



*Paradoxology: Why Christianity Was Never Meant to Be Simple*  
**Available February 2017**  
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*"If what we believe is true, it will stand up to questioning."*  
 — Krish Kandiah

## Deepening Faith Through Difficult Questions

In *Paradoxology*, Krish Kandiah helps readers deepen their faith in and knowledge of God through engaging the difficult questions of Christian belief. Writing to young adults seeking authentic answers and thinking Christians wanting to reengage with the Bible's toughest portions, Kandiah does not downplay or quickly dismiss any question. Instead, he provides convincing answers through thoughtful and clearly worded chapters on paradoxes found throughout the Bible.

"There have been a huge number of questions about the Christian faith that I have never heard convincing answers to, and so I went on a quest to try and answer them for myself," Kandiah said. "As I investigated them, I realized that they could help other people too."

*Paradoxology* includes the following chapters:

### Introduction

1. The Abraham Paradox: *The God who needs nothing but asks for everything*
2. The Moses Paradox: *The God who is far away, so close*
3. The Joshua Paradox: *The God who is terribly compassionate*
4. The Job Paradox: *The God who is actively inactive*
5. The Hosea Paradox: *The God who is faithful to the unfaithful*
6. The Habakkuk Paradox: *The God who is consistently unpredictable*
7. The Jonah Paradox: *The God who is indiscriminately selective*
8. The Esther Paradox: *The God who speaks silently*
9. The Jesus Paradox: *The God who is divinely human*
10. The Judas Paradox: *The God who determines our free will*
11. The Cross Paradox: *The God who wins as he loses*
12. The Roman Paradox: *The God who is effectively ineffective*
13. The Corinthian Paradox: *The God who fails to disappoint*

*Epilogue: Living with Paradox*

Kandiah (PhD, Kings College London) is the founder and director of Home for Good, a charity finding homes for foster children and young refugees. He is currently the vice president of Tearfund, a Christian relief and development agency. Previously, he was president of London School of Theology and also on faculty at Oxford University.

Kandiah is an international speaker, teaching regularly at Regent College and George Fox Seminary. He has also worked with students in the UK with UCCF, and in Albania with IFES. He is the author of several books, including *Home for Good*.



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## Finding Faith in a God of Paradoxes

It seems that the God of the Christian faith is full of paradoxes that ought to undermine Christian belief. How can a God who is compassionate sanction genocide? Or be all-powerful, yet allow horrific suffering?

In his new book, *Paradoxology*, Krish Kandiah makes a bold claim: these paradoxes are actually the heart of vibrant faith, for it is in the most difficult parts of the Bible that we come to a clearer understanding of who God really is.

To help readers engage with the tough questions of faith, Kandiah addresses paradoxes in the lives of biblical characters from Abraham to Judas, from Job to Jesus. He addresses questions such as the following:

- What if the tension between apparently opposing doctrines is exactly where faith comes alive?
- What if this ancient faith we call Christianity has survived so long not in spite of but because of its apparent contradictions?
- What if we have settled for neatly packaged, simplistic answers, instead of seeking out the deep and rich realities of our faith?
- What if it is in and through our doubts that we learn the meaning of true relationship with the God who created us – of true worship?
- How can Christians build a faith so robust that it gets stronger the harder that life gets?
- How can Christians develop a confidence in the gospel that means we are not afraid to stand up for our faith or allow it to direct our every action, thought, and hope?
- How can Christians understand genocide, suffering, and free will?
- How can Christians understand the fact that Jesus is both God and human?
- Why does God often feel so distant when he promises to be close?
- Are the paradoxes of the Christian faith really defensible?



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## The Moses Paradox: The God Who Is Far away, so Close

For many people around the world, the inability to see or locate God is taken as grounds enough to deny his existence altogether. The need to reconcile the fact that a supposedly omnipresent God feels impossibly distant from us is a paradox believers have wrestled with throughout history. Christians worldwide talk about and seek out sacred spaces, ‘mountaintop experiences’ and hallowed ground to worship God.

Without a clear grasp of the location of God we could easily end up compartmentalizing our lives, assuming he is distant from us when we are not in our church buildings. We could think God is not available to us any more when the ‘mountain-top’ worship experiences have been left behind and we are in the valley of the mundane, stuck in the drudgery of the domestic. We could accuse God of not caring when we don’t feel him by our side in times of crisis. If we don’t wrestle with this paradox, we run the risk of not knowing how to find God in the loneliness of leadership, the sting of suffering or the darkness of doubt.

The paradox of the whereabouts of God needs to be addressed, both to commend the faith to those who don’t believe and to strengthen the faith of those who do.

If God is as the Bible describes him, then he surely shouldn’t be hard to find. The Bible teaches that God is present everywhere: if we were to go up to the heavens or to the depths of the oceans, God is there. God is the one in whom all of creation holds together, we are told, and he is described as being not far from us. The heroes of the Old Testament certainly seem to physically see and hear God, walk with him and talk to him. In the New Testament Paul reminds us that ‘in him we live and move and have our being.’ Scripture declares that God is unmissable in his universe, and involved in the intricacies of our personal lives. He promises his presence with us wherever we go. In fact he promises all believers that he will never leave us or forsake us.

However, the Bible also teaches that God is elusive and distant. His ways ‘are above our ways’. He is the ‘Lord of Heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’. The Psalmists call on a God who seems to have hidden himself and abandoned his people; time after time they talk about seeking God, thirsting for God, longing for God, or remembering God – all suggesting he is currently unavailable. Even in the New Testament we are reminded that ‘no one has ever seen God’, at least not in his glory.

Paradoxically, even God himself experienced the absence of God – Jesus, the Son of God himself, cried in despair from the cross: ‘My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?’ And so the Bible itself is caught up in this problem. How can God be both everywhere present, promising he will be with us at all times, and yet also so intangible that for much of



**Krish Kandiah**, author of  
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our lives we don't see, hear or feel him at all? How can we worship a God who says he is here with us, when so often it feels like he is nowhere to be found?

We call this the Moses Paradox, because although Moses himself regularly had unique encounters with God's presence, he also stands alone in his understanding of the limitations of access to God. Moses is the only person who is described as seeing God face to face, but he is also the one who has to protect and prevent others from seeing him; he builds the Tabernacle to house the presence of God, and is given the laws to restrict who had access to it. Moses knew the presence of God – he also knew the distance of God. How did Moses reconcile this tension in himself, and what can we learn from this for our own lives?

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My collar was a bit tight and the dinner jacket, which I had borrowed from a teenager in our church, was a bit too long in the sleeve. But I was there, at London's Leicester Square, on the red carpet and with paparazzi all around. I was loitering with intent: this was no ordinary movie premiere, this was a royal premiere with the Queen herself due to join us in the auditorium. The red carpet was disappearing fast under a layer of real snow (topped up by some fake) as I mingled with the stars. I had spotted former Wimbledon tennis champion Boris Becker, various C-list celebrities from a reality TV talent contest and Qui-Gon Jinn (or, as non-members of the *Star Wars* fan club call him, Liam Neeson).

I was poised, ready with my camera to snatch an exclusive of Her Majesty, when suddenly two huge men with sunglasses appeared. I was about to ask them why they were wearing sunglasses in winter at night-time, but before I could say anything, they ushered me and my camera into the empty cinema while all the important people carried on their loitering outside of the cinema. Apparently riff-raff weren't allowed to be on the red carpet at the same time as the elites.

I never did snatch a picture of the Queen wearing her first ever pair of 3D glasses, and Qui-Gon didn't have time to sign my *Star Wars* calendar. As I sat there, far away from the stars I had come to see, I reflected on my own experience of God. Normally I don't think about my proximity to the Queen of England, but just when I was actually the closest to her, I felt the furthest away.

There have been times when I have felt very close to God, but there have also been many times when I have sensed a distance from him; in retrospect, perhaps the occasions overlapped. But when I experienced distance from God, I did not feel like I was being ushered away from a celebrity who had no time for little, insignificant people. Quite the opposite: when I felt distant from God, I knew that the desire to draw close to him came from God himself.

Sometimes I know that my feeling of distance from God is not just due to God's transcendence, but due to my own stupidity, sin or selfishness. It is not always he who is

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# BOOK EXCERPT

*It is for our protection that God keeps his distance, but it is for our salvation that God comes close.*

distant; often it's me. He calls me closer, but I feel ashamed or fearful or inadequate. It is no accident that the first time the question 'Where are you?' appears in the Bible, it was not from people looking for God, but from God, looking for his people. Adam and Eve's sin and shame had caused them to try to hide from God, and millions have followed in their footsteps. Similarly, it was not Moses looking for God in the desert – he too was trying to hide from the consequences of his sinful actions – but God seeking out Moses as he called to him from the burning bush.

It was no accident, either, that God appeared to Moses as a flame. The movement of a flame and its bright colours attract us, and yet the heat of the flame pushes us away. This is the 'fearful and fascinating Mystery' of God that the German theologian Rudolf Otto celebrated.

The burning bush drew Moses' attention and yet he was told not to come too close because of the dangerous holiness of God: this encounter gives us a visual aid of our presence – distance paradox. Fire is a symbol of purity. The moral purity of a perfect God draws us to him, but his holiness and our sinfulness separate us. God has to bar us from his presence in order to protect us – we would survive in the white-hot radiance of God's moral perfection no longer than an ice cube on the surface of the sun. It is for our protection that God keeps his distance, but it is for our salvation that God comes close.

The moment this was most perfectly symbolized was when the sky turned black and the Son of God, feeling the pain of the unique occasion of separation from his Father, cried out, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' Then, the huge curtain in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom, allowing anybody and everybody access to the most restricted part, called the Holy of Holies. This was the moment when God invited us – all of us – to get close and personal with the King of Heaven. It ushered in a new era when God could be accessed not only at the physical temple, but through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' death seemed like the end for this so-called prophet and 'King of the Jews'. But instead it was a final blow to the problem that separated us from God's presence. Now, when we search for God, we can find him, as millions around the world can testify. And one day we will be with him and see him face to face. One day the dwelling of God will truly be with his people.

In the meantime, because of the nature of the character of God, there is no escaping the apparent absence of the everywhere-present God. We are required to wrestle with it in our public life and in our private life, in our personal life and our corporate life, in our worship in the world, and in the church.

The tension between these elements, though, is exactly what will help us cross the secular-sacred divide, pray well and relate well to God. We have not resolved all of the questions this issue raises, and more clarity will come as we explore the paradoxes surrounding Job



# BOOK EXCERPT

and Judas, but the Moses Paradox helps us to understand – and accept – that we simply must live in, rather than trying to avoid, the tension between the distant but ever-present God.

Sometimes we will feel God especially close, and sometimes we will wish he felt closer. Both states of being are essential to our spiritual health.

*– Adapted from chapter two, “The Moses Paradox”*