather than ours?
 - c. With a non-Christian friend, start with the elephant traps analogy and hear their response. Then move on, if possible, to the other analogies.
- 7) Create your own analogies. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. Using "science only" to find God is like . . . (example: *using a microscope to gaze at the stars*).
 - b. Forcing God to reveal himself through one single discipline—science—is like . . . (example: *telling God he can't disclose himself through widely scattered showers, but must do so through a downpour in one small area*).

CHAPTER 13. MIRACLES ARE LIKE A HOLE IN ONE

- 1) What does it mean to "define miracles out of existence"?
- 2) Summarize Hume's case against miracles, including the "cumulative effect" of natural law operating normally.
- 3) In the parable of Jim and his daughter Ashley, what were Jim's prior assumptions that prevented him from believing his daughter scored an ace?
- 4) If a skeptic were to witness a miracle, why might he still disbelieve?
- 5) **Self-application**
 - a. Do you believe in miracles? Why or why not?
 - b. How would you respond if a child that you love claimed to have accomplished a near-impossible feat, similar to Ashley's hole in one?
 - c. For a humorous satire on miracles, Google search "Donall and Conall Meet Richard Dawkins." In this piece from Lutheran Satire, two fictional peasants make a nice argument against science-only skepticism (five minutes long).
- 6) **Practice**
 - a. With a Christian friend: Ask your friend to role-play a skeptic who doesn't believe in miracles. Make a counterargument using the hole in one analogy.
 - b. With a non-Christian friend: Ask if he or she believes in miracles, and why or why not. Explain the hole in one analogy and ask for the person's response. Ask your friend if they'd believe in a miracle if they saw one firsthand.

CHAPTER 14. HOW TO TALK WITH SKEPTICS: AN INTRODUCTION

- 1) What are the three “layers” you might find in a non-Christian friend? What elements might be found in each layer?
- 2) How can you bring up spiritual topics or parts of the gospel in a conversation?
- 3) Describe modern and postmodern persons. What are the main differences? How might these differences matter in your witness?
- 4) **Self-application**
 - a. Do you think of yourself as a good listener? A good conversationalist? What do you do well? How could you improve?
 - b. Do you tend to let on early in relationships that you are a Christian? Why or why not?
 - c. What skeptic or seeker might God have placed strategically in your life? What is God calling you to do with this person (such as initiate conversation or form a deeper friendship)?

CHAPTER 15. HOW TO TALK WITH MODERN SKEPTICS WHO BELIEVE IN GOD

- 1) Chapter 15 offers three suggestions for relating to modern skeptics who believe in God. Summarize each:
 - Point to the truth.
 - Point to heaven and hell.
 - Prepare for the belief of unbelievers.
- 2) **Self-application:** Do you know any modern skeptics? Do they believe in God? How might you approach them with the message of Christ?
- 3) **Practice** sharing the gospel with someone role-playing a modern skeptic who believes in God.

CHAPTER 16. HOW TO TALK WITH MODERN ATHEISTS

- 1) Pick a few of the nine suggestions for relating to modern-thinking atheists, and summarize them. Which of the nine are most important to you?
 - a. Care.
 - b. Pray.
 - c. Play your whole orchestra.
 - d. Use your head.
 - e. Distinguish between the “new” atheists and all the rest.
 - f. Deconstruct.
 - g. Retreat when necessary.
 - h. Find the passive-active balance.
 - i. Remember the power of community.
- 2) What are some common atheist tactics? How have you seen these used by atheists?
- 3) What does it mean to “read the Bible flat”?
- 4) Do you know any Christians who are former atheists? What brought them to faith?
- 5) Name and pray for any atheists that might be in your life now.

CHAPTER 17. HOW TO TALK WITH POSTMODERN SEEKERS AND SKEPTICS

- 1) Summarize each of the five thresholds given us by Everts and Schaupp.
- 2) When postmodern truth is found in the form of relativism, how might we respond?
- 3) How is the ideal of “tolerance” often applied inconsistently by postmodern thinkers? What are positive, helpful ways to practice the virtue of tolerance?
- 4) What postmodern profile is suggested by the image of a brick in a pillowcase? How can we respond to friends who embody this image?
- 5) How can stories be used to touch the lives of postmoderns, including the stories of Jesus?
- 6) What is the potential role of community in reaching out to postmoderns?
- 7) Brainstorm some ways to reach out to postmoderns using the categories of community, stories, art, spiritual experiences and the like.
- 8) Name someone in your life who takes a postmodern approach (or brick in a pillowcase) to things. How can you best connect with this person? Be specific.

EPILOGUE

- 1) How can you better rely on the Holy Spirit for your apologetic conversations?
- 2) To what extent do your conversational skills eventually point toward Jesus? How can you improve on this?