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| [The Questions God Asks](http://citygate.org/ideas-and-answers/articles/46-the-questions-god-asks) | [print](http://citygate.org/ideas-and-answers/articles/46-the-questions-god-asks?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default&page=) | [email](http://citygate.org/component/mailto/?tmpl=component&link=aHR0cDovL2NpdHlnYXRlLm9yZy9pZGVhcy1hbmQtYW5zd2Vycy9hcnRpY2xlcy80Ni10aGUtcXVlc3Rpb25zLWdvZC1hc2tz) |

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| **God is the source and centre of all reality. There is no other alternate autonomous religious reality where we might meet him. We live and move and have all our being in his presence. The God who has called our life into being relates deeply with his creation. Everything that exists does so because God called it into being for his purposes.**  Just as we as human beings ask questions about life, so the God who created and sustains all things asks questions. We have a choice, to start with the questions of God or with our questions. Who am I? Why am I here? What does my existence mean? Why, if life has no meaning, do I care? Where do I belong, and to whom? What are the foundations of right and wrong and is your right the same as my right? Is there some kind of glue that binds all of life together or are there only fragments?  Christians believe that we find our information about God in the Christian Scriptures. There is logic in the idea that the personal and infinite God might desire to speak to us. What better way to make sure his message is heard than through writing? Of course we are not naive and are aware that this raises many questions itself.  We believe God birthed his written word in much the same way as the incarnate Word entered his world through the willing cooperation between a woman and the Holy Spirit. Not beaten into submission, not used, violated, raped, crushed, but willing cooperation in an act of love, fearful awe, loving obedience and willing submission. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered.  God wrote together with his human partners, to tell those who would listen who he is. Luke, the doctor, had to work hard to investigate carefully for Theophilus[[i]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn1) and for us. It was not easy travelling with Paul. It demanded searching out, careful consideration, evaluation of evidence, but out of it comes the inspired Scripture. We feel God’s breath on every word.  **The Eternal perspective**  We learned in class that everything happened by chance. This is not what God seems to say. Listen to the Word of God: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.****[[ii]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn2)** God defines the borders of what is truly real. In the beginning God spoke and made something separate from himself. He is the centre of all reality. **God said, “Let there be light.”** Everything we see, we see because God made us seeing beings. He provided both eyes with which to see and light by which to see. Through sight we read the words God intended for us, the revelation of who God is. **And it was good.** Not nice, but good, without any flaw. No mismatched seam, no crumpled cloth, everything that was, was perfect. It is hard for human beings to imagine the good because we have only tasted good in the context of corruption. **Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...”** Reality is relational, it is reasonable, it can be understood. Communication is possible because it reflects the God who made it. God, the Trinity, is relational. All humans in every generation that has ever lived reflect their Creator. There are universals common to all cultures. There are meta-realities that transcend unique moments in history. All humans need to breathe air, to eat, to live in relationship, to communicate, to know, to explain and interpret the world around them, to organize themselves socially, to negotiate, to remember, to pass on wisdom from generation to generation. If there are meta-realities it should not surprise us if there might be a meta-narrative to explain them. **The woman saw the fruit was good to eat and good for wisdom...** The tree was good, the fruit was good and knowledge was good. Everything she knew came from God. Everything around her was good; she knew the good from her experience. She knew evil as a theory, an idea. Here was an independent source of knowledge. And when they ate it they were uncovered and full of shame.  Reality is moral. One wrong decision changed the whole universe. The woman wanted experience of evil, not mere academic knowledge. In eating the fruit she internalised the evil and could never again know what it was like to know only the good. Adulterers know the power of memory. Since the first bite there has been a difference between knowing by corrupted experience and knowing the good in theory. Now we experience a difference between reality, our experience of reality, and our description of the experience. This often confuses our discussion and confusion often causes argument.  **And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where *are* you?” So he said, “ I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”****[[iii]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn3)**  This is as beautiful as it is sad. The Creator among his creation, coming to enjoy relationship with his creation. We were created because God desired to share the experience of his perfection with us. God can be known by hearing his words—the problem of communication is with the hiding listener. The tree behind which Adam and Eve stood was the first idol, the first substitute protector. It was meant to cover the vulnerability caused by the first act of vandalism, the deep breach of trust between the man and his God. It was the first idol of many to come, standing between human beings and the infinite, holy and personal creator God. They were naked, exposed and vulnerable. Now they not only saw the good but could also imagine all possible bad. Anxiety entered the human predicament.  **The Lord God asked, “Where are you, Adam?”** This was the first question God asked. It is a question that echoes through history, “Where are you?” A question asked of every human being at every time and in every place, “Where are you? How did you get there? What have you become?” The answer added nothing to God’s knowledge, but it helped Adam understand where he was and it made clear his predicament. We need to know where we are. We need to know the difference between our illusions and His reality. God asks the deep questions because we avoid asking them. **Where are you?** I was doing e-mail. I had a meeting. I needed to rest. I was very busy and could not come: at church, at work, with friends at the club, at my studies. I was hiding behind a tree because I knew my nakedness. We have learned to hide behind so many other trees. We are children who have put our hands in front of our faces.  God calls to us with existential questions. He asks question that penetrate through the façade of fears to the inner being. He calls broken people back from the terrors of superstition, from the lonely despair of individualism, the arrogance of materialism, the crushing conformity of monism, the facelessness of modern psychology, the false hopes of modernity. He calls us from the loss of communication in post-modernity, the terrors of fascism and illusions of communism, the content-less slavery of technology, and the idol of irrational nationalism.  In our inner being we are afraid. These questions take us into the unknown, to our inadequacy. They awaken memories of moral failure and anxiety. They strip us of our idols. We see our nakedness and are aware of our need for covering. But we have nothing to hide from the God who knows everything. We have everything to gain when we stop hiding from ourselves. To deceive others takes no great skill. To deceive myself is a talent that demands a brilliant mind and every one of us can do it. Our anger keeps us in the past, and our anxieties keep us in the future but we meet the “I AM” in every present moment.  This is a pattern common to all human beings. God calls out and we hide. The call of God exposes our nakedness before him and we are ashamed. Shame is a terrible feeling, the shattered image exposed. We invest large amounts of energy into hiding. And God calls out into our darkness and says, “Where are you?”  God calls out to us. You shall have no other gods between us[[iv]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn4). I want there to be nothing between you and me, between you and perfect beauty, knowledge, wisdom, affection, love, justice, and judgment. I want you to enjoy me forever, to delight in my goodness.  **Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me: Would you indeed annul my judgment? Would you condemn me that you may be justified?** (Job 40: 6-8)  Everyone who ever lived has lived with the painful consequence of broken relationships, of ambiguous communication and the need for protection from vulnerability. There is no people or place that has not blamed God for the consequences of their own will to be as he is; of trying to break the boundary between the Creator and the created, to free ourselves from his moral order and the acts of vandalism that have followed.  **Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?** God asks Job. **Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?** (Job 38:4-7)  The act of creation was pregnant with joy. God offers purpose, meaning and relationship. We are profoundly ignorant of so much, even in our technological age. We struggle with the reality that we are “knowing beings” with no one to know. Everyone lives in the presence and under the observation of God. The universe is not empty. But we have a very limited capacity for sight, especially of the moral kind.  **Then Job answered the Lord: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.** (Job 40:1-6)  ***The Present Perspective***  The questions of Christ are masterful and helpful to allow us to see the issues clearly. We pass over them too quickly. Pause in amazement and listen in wonder as God, the second person of the Trinity, does his missionary activity.  It was after a storm where his followers feared for their lives that Jesus landed on the shore and approached a very disturbed man, a man sitting naked, among graves, possessed by a legion of demons. He is naked and unrestrained by the useless chains by his sides, he is crying out, begging Jesus not to torture him. And Jesus invades his private space. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house but had lived among the dead. Jesus asked him, **“What is your name?” “Legion”,** he answers, **“for we are many.”**[[v]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn5)  What is your name? This question is deeply personal and humanising. His name represented horror to his neighbours; it had been as a curse, and for contempt. This is a name that is covered in shame and fear, and Christ wants to know.  His name is not Legion. His name is Harry or Sergei or Roman. His name had been taken away, his personality lost among the demons and the dead. But when the kingdom of God comes, demons have to flee.  His understanding of God has been twisted and corrupted. Jesus is not going to torture him, he is going to heal him, but the process might feel painful. The journey is not the destination!  He becomes himself when he meets Christ. Relationship with Christ leaves him clothed, his need for covering met. His mind is restored. He is sitting at Jesus feet. How long have I wanted to have a mind restored, to think truth about who I am and who God is! We cannot meet God face to face until we have a face with which to meet him. We cannot deny ourselves until we have a self to deny.  Some of us are afraid of Christ because we have been dominated by strong people or are afraid he will tell us to be someone else. When Christ invades our space there is a strong temptation to resist him. But Christ has come to restore us to our true self. Until we meet him we will pour immense amounts of emotional and physical energy into maintaining a false image; as we get older and our strength fails, it is harder.  Paul writes to the Corinthians and says that I will know (then) even as I am now fully known. There is one in the heavens who will never reject you, who knows your deepest evil and who loves you still. Christ the high priest, Christ the sacrifice who invites you to take on a new name.  What is your name? Does you name matter? This is a question of identity. Who am I? Am I defined by the externals of life: by Nike or MTV? by the drive of prestige or status? by the preservation of image? A name symbolises. A name is a signpost that points to something, a container of value, reputation and meaning. What does my name contain?  Christ knows you. There is nothing he does not know: reputation, hopes, desires, and dreams. He knows how broken and how twisted, how good and how bad. And he calls you by your real name. There are times when my mind does not work as it should, when I am tired or frustrated or angry. But God knows the inner most being. Even when I think he is other than he is, he is master of the situation and completely secure in his own name. Thus, he can call out to me, take my abuse and bring me to my right mind.  **Therefore, [says Moses] be careful to observe [the law] for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”****[[vi]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn6)**  Listen in to the account of a blind man who, hearing Jesus pass by, calls out, **“Son of David have mercy on me.” “What would you have me do for you?”** asked Jesus.***[[vii]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn7)***  A strange question for a healer to ask a blind man! “Why, I’d like a cup of tea please.” Is it not obvious what he wants? “I want to see.” Jesus knew that he wanted to see. But did the blind man really want to see? It is important that we give articulation to the hope, the desire, and faith. Do you really want to see? What do you want to see? Am I willing to come out from the crowd and admit to my need? Am I willing to ask for sight? Will I like what I see when my eyes are opened? Will I take the risk or stay on the sidewalk satisfied with second best, with an unhealed self? Am I willing to take on the responsibility of sight or is blindness the easy option? How badly do you want to be free from the weakness that blinds you?  Then consider the woman in the garden by the tomb on that final Passover, her hopes shattered in grief. She has seen someone she loves killed and with him, her dreams.  **“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”** **[[viii]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn8)**  A question helps her to connect with reality. Her grief has torn her from her right mind and she is not thinking clearly; she is focused on her loss. Who am I looking for, and why, and why here?  Here we see articulation of her innermost anxiety and the fear of losing that which is most valuable. Her perception of reality did not allow her to believe what was happening. She has a wrong belief and a wrong expectation of the future, a gap between her reason and her imagination, between articulated belief and gut belief. One set of beliefs is getting in the way of the application of another set of beliefs. This did not surprise the Christ. What God was doing was way beyond her education, expectations, vision or her wildest dreams. Jesus said to her, “Mary.” He answers all her questions when he calls out her name.  Some time later on the Emmaus road two men were walking away from their hopes and dreams[[ix]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn9). They have also just seen Jesus crucified. They have suffered overwhelming loss. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. But they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”**  **They stood with their faces downcast. “Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn’t know these things that have happened there in these days?”**  They make a commentary on recent events, searching for a context that would give understanding, meaning and perspective. Jesus comes along side them. **“What are you talking about?” he asks.** They reply, **“haven’t you been in Jerusalem?  Haven’t you heard about all that has happened in this last week?” “What things?” he asks.**  “What things?” What an amazing question! He knew, but they didn’t know. They didn’t know what had happened. He asked them so that they could articulate their confusion and all the tumult in their crushed hearts. **“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel”** Oh, those things. Ah yes, those things.  The God who made us understands our psychology. He knew the need these men had to articulate their questions and doubts. He is not afraid of doubts. Beginning with the past, he brought them into the present reality. Because he values relationship he sat down with them to eat. Because he knows the need of visual reminder at the moment he broke the bread, he disappeared. Perfect timing. And at the moment of his disappearing they saw him and remembered the connection between their hearts and his mind. It demands an amazing patience and understanding not to preach or teach until we have articulated our hopes and dreams and confusions. Timing is important. He listened patiently to what he already knew and understood, so that they would be able to hear him when he spoke.  We should not be afraid of honest questions. Honest doubt is the way of growth. We need to articulate our doubts and fears in order for them to be addressed. The church should be a safe space for people to do this.  A short time later Jesus meets Peter: **“Do you love me?”**[[x]](http://citygate.org/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=288" \l "_edn10) Jesus asks. He knows Peter’s heart. **“You know that I love you.”** Ah, but do you know, Peter, that you love me? Do you know that I love you Peter? And so Peter, the rock who had lacked courage, walks away reassured of his master’s affection.  God listens, God hears, God knows and God speaks. God asks us questions to help us see where we are: questions of relationship, identity, idolatry, questions to strip away our delusions and illusions, questions to take us to the truth of the inner being because we do not know but God does know.  God offers us intimacy but we fear it. We feel the heat of his glory against the vulnerability of a broken spirit. Through the pages of the Bible, God calls to each of us and asks: “Where are you?” What is your name? What are you talking about? Who are you looking for? What do you want me to do for you? Do you love me?  These are questions of relationship, identity, idolatry. The hard questions of God are a gift to those willing to submit to God’s inquiry because they know the heart of the Creator and His call for us to draw close to Him.  God is also going to be asking you some questions of eternal significance. God is going to invade your space. When he does I encourage you to listen and to trust him. We must not hide in a religious world but live in the reality of our times and meet God there. Do not to hide in the forests of our modern age but bow honestly, tell him what you fear, what you long for, and what you need. When you hear his voice, he will fill the longings of your heart. This is a call from God that comes to each human being at all times and in all places, a call from the God who walked in the garden in the cool of the day.n |

As we read the accounts of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, we come across three questions asked by Jesus or angels of certain disciples who has been close to Jesus.

These three questions start with the words "Why do you...?" They have in them something of a chiding tone, albeit kindly. The men and women who were asked these questions were disciples of good heart and of great faith. They were among Christ’s closest friends. Even they needed to grow in faith and understanding. How much more do we?

# [arrow](http://members.datafast.net.au/sggram/f024.htm#Point1)Why do you sleep?

[**Lke 22:39-46**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Luke.htm#C22V39)  [**Mtt 26:36-46**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Matthew.htm#C26V36)  [**Mrk 14:32-42**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Mark.htm#C14V32)

On the night in which Judas was to betray his Master, Jesus had explained to his disciples that he faced betrayal and death, and they faced severe testing. He had gone to one of his favourite places of prayer, The garden of Gesthemane at the Mount of Olives. His disciples followed him. Jesus told them to pray. He himself withdrew just a stone’s throw from them, to pray by himself. After he had prayed very fervently, he came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, exausted by grief. He awoke them with the question, "Why do you sleep?"

The question is answered before it is asked. They were exausted. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Jesus was disappointed, however, that they could not find that extra strength at this critical hour to stay awake. He was concerned that Satan had obtained permission to test them, but that they might not obtain the strength to resist the tempter.

I suppose most of us have sometime, like the disciples, fallen asleep while we were praying. Or perhaps we have suffered the same embarrassment of Eutychus and fallen asleep in church if not out of the window! (Acts 20:7-10).

I once heard someone mention to a preacher that she sometimes fell asleep while praying and was troubled by it. The preacher put a positive spin on the matter. "I can't think of a better way to fall asleep." That was a nice comment, but we all still sometimes get concerned at the weakness of the flesh and the ease with which emotion and labour can exhaust us. The best solution in the ordinary course of life, is to approach God when our bodies and minds are rested.

There are times, however, when the ordinary course of life is suspended, and we face unusual trials. I suppose most of us have experienced, at some special time, the rising up from within us of a great strength that enabled us to overcome exhaustion and despondency, and to do what had to be done. We seemed to be embued with a great strength of courage and purpose, and extraordinary stamina. Sometimes this ability of the spirit to energise an exausted body and mind is truly amazing.

Of course, we cannot live that way daily, or we would soon burn ourselves out. However such an experience shows that God has sources of extraordinary strength that we can draw upon in times of great need. Whether this extra strength is supernatural, or a natural reserve for emergencies, I do not know. But it is there, and on rare occasions we should draw upon it.

# [arrow](http://members.datafast.net.au/sggram/f024.htm#Point2)Why do you weep?

[**Jhn 20:11-18**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/John.htm#C20V11)  [**Mtt 28:1-10**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Matthew.htm#C28V1)  [**Mrk 16:1-14**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Mark.htm#C16V1)  [**Lke 24:1-4**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Luke.htm#C24V1)

Mary and other disciples, who came to the tomb of Jesus, had found Him missing. Two angels were there, and one spoke to them. "You are looking for Jesus...Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen..." . The disciples were confused.

Now Mary lingers outside the tomb. She is crying. She stoops to look into the tomb. The angels are still there. "Woman, why do you weep?" they ask. She tells them why. "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have laid him."

Then something makes her turn. She sees a man whom she takes for the gardener. He repeats the angels' question. "Woman, why do you weep?"  She begins to plead with him to tell her where Jesus had been taken, but her eyes are not on him. Gently he speaks her name. "Mary!" Again she turns to look at him, and now recognises her Lord. "Rabboni!"

She clings to Jesus, perhaps as though she fears to lose him again. "Don't cling to me. I haven't ascended to the Father yet.". In other words, "I'll be around for a while yet". So Mary could dry her eyes, and part company knowing that her Lord was alive and she would see more of him before he departed this earth.

Mary and the other disciples were close to Jesus and strong in their faith. Yet they had trouble understanding that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, just as the scriptures had indicated he would, and as he himself had promised.

In our weakness, and in our troubles, it is easy to see the black side of things and not understand the bright things which God can cause to follow. God, however, "causes all things to work together for our good" (Rom 8:28). Of course we weep. But should we let our tears blind us to the goodness and glory of God who always brings us joy out of our sorrows?

Even though our sorrows last a lifetime on earth, the joy of heaven will be unending. One day we will look through our tears and see the bright face of him who will end all our weeping forever. And we will say, "Rabboni!"

# [arrow](http://members.datafast.net.au/sggram/f024.htm#Point3)Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?

[**Acts 1:9-11**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Acts.htm#C1V9)  [**Mtt 28:16-20**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Matthew.htm#C28V16)  [**Mrk 16:19-20**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Mark.htm#C16V19)  [**Lke 24:46-53**](http://ebible.org/bible/web/Luke.htm#C24V46)

Following his resurrection from the dead, Jesus spent forty days more on earth, appearing to his disciples and teaching them about the kingdom of God. At the last of these gatherings, Jesus was lifted up into the sky and disappeared behind a cloud. Then the disciples were asked, "Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?".

Unlike the other two questions, this one is not answered, because the answer is obvious. Wouldn't you be doing the same if you saw someone ascend into heaven?

When I was a lad, my friends and I would occasionally play a little prank. We would stand on a busy Melbourne street and gaze up into the sky. Presently a number of other people would be seen gazing up into the sky too! Of course, the joke was that there was nothing up there. These disciples, however, had witnessed a truly great and marvelous event. Who could blame them for gazing at the sky? They were amazed. However, a great task was ahead of them. It was now time to get ready for the work of making others amazed and helping others to believe.

We are often greatly surprised by God too. He does much more than we expect, although perhaps we should expect much more than we do, for we know he is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. When God does surprise and amaze us, we may naturally need a little time to behold his work and take it in.

It is easy, however, to become self indulgent and do nothing else but gaze at God in wonder at what he has done for us. We may be inclined to mistake this state of mind for faith and religion. But God-gazing is not faith. It is merely surprise, or at most awe. Faith is getting over the surprise and coming to grips with the task God has set us.