

Is God Real?

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Endorsements

Praise for *Is God Real?*

Is God Real? is vintage Lee Strobel. His books are always clear, interesting, and chock-full of ideas, and they do not dodge the tough questions for which people need answers. *Is God Real?* may be his best book yet. It focuses on the most fundamental topics a human being can ask: Is there a God and a purpose to life? If so, what is God like? How do we really know that our answers to these questions are true and reasonable? Moreover, Strobel's selection of expert interviewees could not be improved on. I urge atheists, Christians, and members of other religions to read this book. It is so good that intellectual honesty requires it.

J. P. Moreland, distinguished professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

Half Title Page

Is God Real?

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Card Page

Also by Lee Strobel

The Case for Christ

The Case for Christ curriculum (with Garry Poole)

The Case for Christ for Kids (with Rob Suggs and Robert Elmer)

The Case for Christ Student Edition (with Jane Vogel)

The Case for Christmas

The Case for a Creator

The Case for a Creator curriculum (with Garry Poole)

The Case for a Creator for Kids (with Rob Suggs and Robert Elmer)

The Case for a Creator Student Edition (with Jane Vogel)

The Case for Easter

The Case for Faith

The Case for Faith curriculum (with Garry Poole)

The Case for Faith for Kids (with Rob Suggs and Robert Elmer)

The Case for Faith Student Edition (with Jane Vogel)

The Case for Heaven

The Case for Hope

The Case for Miracles

The Case for Miracles for Kids (with Jesse Floria)

The Case for Miracles Student Edition (with Jane Vogel)

God's Outrageous Claims

In Defense of Jesus

Spiritual Mismatch (with Leslie Strobel)

Today's Moment of Truth (with Mark Mittelberg)

The Unexpected Adventure (with Mark Mittelberg)

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Title Page

Is God Real?

Exploring the Ultimate Question of Life

Lee Strobel

New York Times Bestselling Author

Zondervan Books

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Copyright (print)

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

Is God Real?

Copyright © 2024 by Lee Strobel

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, *3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546*

Zondervan titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com.

ISBN 978-0-310-36787-1 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-36823-6 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-36789-5 (audio)

ISBN 978-0-310-36788-8 (ePub)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-310-36787-1

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version. Public domain.

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The author is represented by the literary agent Don Gates @ THE GATES GROUP, www.the-gates-group.com.

Cover design:

Cover photo:

Interior design: Denise Froehlich

Printed in the United States of America

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

Dedication

To Tony and Debbie Ferguson—

encouragers

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Contents

Contents

- Introduction
- Exploring Whether God Is Real
1. The Cosmos Requires a Creator
Interview with Dr. William Lane Craig
 2. The Universe Needs a Fine-Tuner
Interview with Dr. Michael Strauss
 3. Our DNA Demands a Designer
Interview with Dr. Stephen Meyer
 4. Easter Showed That Jesus Is God
Interview with Dr. Michael Licona
 5. Experiencing God
Interview with Dr. Douglas Groothuis
 6. Which God Is Real?
Interview with Dr. Chad Meister
 7. Challenge #1: If God Is Real, Why Is There Suffering?
Interview with Dr. Peter Kreeft
 8. Challenge #2: If God Is Real, Why Is He So Hidden?

Interview with Kenneth Samples

Conclusion

Your Encounter with the Real God

Recommended Resources for Further Investigation

Guide for Reflection and Group Discussion

Acknowledgments

Meet Lee Strobel

Notes

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute

Introduction

Introduction

Exploring Whether God Is Real

Believing in something doesn't make it true. Hoping that something is true doesn't make it true. The existence of God is not subjective. He either exists or he doesn't. It's not a matter of opinion. You can have your own opinions. But you can't have your own facts.

Ricky Gervais, "Why I'm an Atheist,"

Wall Street Journal, December 9, 2010

More than two hundred times a second, around the clock, someone is asking an online search engine about God—often with the simple inquiry, "Is God real?" If you type that question into Google, you'll get 3.7 billion results in two-thirds of a second—a digital tidal wave that generates more confusion than enlightenment.¹

As for those who seek wisdom from the disembodied voice of Siri, there's only disappointment. Asked if God is real, she replies with a seeming shrug: "It's all a mystery to me." Even Artificial Intelligence comes up short. When ChatGPT is asked whether God exists, it offers a shallow overview of competing perspectives before concluding, "I cannot give a personal opinion on this matter."

Indeed, the question of whether God is real is the most consequential issue of all because so much hangs on the answer. What exactly is at stake? As evolutionary biologist William Provine said in a debate, if there is no creator, then these are the inescapable implications for humankind:

- There's no evidence for God.
- There's no life after death.
- There's no absolute foundation for right and wrong.
- There's no absolute meaning for life.
- People don't really have free will.ⁱⁱ

In recent years, the percentage of Americans who believe in God has been declining. According to Gallup, 87 percent said they believed in God in 2017, but that number dropped to 81 percent by 2022—the lowest in American history. In contrast, the number was 98 percent in 1967. When pressed about whether they are *certain* that God exists, only 64 percent of US adults now say yes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Callout

The question of whether God is real is the most consequential issue of all because so much hangs on the answer.

end Callout

Still, there are some positive spiritual signs as well. A survey in late 2022 showed that three out of four US adults said they want to grow spiritually, and nearly half (44 percent) said they are more open to God today than before the COVID-19 pandemic.^{iv} Three-quarters of Millennials say they're "searching for a sense of purpose in life."^v

The numbers are starker for younger Americans. Generation Z (those born between 1999 and 2015) has been called the first post-Christian generation. For them, said Barna Research, “‘atheist’ is no longer a dirty word.” They are twice as likely to call themselves atheist as older adults (13 percent versus 6 percent).^{vi}

At the same time, rates of depression and anxiety are soaring among young people. According to a 2023 report by the Centers for Disease Control, “almost 60 percent of female students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year and nearly 25 percent made a suicide plan.”^{vii}

“The bad news is that Gen Z is flat on its back, knocked down by sadness, loneliness, and anxiety,” said youth ministry expert Greg Stier. The good news, he said, is that this sense of hopelessness is resulting in an increased openness to seeking spiritual answers.^{viii}

Shane Pruitt, who travels the country to speak with young people about faith, said in 2023, “I’ve personally seen more college students and teens start following Jesus in the last three years than in the previous eighteen years of ministry combined.”^{ix}

Pollster David Kinnaman put it this way: “The rumors of Christianity’s demise among younger people are greatly exaggerated.”^x In fact, predictions about the death of Christianity in America date back two hundred years, with Thomas Jefferson claiming in the 1820s that Christianity would soon give way to a more modern faith that eschewed miracles. Yet these prognostications have failed to materialize.^{xi}

I’ve spoken with a lot of people from various generations and found that so many of them are sincerely interested in exploring faith, with quite a few genuinely intrigued and even enthralled by Jesus. In my view, it’s difficult not to have a sense of spiritual optimism, despite some of the troubling trends.

Right now, where do you stand on the question of whether God is real? Does the needle on your spiritual gauge point more toward skepticism or belief? Or would you say you're somewhere in the middle, not hostile toward faith but honestly interested in following the evidence wherever it leads?

Rejecting Belief in God

Among those who are convinced that God doesn't exist is British comedian and armchair philosopher Ricky Gervais. In an essay titled "Why I'm an Atheist," he explained that when he was about eight years old, Jesus was his hero. One day, he was at the kitchen table drawing a picture of Christ when his older brother Bob came in and asked, "Why do you believe in God?"

Said Gervais, "Just a simple question. But my mum panicked. 'Bob,' she said in a tone that I knew meant, 'Shut up!' Why was that a bad thing to ask? If there was a God and my faith was strong it didn't matter what people said. Oh . . . hang on. There is no God. He knows it, and she knows it deep down. It was as simple as that. I started thinking about it and asking more questions, and within an hour, I was an atheist."^{xii}

Others have reached a similar conclusion for varying reasons. The founding publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, Michael Shermer, told me he was led to Christ by his friend George when they were in high school, though Shermer admits he had mixed motives because he thought a conversion might help his odds of dating George's sister. Shermer lived as an evangelical Christian until he gradually lost his faith in college, where a professor attacked his beliefs and Shermer didn't find satisfying answers to some of his nettlesome theological questions.

Then his college sweetheart became paralyzed in a motor vehicle accident. Shermer asked God to heal her, and yet she remained disabled. I asked Shermer, "Was this the final nail in the

coffin of your faith?” He replied, “Yeah, that pretty much did it. I was like, ‘Ah, the heck with it.’”^{xiii}

Can you relate to that? Has there been a time when you called out to God during a crisis but felt like you were only talking to yourself? For some people, God seems too hidden to be real.

Charles Templeton was the pastor of a burgeoning church in Toronto and pulpit partner of renowned evangelist Billy Graham before morphing into Canada’s best-known spiritual skeptic. When I asked Templeton if there had been one thing in particular that caused him to lose his faith in God, he said it was a photograph in *Life* magazine many years earlier.

“It was a picture of a Black woman in northern Africa,” he told me. “They were experiencing a devastating drought. And she was holding her dead baby in her arms and looking up to heaven with the most forlorn expression. I looked at it and I thought, *Is it possible to believe there is a loving or caring creator when all this woman needed was rain?*”

He shook his head. “I immediately knew it is not possible for this to happen and for there to be a loving God. There was no way.”

Interestingly, though, Templeton broke down in tears during our interview because he said he missed Jesus—and there’s reason to believe he did ultimately return to faith in God on his deathbed a few years later.^{xiv}

Scholar Bart Ehrman said he left Christianity to become an agnostic partly because his research on the text of the New Testament cast doubt on the Bible’s reliability—ironic because he dedicated his book on the topic to his mentor, Bruce Metzger, who told me that his own study of the matter only served to *deepen* his faith.^{xv}

Like Templeton, Ehrman also attributed his abandonment of Christianity to his inability to reconcile the existence of pain and anguish with a loving God. “For many people who inhabit

this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering,” he wrote. “I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it.”^{xvi}

Among evangelical Christians, a phenomenon called deconstruction has been gaining notoriety in recent years. Some people have found that this systematic dissecting and reexamining of their beliefs has led to a stronger and more secure faith in the end. But Alisa Childers, author of *Another Gospel?*, has warned that “sometimes the Christian will deconstruct all the way into atheism.”^{xvii} In many instances, she said, the deconstructed faith fails to retain “any vestiges of actual Christianity.”^{xviii}

The size of the trend is uncertain, but by 2023, there were already nearly 350,000 posts on Instagram using the hashtag #deconstruction.^{xix} Said Sean McDowell and John Marriott in their book *Set Adrift: Deconstructing What You Believe without Sinking Your Faith*, “College students and young adults are finding it increasingly difficult to retain their faith and, as a result, are deconverting from it.”^{xx}

As for me, however, I went in a far different direction. I deconstructed my atheism.^{xxi}

From Skepticism to Belief

For years, I was a happy spiritual skeptic, with degrees in journalism and law and enjoying my career as a legal editor at the *Chicago Tribune*.^{xxii} Then my agnostic wife’s conversion to Christianity prompted me to spend nearly two years investigating whether God is real, focusing largely on the resurrection of Jesus.

Reluctantly, I became convinced that Jesus not only claimed to be the unique Son of God, but he also proved it by rising from the dead. I put my trust in Christ in 1981, and my life has never been the same—in a good way!

In fact, I've seen that kind of story again and again among people I've encountered down through the years. For example, just from within my sphere of relationships are these stories:

- J. Warner Wallace, a cold-case homicide detective, used his well-honed investigative skills to painstakingly analyze the historical reliability of the Gospels. He concluded that these written accounts “reliably and accurately described the resurrection of Jesus without ulterior motive.” When he realized this, “everything changed for me.”^{xxiii} He renounced his atheism and wrote the bestselling book *Cold-Case Christianity*.^{xxiv}
- Sarah Salviander, an astrophysicist raised by atheists, believed that Christianity was “philosophically trivial.” But as she was studying deuterium abundances in relation to the big bang, she became “‘completely and utterly awed’ by the underlying order of the universe and the fact it could be explored scientifically”—and she became a Christian.^{xxv} “I was awakened,” she said, “to what Psalm 19 tells us so clearly: ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’”
- Stephen McWhirter, a musician, was a methamphetamine addict. The troubled son of a pastor, he hated Christianity and yet he inexplicably accepted a book from a friend about Jesus. As he read it at 3:00 a.m. amidst his drug paraphernalia, he encountered the presence of the living God. “I went from addiction to redemption,” he said, “because God’s real.” Today he writes Christian worship songs.^{xxvi}
- Guillaume Bignon, a cynical software engineer, became a Christian after studying, among other topics, the nature of morality. Concerning his exploration of faith, he said, “I had to force myself to be open-minded because I really wanted everything to be false.” But his skepticism withered the more he explored the evidence. He not only became a

Christian, but he went on to earn his doctorate in philosophical theology and write the memoir *Confessions of a French Atheist*.^{xxvii}

- Louis Lapidès, a spiritually skeptical Vietnam veteran, examined the ancient messianic prophecies, prompting him to conclude that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the divine Messiah sent to save Israel and the world. Lapidès, raised Jewish, became a Christian and later a minister. “My friends knew my life had changed, and they couldn’t understand it,” he said. “I would say, ‘Well, I can’t explain what happened. All I know is that there’s someone in my life, and it’s someone who’s holy, who’s righteous, who’s a source of positive thoughts about life—and I just feel whole.’”^{xxviii}
- Holly Ordway, an atheist professor of English literature, started to ask herself, *What if God is real?* Christian fiction planted seeds in her imagination; Christian philosophers provided a counterpoint to her naturalistic worldview; and her fencing coach turned out to be a Christian. “I realized that I could ask my coach questions and feel safe and respected while having a dialogue about these issues,” she said. She ultimately found that the evidence of history “was best explained by concluding that the resurrection really happened.” She became a Christian, a professor of apologetics, and author of the book *Not God’s Type: A Rational Academic Finds a Radical Faith*.^{xxix}
- Cody Huff, a drug addict and convicted burglar, was living on the streets of Las Vegas when he went to get a free shower at a church. A volunteer offered a hug and the words “Jesus loves you”—and it was the pivotal moment of his life. “Right away something was different,” he told me. “The more I heard about Jesus, the more I wanted to hear. I couldn’t get enough of the Bible.” He came to faith, was ordained as a Baptist minister, and devoted the rest of his life to helping the homeless.^{xxx}

- Michael Brown, a Jewish hippie with an insatiable appetite for illicit drugs, went to rescue two friends who were attending church in pursuit of girls. Brown got into discussions with Christians about why they believed that God is real. He became a follower of Christ, and now, with a doctorate in Near Eastern Languages, he is among the foremost defenders of Jesus being the Messiah.^{xxxii}
- Thomas Tarrants, a Ku Klux Klan terrorist, was wounded in a shoot-out with the FBI when he went to firebomb the home of a civil rights leader in Mississippi. Sentenced to prison, he escaped and survived another shoot-out in which an accomplice was killed. He then spent three years by himself in a six-by-nine-foot cell—with a Bible. He delved deeply into the Scriptures, eventually coming to a profound faith in Christ that liberated him from his racial hatred. Finally released, he earned his doctorate, was named president of the C. S. Lewis Institute, and became a champion of racial reconciliation.^{xxxiii}

Again, these are just a few of the people I have personally known, and I could have added many others. All of them had some things in common. Despite their initial doubts about God, they kept an open mind and pursued the evidence and arguments wherever it took them. In the end, they were willing to reach an informed verdict in the case for God.

Yearning for the Transcendent

Let's face it, the question of whether God is real resonates deep inside all of us. Who doesn't want to know where we come from and where we're going after we die? Staring into the darkness in the middle of the night, we tend to wonder about the purpose of life.

Are we accidents of nature, destined to flourish for a brief moment and then wither and decay forever? Or are we the creation of a beneficent God who loves us and imbues meaning into our

existence? Is there really hope after the grave, or is that merely wishful thinking from the only species that is able to recognize the horror of its inevitable demise?

From time to time, we feel an innate longing for God—which might actually be evidence that he is real. “One argument for God’s existence regards the aching absence of God in human experience,” said philosopher Douglas Groothuis. “There is, on the one hand, the pained longing for the transcendent and, on the other, the sense of the inadequacy of merely earthly goods to satisfy that longing. . . . We all experience a deep sense of yearning or longing for something that the present natural world cannot fulfill—something transcendentally glorious.”^{xxxiii}

He pointed out that C. S. Lewis talked about several instances in which he sensed something wonderful beyond his grasp. “These were fleeting but invaluable moments, which he called the experience of ‘joy,’” Groothuis said. “They were indicators that the everyday world was not a self-enclosed system; a light from beyond would sometimes peek through the ‘shadow lands.’ This thirst, which is intensified by small tastes of transcendence, indicates the possibility of fulfillment.”^{xxxiv}

Wrote Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”^{xxxv}

So perhaps our longing for the transcendent is a clue that it actually does exist. And yet there could there be another explanation. Maybe our imagination conjures up the idea of God because

we desperately want to be rescued from our fear of death. Could it be that we are so frightened by our own mortality that we subconsciously manufacture false ideas about a loving deity and eternity in heaven in order to ease our death anxiety?

One way or the other, our beliefs have very real consequences. How we live our life and what we value the most inevitably flow from our convictions. The paramount question becomes whether our beliefs are based on fact or fantasy.

Callout

Our beliefs have very real consequences. How we live our life and what we value the most inevitably flow from our convictions.

end Callout

My motive has been to discover truth, regardless of what the implications might be. Maybe that's fueled by my investigative reporting at the *Chicago Tribune*, where I relentlessly followed the facts to make sure I was exposing the news as accurately as I could. Or maybe it's rooted in my law training, where I came to admire the beauty of a legal system designed to ferret out the truth. Regardless, I became obsessed with getting to the bottom of whether or not there's a God and then living with the consequences, one way or the other.

If he was real, I wanted to know him personally. And if he wasn't, then I wasn't interested in playing any religious games.

Because truth matters.

“Now—Here Is My Secret”

Canadian writer Douglas Coupland, described as “possibly the most gifted exegete of North American mass culture,”^{xxxvi} authored the book *Life after God* nearly three decades ago, and yet its themes remain hauntingly relevant even today.

The book tracks a young man through a troubled era. He’s remorseful over his mistakes. His marriage has stagnated. He’s ensnared in a meaningless job. Instead of deep friendships, he endures what he calls “halfway relationships.” He’s worried that he doesn’t *feel* life the way he used to. But after 358 pages of aimlessness and frustration, this was his conclusion:

“Now—here is my secret:

I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you read these words. My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to bring me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.”^{xxxvii}

Maybe you’re a little like Coupland’s character. Perhaps you have a secret too. It could be that your circumstances are causing you to conclude that maybe—*just maybe*—you need God to breathe new hope and life into your world. Or maybe you need him to chisel the crust off a heart that’s corroded with self-interest and cynicism. Or maybe you need him because—well, to be honest, you’re not sure why. You just sense that there’s got to be more to your existence than a job, three meals a day, and the gnawing feeling that something’s missing.

So you've started reading this book to see if it really makes sense to believe that God is real. Questions swirl in your mind. And maybe you're a little afraid of what you might find.

Or possibly you know a lot about the *idea* of God, but you're realizing that you don't really know God *personally*. You went to church as a kid or even went through some religious classes, but all of it has seemed to have numbed you toward God more than sensitized you to him. If someone asked, you'd say you were a spiritual person, although the truth is that a soul-satisfying faith has always eluded you.

Let me suggest this. Before you begin the first chapter of this book, pray a twenty-word prayer that can kindle a revolution in your soul. Pray it even though you may doubt that anyone is listening: *God, if you open my eyes to who you really are, then I will open my life fully to you.*

From your perspective, that prayer may seem peppered with risk. Because if you sincerely pray it, it catapults you from the status of an observer to someone who is intent on getting to the truth about God. You've entered uncharted territory. That old saying pops into your head: "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

You may be afraid that if you end up following Jesus, you'll find yourself stuffed inside a moral straitjacket that will suffocate you. Your freedom will be choked by restrictive regulations at a time when you see your life as needing fewer rules, not more.

Maybe you envision a risk of being turned into something you don't want to be—some kind of proselytizer who punctures every sentence with "Amen!" Or someone who forfeits fun in favor of faith.

Or it could be that you see a risk to your self-image if you're forced to concede some things about yourself that you'd rather not talk about. After all, isn't it healthier to focus on all the positive things you've done rather than dredge up your mistakes?

I prayed a prayer like this on January 20, 1980, even though those kinds of worries loomed large for me. I investigated God, encountered him, and then responded to him in a prayer of commitment and faith. Today, I can look back at the revolution that has happened with my life and say with complete candor that those initial risks I imagined were tremendously overblown. Personally, I found the Bible's promise to be true: "God rewards those who earnestly seek him."^{xxxviii}

Starting Your Journey of Discovery

What about you? Are you open to the idea of evaluating the evidence and coming to an informed conclusion about whether God is real? Imagine yourself as an umpire behind home plate in a baseball game, calling strikes and balls as you see them, without fear or favor. In other words, your task is to set aside bias and prejudice as best you can.

Will you find an ironclad case? Few things in life can be established without any doubt whatsoever. For instance, we can say with absolute certainty that $2 + 2 = 4$. Mostly, though, we make important decisions in our life based on the preponderance of evidence. *Where do the facts point most convincingly? What is consistent with the evidence? What is more likely than not to be true? Does this case make sense?*

Look at it this way. Right now, I'm typing on a computer in my home office outside of Houston, Texas. Occasionally, I pause to sip from a bottle of water. But how do I know for sure that the water hasn't been poisoned?

Well, the water comes from a reputable supplier. The bottle was sealed when I got it. The water looks clear. There's no discoloration. It doesn't have an unusual odor. I haven't heard of

anyone else getting sick from drinking water recently. My wife gave me the bottle, and she has no reason to hurt me.

And yet it *could* be poisoned. I don't have absolute proof that it's safe. But I do have sufficient evidence to warrant taking a step of faith by tasting it and finding that it's truly good.

Belief in God is similar. We evaluate the evidence and arguments; we test them with objections; we seek clarity; we pursue further answers. And if we end up with sufficient confidence, we take the advice of Psalm 34:8: "Taste and see that the **LORD** is good."

In fact, Jesus claimed to offer what he called "living water," saying, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."^{xxxix}

So let me take you on a stimulating journey of discovery. Come with me as we travel around America—from Boston to Seattle, from Denver to Los Angeles, from Texas to Indiana—to meet some of the scholars I've interviewed about this foundational question of whether or not God is real. We'll look at science, philosophy, history, morality, and human nature.

And since 52 percent of Americans say they've experienced religious doubt in the past few years,^{xl} we'll examine two of the biggest obstacles to belief in God: (1) If he's real, why does he allow suffering in the world? And (2) if he's real, why does he seem so hidden from us?

Remember, much hangs in the balance. Beliefs have real-world consequences. Let these experts make their best case. Evaluate their insights and consider whether there is sufficient evidence to drink deeply from the living water that Jesus offers.

Then *you* decide. Is God real?

ⁱ See “Searching for God: How to Optimize Your Search Results for Biblical Accuracy,” incmedia.org, <https://incmedia.org/searching-for-god-how-to-optimize-your-search-results-for-biblical-accuracy>, accessed June 24, 2023.

ⁱⁱ See Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 126–27.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in Lydia Saad and Zach Hrynowski, “How Many Americans Believe in God,” Gallup, June 24, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/268205/americans-believe-god.aspx>.

^{iv} Cited in David Kinnaman, “Rising Spiritual Openness in America,” Barna Research, January 18, 2023, www.barna.com/research/rising-spiritual-openness.

^v Leonardo Blair, “Most Millennials Like Jesus and the Bible, but 30% Identify as LGBT: Study,” *Christian Post*, November 4, 2021, www.christianpost.com/news/30-of-millennials-identify-as-lgbt.html. Millennials are identified in this study as those who were born between 1984–2002.

^{vi} “Atheism Doubles among Generation Z,” Barna Research, January 24, 2018, www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z.

^{vii} See “Youth Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report, 2011–2021,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023, www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf, accessed June 24, 2023.

^{viii} Greg Stier, “A Jesus Revolution Youth Group,” Greg Stier.org, March 16, 2023, <https://gregstier.org/a-Jesus-revolution-youth-group>.

^{ix} Stier, “Jesus Revolution.”

^x Quoted in Adam MacInnis, “Study: Gen Z Wants to Know More about Jesus,” *Christianity Today*, October 26, 2022, www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/october/gen-z-barna-research-survey-christian-faith-jesus.html.

^{xi} See John Blake, “Predictions about the Decline of Christianity in America May Be Premature,” CNN, April 8, 2023, www.cnn.com/2023/04/08/us/christianity-decline-easter-blake-cec/index.html; see also “Modeling the Future of Religion in America,” Pew Research Center, September 13, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america.

^{xii} Ricky Gervais, “Why I’m an Atheist,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2010, www.wsj.com/articles/BL-SEB-56643.

^{xiii} See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 39–46.

^{xiv} See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 1–15, 297–98.

^{xv} See Lee Strobel, *Finding the Real Jesus: A Guide for Curious Christians and Skeptical Seekers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 32–47. For an account of my full interview with Bruce Metzger, who died in 2007, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 58–77.

^{xvi} Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 3; see also Randy Alcorn, “A Case Study: Bart Ehrman, a ‘Christian’ Who Lost His Faith,” Eternal Perspectives Ministry, April 15, 2020, www.epm.org/resources/2020/Apr/15/case-study-bart-ehrman.

^{xvii} Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2020), 24.

^{xviii} Alisa Childers, “Why We Should Not Redeem ‘Deconstruction,’” Gospel Coalition, February 18, 2022, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/redeem-reconstruction.

^{xix} For some helpful insights into this phenomenon, see Joe Terrell, “Five Real Reasons Young People Are Deconstructing Their Faith,” careynieuwhof.com, April 19, 2022, <https://careynieuwhof.com/five-real-reasons-young-people-are-deconstructing-their-faith>.

^{xx} Sean McDowell and John Marriott, *Set Adrift: Deconstructing What You Believe without Sinking Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), xiv.

^{xxi} For the full story, see Strobel, *Case for Christ*.

^{xxii} Though I have a Master of Studies in Law (MSL) degree from Yale Law School, I am not an attorney. The MSL degree is for professionals who want to understand law but not practice it. For example, I wrote about law for the *Chicago Tribune*, authored a book on a landmark court case, and taught First Amendment law at Roosevelt University.

^{xxiii} J. Warner Wallace, “How Jesus’ Resurrection Changes Everything,” *Decision*, April 1, 2021, <https://decisionmagazine.com/j-warner-wallace-how-jesus-resurrection-changes-everything>.

^{xxiv} See J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Wheaton, IL: Cook, 2013); see also his *Person of Interest: Why Jesus Still Matters in a World That Rejects the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021).

^{xxv} See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for Life after Death* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 99–101.

^{xxvi} Watch McWhirter tell his story (“Meth Addict to Worship Leader // My Testimony”) on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MVGuez4VEk.

^{xxvii} See Guillaume Bignon, *Confessions of a French Atheist: How God Hijacked My Quest to Disprove the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022).

^{xxviii} See Strobel, *Case for Christ*, 186–203.

^{xxix} Holly Ordway, *Not God’s Type: A Rational Academic Finds a Radical Faith*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2010).

^{xxx} See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Grace: A Journalist Explores the Evidence of Transformed Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 107–22.

^{xxxi} See Lee Strobel, *In Defense of Jesus: Investigating Attacks on the Identity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 204–39.

^{xxxii} See Thomas A. Tarrants, *Consumed by Hate, Redeemed by Love: How a Violent Klansman Became a Champion of Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: Nelson, 2019).

^{xxxiii} Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 367–68.

^{xxxiv} Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 368.

^{xxxv} C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1943; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1960), 120.

^{xxxvi} John Elek, “When Ronald McDonald Did Dirty Deeds,” *The Guardian*, May 21, 2006, www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/21/fiction.douglasoupland.

^{xxxvii} Douglas Coupland, *Life after God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 359.

^{xxxviii} Hebrews 11:6.

^{xxxix} John 4:13.

^{xi} Cited in “Doubt and Faith: Top Reasons People Question Christianity,” Barna Research, March 1, 2023,

www.barna.com/research/doubt-faith.

Copyright-Protected Manuscript
Property of Zondervan Books
Do Not Reproduce or Distribute