

# FAQs

Here are some questions that we got asked a lot:

Why should there even be a God anyway?

What is Christianity?

Which is more important - faith in God or science?

Why does God allow suffering?

What is heaven, and how can you get into it?

How can I become a Christian?

# And here are some answers:

## *Why should there even be a God anyway?*

Why should there even be humans, animals, plants, the earth or the universe?

The logical conclusion of questioning God is to question the existence of *ourselves* and our own reality. For us, the existence of God also provides a logical explanation for our existence, and gives it reason, meaning and purpose.

## *What is Christianity?*

*Christianity is not a set of rules or just a way of life, but about experiencing and living out a relationship with God.*

We believe that *God made us each out of love*, to enjoy a relationship with him, one another and the earth. However, we also believe that we walk away from God every day, when we go against the way he made the world to be (this is also known as sin). This ruins and fractures our relationship with God.

But *it doesn't end there!* We believe that Jesus - this God of the whole universe - *died for us* and, most importantly, rose again: conquering sin and death so that our sin doesn't have to define us anymore. As a result, we can be forgiven for everything we've ever done wrong, and come back into this loving relationship with him that we were made to be in.

So how does that affect you and me on the day to day?

We believe that a life with Jesus is one of *freedom*, able to get to know God, each other and ourselves without the burden of the things we do wrong on our shoulders.

Life is therefore all about responding to Jesus' incredible sacrifice and enjoying the freedom that it gives us, trying to bring glory to God in everything we do, whether that be in our friendships, hobbies, work etc.

## ***Which is more important - faith in God or science?***

We shouldn't accept anything blindly, Christianity or science. Always look into it; ask questions. Examine the arguments; do they make sense. Look at the evidence; is it sufficient. Does it fit reality? Personally, I am convinced that Christianity is true and that most of the claims of science are true. But with Christianity I face a further issue that I do not face with science. I am asked to enter a personal relationship with the God who is really there, a relationship of trust and obedience, through Jesus. And that is where faith comes in. Faith is not how I know Christianity is true. Faith/trust is what I am called to do about it.

God has made himself known in two ways: in his Word and in his world. Those revelations do not conflict. Then we apply our human minds to God's Word and we get theology. We apply our human minds to God's world and we get science. Those may at times conflict, but the fault will be in our reasoning. We have either misunderstood God's Word or we have misunderstood God's world.

## ***Why does God allow suffering?***

This is often a very sensitive topic, and so I want to approach it with care.

To start with, I'd like to share with you a little about my life. I don't want to seem self-centred and I'm not asking for any sympathy at all, but I want you to know that I'm not someone speaking about an inaccessible, theoretical belief system, with no experience of suffering at all. I've had my fair share of ups and downs, including my dad dying very suddenly from a heart attack last summer. So I get it: sometimes life is hard, and its easy to ask *why? Why would God allow all this?*

I think it's important to begin by establishing why Christians think we're here in the first place. We believe that God made each of us out of *love*, to

enjoy a relationship with him, one another and the world around us. However, love cannot be forced: it requires a *choice*.

This always makes me think of those cuddly toys you can get with a voice insert that says 'I love you' when you squeeze them. Unfortunately, (get ready for a heartbreaker), that cuddly toy doesn't love you, *because it doesn't have the choice to*. In order for us to experience the loving relationship(s) which we were created for, God needed also to create us with free will and the ability to choose whether or not to love him.

And so follows the classic story of Adam and Eve, the tree, the snake and the apple. This is known as 'the fall'. Whether you believe this is fact or an allegory, we believe that it conveys an important truth: every day we walk away from God in one way or another, and choose paths which go against the way that God made the world to be. This is otherwise known as '*sin*'.

Now sin creates a big problem for our relationship with God. We believe that God is 'holy', and entirely good. Therefore, he can't come into contact with our sinful, broken selves. It's like life and death; his goodness and our sinfulness are two states which can't co-exist. Therefore, *our sin breaks and ruins our relationship with God*.

Not only this, but our sin also damages our relationships with *one another and the earth*. If you think of a bottle filled with water, and then imagine pouring a few drops of red dye into it, the red dye doesn't just stay in a thin layer on the top. It diffuses down and turns the whole bottle red. In the same way, you can't have imperfect humans in a perfect world, because one will taint the other.

So here comes the uncomfortable bit; at the end of the story of Adam and Eve, God sends them out from the Garden of Eden and into a world that is no longer perfect. It's important to note here that *we don't believe that God is creating suffering*, but that it is *the painful result of our sin*. We can no longer live forever in a perfect place, because imperfect humans and a perfect world can't co-exist. And we can't live forever in an imperfect place, because

- 1) We now have disintegrating bodies as part of the fall's effect on the physical world.
- 2) Really, who would want to? Do we really want to live forever in a place so full of pain and suffering, with no hope of ever being redeemed?

So since we believe God is life, and that sin is walking away from him, then the *result of our sin is death*; a reality that we're deeply uncomfortable with and often far removed from in our society. In Christianity's view, all of us are sinful, so all of us deserve to die.

That sounds pretty rough doesn't it? And it is. As Christians, rather than thinking we're good, we realise just how broken we are. This makes Christianity's view of the world look pretty bleak.

However, there is a resolution. Before we come to the hopeful bit of the argument, though, let's take a sidestep to answer this question:

***Why doesn't God just remove the evil and suffering straight away and let Adam and Eve off?***

To answer this we have to ask another question:

***Which part of this evil and suffering would we like him to remove?***

We've all done things which have hurt others and caused suffering. So in order to remove suffering, he'd have to remove us.

This creates *even more* questions:

- 1) When you do something wrong, would you like God to evaporate you with a click of his fingers, with no chance of apologising and setting things right?
- 2) Should you be defined by who you were yesterday? What about the things which you've done in the past which you thought at the time were absolutely fine, but look back on now as wrong?
- 3) How, as sinful human beings, can we be expected to even know for certain what's right all the time? Aren't there some things which you might think of as harmless jokes, but which someone else might find really hurtful? How should God judge who should stay and who should be immediately incinerated on the spot?

And most of all, it creates a logical contradiction...

- 4) Why would God, who we believe loves us so much, want to create us only to kill us?

If this were the case, God would suddenly seem a very unfair character, and the lives we'd live would be full of fear of doing anything at all, in case we did something wrong.

Thankfully, we believe that God has picked a different way to deal with evil and suffering. As part of this, he's ***given us a second chance***.

To quickly recap before we look at this... we believe that God created us each out of love, to enjoy a relationship with Him, one another and the

earth. However, we also believe that we walk away from God every day, when we go against the way he made the world to be (also known as sin). This ruins and fractures our relationship with God, and means that there is evil and suffering in the world.

However, the story doesn't end there!!

We believe that regardless of this, God still loves us the same, and ***nothing we can ever do will make him love us more or less. No matter how many times we walk away from him, God still wants to be in the relationship with us that he made us for.*** Let's think about that for a second. Despite us repeatedly stabbing the God of the universe in the back, he still wants to be in a relationship with us. And more than just wanting to be, he does something about it.

Instead of leaving us to suffer forever on our own, we believe that he sent Jesus to die painfully, slowly and humiliatingly for us on the cross, and most importantly, to ***rise again***; conquering sin and death by paying the price for our sin so that we don't have to be defined by it anymore. This means that we can be forgiven for everything we've ever done wrong and have a second chance to take his outstretched hand and come back into the loving relationship with him that we were made to be in; staying in it this time - chosen out of our free will - for ***eternity***.

So Jesus died thousands of years ago, and that affects us for thousands of the years in the future. Eternity. Forever. But how does that change things for us now? This is where we have to take another sidestep from the question to consider the nature of ***heaven and hell***.

This is another uncomfortable topic in our culture. Christians can't get away from the existence of these two states; they are fundamental to our belief and give an added significance to our lives here on earth *now*. However, people very often have a twisted idea of what heaven and hell actually are. This is largely because, historically, the Church as an institution and a means of government has built up the idea that heaven is a beautiful place for good people and hell is an awful pit of fire for bad people, often using this to meet its own aims.

***The Bible tells us an entirely different story.*** It says that none of us can ever be 'good enough' to earn a place in heaven, because we all sin and, as we established earlier, ***even the tiniest bit of sin is enough to cut us off from an entirely good God.***

If you picture a door into heaven, people often say that you have to do certain things and take a certain path to get up to it, and then when you're

there, God will judge whether or not you're good enough to be let in. However, the Bible says the opposite: that we're too broken to haul ourselves up to the door. Instead, rather than heaven being something we can work towards, we believe that we get through the door not because of anything we could ever do, and not because we're wonderful people (if anything, as followers of Jesus, we realise how broken we are), but because of Jesus' huge love and sacrifice for us. And then we try to live our lives a certain way in response to his incredible sacrifice.

Its hard to comprehend the reality of someone dying for us, but I think of it like putting yourself in the middle of a busy road, about to be run over, and then the person you love most in the world coming and pushing you out of the way and getting run over instead. And then magnify that by about a billion, because it's the God of the whole universe, dying just for you because he loves you so much. Obviously, the analogy is flawed, but it can help visualise just a little bit of how amazing we believe his sacrifice was, and can help show why we want to live for and with God.

So we believe that heaven and hell, rather than being places for good/bad people, are places with or without God. We don't know exactly what heaven and hell are like, but since we believe heaven is a place with God, we believe it is a perfect place, without sin and without pain. Therefore, we don't think God has just left this world in a mess, but instead has ***done something about the evil and suffering by sending Jesus***. This means that, just like Adam and Eve had the choice to be in a relationship with God and in a perfect place without suffering, ***we have the ability to choose to be too***.

The Bible acknowledges that we're all going to experience pain in life, and becoming a Christian doesn't mean that life is immediately going to be easy. Whilst on earth, ***Jesus suffered***. People often threw him out of their towns, his friends betrayed him, he was put on unfair trial and he was brutally killed in the most shameful form of Roman punishment. He understands what it is to feel pain. And the Bible is full of people experiencing pain too. However, ***God doesn't leave us alone to suffer***. Since we believe that we can be in a relationship with Jesus, we know that whatever we are going through, we can be understood and supported through it by God. And if we let him, we believe that God can shape us through our experiences and bring good out of terrible situations.

For me personally, my relationship with God has transformed my experience of grief following my dad's death, because I know that whatever happens, whatever goes wrong, however low I feel, God's love for me never changes, that his hand is over the whole situation and that I can lean on him for strength when I don't have any at all. And I know that this suffering is

shaping me into the person I will be in eternity, when there won't be any more pain at all.

My friend explained to me a great analogy which basically sums the whole thing up. Imagine you're having a meal in a warm house with God, and there's a massive storm going on outside. Rather than choosing to stay inside with God, you fling open the door and run outside and get lost in the darkness; afraid, alone and covered in thick mud (our sin). We all choose to do it, whoever we are. However, God doesn't leave us out there to suffer. Instead, Jesus runs out of the house after us, seeks us out, finds us and swaps clothes with us, taking our muddy clothes on himself and giving us his clean ones to wear. Therefore, we can go back inside to God, and when we do, he doesn't see us messed up and muddy, but made clean by Jesus' sacrifice. And because Jesus has been out in the mud too, he understands what it feels like and shares our pain with us.

However, Jesus can't force us to swap clothes with him. He can hold out his clean ones, but *it's our own choice* whether or not to take off our old way of life and put on a new one.

So to conclude, we believe that:

- 1) God *loves all of us*, no matter who we are, and wants to be in a relationship with us.
- 2) Suffering is the *result of us walking away* from this, not God trying to punish us.
- 3) God *understands* our suffering.
- 4) God *sent Jesus* so that we don't have to suffer forever.
- 5) He'll walk with us through our suffering, *if we ask him to*.

Finally, here's a song/poem from the Bible. It was written by someone who was suffering lots at the time (running away from people wanting to kill him) and who wanted to express the way that God made a difference to him whilst he was going through it:

### Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,



they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

## ***What is heaven, and how can you get into it?***

The existence of heaven and hell are fundamental to Christian belief and give an added significance to our lives here on earth *now*. However, people often have a twisted idea of what heaven and hell actually are. The idea is often presented that heaven is beautiful place for good people and that hell is an awful pit of fire for bad people.

***The Bible tells us an entirely different story.***

If you picture a door into heaven, people often say that you have to ***do certain things*** and take a certain path to get up to it, and then when you're there, God will judge whether or not you're good enough to be let in. However, the Bible says ***it doesn't work like that at all***. Instead, it says we're ***too broken to haul ourselves up to the door***. Rather than being something we can work towards, we believe that we get through the door not because of anything we could ever do, and not because we're wonderful people (if anything, as Christians, we realise just how in need of help we are), but because of ***Jesus' huge love*** and sacrifice for us.

We believe that God wants to be in a relationship with us so much that he sent his son Jesus to ***pay the price for our sin by dying in our place on the cross*** and, more importantly, to rise again and conquer sin and death so that our sin doesn't have to define us anymore. As a result, when we do things wrong, we can have confidence that God's forgiven us. He doesn't intend for us to live with the burden of guilt, he wants us to be free.

It's hard to comprehend the reality of someone dying for us, but I think of it like putting yourself in the middle of a busy road, about to be run over, and then the person you love most in the world coming and pushing you out of the way and getting run over instead. And then magnify that by about a billion, because it's the God of the whole universe, dying just for you because he loves you so much. Obviously, the analogy is flawed, but it can

help visualise just a little bit of how amazing we believe his sacrifice was and the motivation behind why we want to live for and with God. So *rather than having to live our lives a certain way to gain a place in heaven, we try to live that way out of thankfulness, praise, joy and respect for our God in the light of Jesus' incredible sacrifice.*

However, we believe that God doesn't force us into being in a relationship with him, because he wants the relationship to be based on love, and love requires a choice. As a result, we can equally choose not to be in a relationship with God and consequently, there must too be a place without him. This is otherwise known as hell. We don't know exactly what heaven and hell are like, but since we believe that heaven is a place with God, we believe it is a perfect place, without sin and without pain. There's debate as to whether hell is a concrete place or just a dissolve into nothingness, but that's not where biblical focus lies. Rather than being about damning us to hell, its about providing *chance after chance to enter a relationship with Jesus.*

The existence of heaven and hell is a controversial point in our society, but it is important. Christianity says that we live in a moral universe, and that there is a right way and a wrong way, and that we all have choices. We believe that these don't make any of us better than the other, and that God loves us the same regardless of them and of how we view him. Our choices simply change whether or not we respond to his love with our own.

### **Summary...**

So, we believe that:

- 1) Heaven and hell, rather than being places for good/bad people, are places with or without God.
- 2) God wants to be with us, and so sent Jesus to die for us and rise again, conquering sin, so that we can choose to be in a relationship with him.
- 3) As a result, we don't get to heaven/hell based on our own actions, but on our acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice. It just depends what we choose.

## ***How can I become a Christian?***

***If you're interested and would like to know more...***

You can find different events going on near you. Lots of churches have youth groups, and these can be a good place to meet Christians and ask questions. There are also things like the Alpha course, which can give you the opportunity to discuss Christian issues.

***Or, if you feel you'd like to give your life to God now...***

There's no set criteria for becoming a Christian, and it's not like you can go down to your local church and just sign up. Christianity is about a *personal relationship with God*, and we believe he loves you and knows your heart already.

We also believe that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us so that our sins can be forgiven. That's incredible news for us. It means that all we have to do (though this can really be difficult) is

- 1) *Face up to our sin* and all its consequences
- 2) *Talk to God* about it in prayer, *asking for his forgiveness*
- 3) *Accept his joyful gift of life*, made new and washed clean.

This sets us free to start building our lives up from a foundation of basic contentment and assurance of God's love. This bears responsibility, because it means that we have to make changes as to how we live in the light of this. But we know that we don't have to do it on our own: God will walk with us.

So *who is this elusive God* that we're supposed to be able to get to know? A good place to start finding out is to *look at Jesus*, and a good place to get to know Jesus is in *one of the gospels* in the New Testament of the Bible; Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Giving one of these a read can help. Another great place to get to know God is *Church*. This also provides a really solid community to meet other Christians and be helped in the (sometimes challenging!) journey of choosing to follow Jesus.

So how do you become a Christian? *Recognise* Christ's sacrifice, *examine* yourself in the light of it, *talk* to him about it, and then start *living* life from a fresh, forgiven, *free* start.

If you've read this far,  
thank you for doing so!  
We hope it's helped you  
understand Christianity a  
bit better.

If you have any more questions, do keep asking Christians around you. We believe that God wants to give you answers :)