



You asked – we responded.

Read Pastor Matt's and Pastor Ryan's responses to the questions you asked.

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If the only way to God is through Jesus did the Jews go to heaven?

People ask this question of just about all the religions in the world; "If Jesus is the only way, then what about _____?" Christians, followers of Jesus, make the bold statement that Jesus is the only way because Jesus made that proclamation Himself, He said:

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. "And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:1-6)

Jesus made this statement not as a way to exclude others, but as a Word of encouragement and inclusion for anyone seeking refuge from troubled hearts. He is the answer to that trouble because He is the One who has prepared the way into the very presence of God. In Christ we can dwell with God, we can be with Him in this life and in the life to come. The preparation for this new place (this new way) to live life happened when Jesus died on the cross for us and rose from the grave. We can rest assured that if He was willing to do that, then a relationship with God is a for sure thing.

The biggest point in this passage is that Jesus didn't come to prepare a new religion, He came to prepare a place in the presence of God for us. He came to pave the way for us to have a relationship with our Creator. If you want to have that relationship, if you truly want to know God, then Jesus is the way to do that because He is God, He is the only One who knows the way. Praise God there is a way to get there!

There is a small town I have driven through a few times in Oregon called Maupin. It is along the Deschutes River on Highway 197. It's a small town of like 400 people. There is only one road to Maupin, so if you want to go there, eventually you will have to get on 197. It is not that they are trying to keep people out or be exclusive; it's just the way you take to get there. All are welcome; you just have to take 197. It is the same with God, all are welcome to dwell with Him; you just have to take Jesus to get there.

So, if you want to know what religion can get you to heaven, the answer is none of them. If the Jews were looking for their religion to get them to heaven it didn't work. The only way to get to God is in Christ, because He is the only road in. He is the way. To dwell with God one must have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

If someone died can you see their spirit?

Could the planets in our solar system be God giving us chance after chance burning up our resources and destroying our planets? Could aliens be those of us who did not destroy their planet?

I am going to respond to these questions together because I think they are pretty similar in nature. First, let's take a look at aliens and other planets. We should first consider the creation account in Genesis 1. Here we see God creating the earth on the first day and not creating the sun, the moon, or the stars until day four. The earth is the beginning of God's creative work. Everything else that was created was to fill the earth, to care for the earth, or to somewhat benefit those on the earth (like the sun and the moon to govern the day and the night). It does not mention any side/alternative projects on God's part. But, if there were aliens, they would still fall under God's creative order. Genesis makes it clear that before God created there was nothing, so aliens could not have existed before earth. They would be part of God's creation and if that were the case, I would think God would have mentioned that since He mentioned everything else.

From a scientific stand point there have been no discoveries to point to life on other planets or that other planets ever had life. Of the planets closest enough to study only a couple have been given any chance of having life, one of them being Mars. Mars has been studied pretty heavily and spacecraft even landed on and studied the surface with no discoveries to support life being found. One could argue that there are millions of planets yet to be discovered in far away galaxies that have life. It could be, but it is highly unlikely.

Now, there are plenty of strange and interesting things that have happened in this world, some of which have been attributed to aliens and/or ghosts (spirits). This is a different topic, which the Bible does mention. There is a spirit world that does exist along side of our world. In the Bible we can read about angels appearing and talking with human beings (like at Jesus' tomb or when Mary was told she was pregnant). Angels are good, holy, and righteous beings that carry out the work of the Lord. The Bible also mentions demons that are not good, but deceptive and troubling. Demons are fallen angels who rebelled against God.

2 Corinthian 11:14-15 says, "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." Can these spirits disguise themselves as aliens and even as deceased loved ones? Certainly doesn't seem to be out of their capability.

Our loved ones, however, are not spirits we can see or talk to. Hebrews 9:27 declares, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." That is what happens to a person's soul-spirit after death. There is no possibility of remaining on earth in spirit form as a "ghost."

Simply put, it is highly unlikely that aliens were a part of God's creative order. But, it is quite possible that spirits are disguising themselves both as ghosts and aliens. It is important to remember in all of this that God is in control and is all-powerful. At the name of Jesus every knee bows and every demon runs.

Pastor Matt Huff

What suggestions do you have for living in the world but not of the world?

If we are called to spread the Gospel, what are practical ways to do that in the culture we live in?

Once again I think we answer these questions go together because they are, in many ways, connected. Let me start with the two most popular verses about spreading the Gospel.

Matthew 28:19 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Acts 1:8 - but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

These two verses tell us to do two very practical things in regards to spreading the Gospel, to witness and to make disciples. We often over think these two things and make them a bit harder than they need to be. Witnessing is simply sharing a personal experience, something you personally saw, heard, or experienced. Discipleship is a little bit different than witnessing. A disciple is someone who has submitted to the leadership and teaching of another person. They have agreed to allow that person to speak into their life in an effort for them to become like them. A modern day example would be something like learning a trade. You first submit yourself to a teacher as an apprentice and learn all that you can, then as you put it into practice you are a journeyman, and eventually you are experienced and can become a master. So, to make disciples (according to these passages) is to lead someone into Christ-likeness.

The teaching part may be the easy part. You get people who are interested in learning about God and what it means to follow Jesus and you teach them the Bible. It is what our Sunday School classes, small groups, and even our sermons are for. I think the struggle we have and the question most people want answered is how do we get people interested in the first place? How do we witness in such a way that they want to become like Jesus; that they are willing to submit to His leadership and teaching?

The first step in getting people interested in the Gospel is relationships. If we isolate ourselves and never get to know people who don't know God then we will never actually witness to or disciple anyone. So, the first thing we need to do is engage in the world around us and build relationships with people not following Christ. Jesus did this very well; He engaged the world around Him and built relationships with people who were lost.

Engaging in the world does not have to be complicated. Most of us are already doing it. We work in the world, shop in the world, our kids go to school in the world, and we have hobbies in the world. So, how can you engage in the world in which you already exist? Does that mean volunteering at your child's school or just looking for ways to talk about what God has been doing in your life (witness) with those you work with? As we engage the world Jesus gives us some instructions on what that should look like too. He says we should engage in good works, love others, and stand united (Matt. 5:16, John 13:34-35; 17:23). We will have different ways of doing

it, but we all need to do it. Try not to over think it, just let the Holy Spirit guide and see what comes naturally as you build relationships with other people.

Now, engaging the world does not mean we have to become like the world. We can engage the world and still be Christ-like; Jesus certainly did it. You can engage with drunk people and not have to be drunk. I don't drink coffee but I meet with people in coffee shops all the time and never actually drink coffee. As we get to know people and build those relationships just be true to God and we can do that without engaging in sinful behavior. We want Jesus to shape us and not the world.

Therefore, it is important to know your own temptations and limits. If you find yourself engaging in things that are pulling you away from God and is not pulling other people toward Him you might want to ask why are you doing it? Maybe, you should stop. Boundaries are good in a life with Christ and not everyone is going to be able to witness in every situation. Set your boundaries and stick to them. Perhaps the best way to avoid becoming like the world is to have an accountability partner, someone you give permission to, to call you on your mistakes and who can help keep you from falling into sin.

To be God's witness and make disciples requires our presence in a world that is far from Him. We cannot hide from the world because we are afraid of getting dirty or slipping. We just have to put up the necessary guards and protection. So be present in the world for Jesus, just be sure to have your partner and your boundaries in place.

Pastor Matt Huff

Why does the Bible seem to be male dominated and demeaning towards women and the Bible stories are about males?

When we read the bible it does appear to be demeaning toward women and most of the Bible stories are about men (although there are some pretty famous women talked about in Scripture). So, as we read the Bible it is important that we understand some things about it. It was written to share with us God's interaction with humanity in history. The time and culture in which it was written is quite different from where we are today, which means God's interaction with humanity was, at times, a bit different. This is especially true in the Old Testament. The Bible was not written to us specifically, but to people who lived before us in a different time and place. So, to understand how the Bible talks about women we need to understand a little about the culture in which it was written.

Based off of what we have available to us in Scripture and what we know about history, women were not treated as equals during the time of the writing of the Scriptures. Much of the culture during this time was patriarchal, controlled by men. The expectation for women was for them to be in the home raising the kids. Their rights and privileges were tied closely to their husbands or the males in their families. So, let's be careful to say the Bible is demeaning toward women when the Bible basically reports what the culture was like (and how God intervened and acted in it), which doesn't mean it is a Christian value or ideal.

With the arrival of Jesus comes a new worldview and a new life (a new way of being and doing). Jesus was radical, He went against culture, not for the sake of standing against culture, but for the sake of the Good News, for the sake of the Kingdom. He came to redeem God's creation. He brought a message that went against a lot of the culture and traditions of the day. Paul summarized it best in Galatians 3:26-28 when he wrote, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

With the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus things started to change. People were being changed which also meant culture was starting to change (to be redeemed). Jesus spoke to women in public, something that was not all that popular in the culture. He healed them and gave them titles like "daughter of Abraham" a significant act (Luke 13:16). That title meant her inheritance was hers because of who she was not because of her husband. Jesus intervened for women, even when caught in the act of sin (John 8:1-11). He taught women and let them follow Him (Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:1-3) and He entrusted women with perhaps the most important message; His resurrection (Mark 16).

One of Jesus' greatest statements on equality and summarizes all His life and teaching is Matthew 20:16; 25-28: "So the last shall be first, and the first last."But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This just isn't a woman issue with Jesus, it is with everything. God is the greatest and we aren't, that is the simple truth.

The Bible, when read carefully, actually lifts up women and looks out for women. They are defended in divorce, they are protected when their husband dies, and they are given a place of equality in the family of God through Christ. The frustrating thing is genuine change takes a while and transformation doesn't happen over night. The ways Scripture speaks of women in its defense and in its equality (Jesus) was very countercultural. It was not an easy message to carry and one they often had to set aside for the sake of the larger message, that of Jesus crucified, because until one has been touched by the Good News of Jesus it is difficult to hear and embrace His teachings. However, today we just might find ourselves in a different situation. "We live in a world that wants to afford women the same status as men. In a remarkable turn of events, the respectable position in our culture is actually the one that best fits the spiritual truth that God values both men and women equally and that God speaks to men and women equally. In the first century there was nothing uniquely Christian about placing women in subordination to men. This was exactly the position the world had on the issue. Christianity was unique when it afforded worth and value to women, when it moved in the direction of empowerment and spiritual equality. It was at this point that Christianity was being uniquely Christian. Today we can work out these spiritual principles more fully than the early church did in their day, just as we did when we abolished the institution of slavery.¹

Here is the truth; Jesus loves all of us with the same sacrificing kind of love. He loves all of you – no matter your skin color, no matter your gender, no matter your social status, enough to die for you. We are all worth it to Him and therefore we should all be worth it to each other.

Pastor Matt Huff

¹ Schenck, K. (2006). *1 & 2 Corinthians: a commentary for Bible students* (pp. 206–207). Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House.

How literally are we to take the Bible? Are they symbolic or word for word true?

Wouldn't it be great if everything in Scripture was black and white, no varying ways to interpret it and it dealt specifically with all the things we are dealing with our society? But, it is not always that clear and certainly does not always directly address the issues that we often face. So, how do we read the Bible and apply the Truth of it to our lives and live the life it describes? As frustrating as it might be at times to not have everything spelled out in Scripture that is the very thing that makes the Word of God living and active (plus the work of the Holy Spirit bring it to life in us), able to transcend culture and time to speak to every person all over the world throughout all of time.

The Church of the Nazarene believes in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation (*Luke 24:44-47; John 10:35; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21*). We believe the Bible gives us everything we need to live a Godly and Christ-like life. God inspired the message it contains, a history of God's interaction with creation (humanity) and His plan for redemption, while allowing each writer to tell the story in their own way, with their own style, and personality. That's why each book and letter has a different feel and appeals to a different audience. Despite the Bible being written by at least 40 different people over the course of 1,500 years the message of it remains constant.

Since the Bible was written by different people and God allowed them to write in their own way it contains different types of writings. Some of these writings are very black and white, things we can understand and take literally, some are more allegorical and it takes a little more study and digging to understand what the writer is talking about, and some things are symbolic or figurative. When we read Scripture often the context will tell us if what is being said is something we can take literally or if it is symbolic. John Wesley used a formula to help him understand and interpret Scripture, it is called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The four components are Scriptures, tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is considered the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine. Tradition is experience and the witness of development and growth of the faith through the past centuries and in many nations and cultures. Experience is the individual's understanding and appropriating of the faith in the light of his or her own life. Through reason the individual Christian brings to bear on the Christian faith discerning thought.

The quadrilateral can be especially helpful when we encounter those particularly difficult issues or passages of Scripture. We always start with Scripture and if we still do not have a clear understanding we move to tradition. How have those who have gone before us interpreted and understood that passage? What others have said, does it line up with what we have experienced and does it make sense in light of Scripture says and what the Holy Spirit is doing among us? Perhaps the most helpful thing we can do as we approach Scripture is to look for the principles it contains and not for a list of do and don't. Does our understanding of an issue line up with the principles outlined in the story of God? Lastly, listen to the Holy Spirit, He is our teacher and our guide, we must never leave Him out of the process.

Pastor Matt Huff

How does abortion line up with Scripture?

As briefly discussed in the previous response the Bible does not always deal directly with the issues of our day. There are things we face today that are not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Abortion is one of those topics. Murder is discussed but the word abortion is not there. Which leads people to many different understandings of where it lies. Ultimately the question comes down to when does life begin? When is murder, murder? Should there be laws to regulate abortion (God does not want divorce, but He created laws to regulate the practice in order to protect the wife and children)? This is a matter for a much larger discussion.

One thing that is clearly spoken of in Scripture is the reality of a broken world. It was not God's plan that we ever have to discuss the issue of abortion, no matter the reason – rape, unwanted pregnancy, unhealthy mom or child, etc... None of this is what God called good, all of it is the result of sin entering the world, a result of the fall. All of it is what took Jesus to the cross, it is what Jesus died to redeem us from. In light of sin, we see a loving and gracious God coming to forgive and redeem. We, as the Church, need to be a place leading people (all those impacted by abortion in any form) to that grace and forgiveness.

The Church of the Nazarene's official stance on abortion is as follows:

The Church of the Nazarene affirms the sanctity of human life as established by God the Creator and believes that such sanctity extends to the child not yet born. Life is a gift from God. All human life, including life developing in the womb, is created by God in His image and is, therefore, to be nurtured, supported, and protected. From the moment of conception, a child is a human being with all of the developing characteristics of human life, and this life is dependent on the mother for its continued development. Therefore, we believe that human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception. We oppose induced abortion by any means, when used for either personal convenience or population control. We oppose laws that allow abortion. Realizing that there are rare, but real medical conditions wherein the mother or the unborn child, or both, could not survive the pregnancy, termination of the pregnancy should only be made after sound medical and Christian counseling.

Responsible opposition to abortion requires our commitment to the initiation and support of programs designed to provide care for mothers and children. The crisis of an unwanted pregnancy calls for the community of believers (represented only by those for whom knowledge of the crisis is appropriate) to provide a context of love, prayer, and counsel. In such instances, support can take the form of counseling centers, homes for expectant mothers, and the creation or utilization of Christian adoption services.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes that consideration of abortion as a means of ending an unwanted pregnancy often occurs because Christian standards of sexual responsibility have been ignored. Therefore the church calls for persons to practice the ethic of the New Testament as it bears upon human sexuality and to deal with the issue of abortion by placing it within the larger framework of biblical principles that provide guidance for moral decision making.

(Genesis 2:7, 9:6; Exodus 20:13; 21:12-16, 22-25; Leviticus 18:21; Job 31:15; Psalms 22:9; 139:3-16; Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15, 23-25, 36-45; Acts 17:25; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:16; 7:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6)

The Church of the Nazarene also recognizes that many have been affected by the tragedy of abortion. Each local congregation and individual believer is urged to offer the message of forgiveness by God for each person who has experienced abortion. Our local congregations are to be communities of redemption and hope to all who suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual pain as a result of the willful termination of a pregnancy.
(Romans 3:22-24; Galatians 6:1)

Pastor Matt Huff

As I've aged my understanding of God has become less cemented and more mysterious. How do you teach your kids about God while they are in the cemented stage while trying to be authentic?

Teaching our children about God is such an important process; none of us want to get that part wrong. But, as we grow in our faith and in life our understanding of God grows and changes, perhaps becoming a bit more complicated. That is part of our spiritual growth, moving from the milk to the meat as Paul would put it. In thinking about this question there was one verse that kept coming to mind, Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." We want to be sure to lay a good foundation on which our children can grow once they leave home and are no longer being so heavily influenced by us.

It is possible for us to teach our children about God without getting into the more mysterious things about God or our understanding of Him and how He works in our lives. There is certainly a mystery when it comes to the things of God, we cannot know it all and He has purposefully not revealed everything to us. He has given us what we need and gives us more when we are ready and when we need it. So, I think we teach our children the same way God goes about teaching and nurturing us, start with the basics and go from there.

Paul talks about people starting off with milk in their spiritual journeys (1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Hebrews 5:11-12). The milk Paul refers to would be the basic elemental teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught that God, the creator of all things, cares deeply for His creation and sent Christ to intercede for us, ultimately paying the price for sin. Jesus also taught many things about life and practice as well, especially in His Sermon on the Mount. I think the best thing for us to teach our children are the truths that make up the milk, those basic elements of the teachings of Jesus.

As we begin teaching our kids about God we start with those simple things. The Bible and the clear things it teaches like God being creator, Jesus coming, being crucified, and raising from the dead, loving other people, etc... As they get older and life begins to get more complicated the applications of those truths will get more complicated and it is then that we can walk through some of those complicated understandings and teachings together. I think it is important to not create the questions for them, but to deal authentically with the questions and struggles when they come. Teach the things you are cemented in and not the things you are still struggling with and growing in.

Pastor Matt Huff

What guidance do you have on how we use our resources for God's purpose?

In answering this question I want to first address the underlying assumption that the resources available to us are ours. If we pay close attention to what Scripture teaches everything in the world belongs to God, we have just been given the opportunity and privilege to manage and use them:

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)

“You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.” (Psalms 8:6-8)

So, perhaps the first part of my response is to say that all of our resources came from God and we need to make sure we are respecting them and using them in ways that are God honoring. Perhaps we should ask are we using our resources in ways that He intended them to be used?

So, how did God intend the resources in His creation to be used? Part of that answer can be found in Genesis 1 where it says, “...it shall be food for you.” The resources we have available to us should be used for our provision and survival. That means things like energy, food, health, safety, and so forth. God cares deeply for us, which is why He has provided for us through His creation. So, are we using these resources to sustain (and even add to) life?

In Matthew 25 Jesus shares a parable about a man who was going on a journey and he had three men look after his possessions. Each man received some talents. Two of the three invested their talents in such a way that they increased. One of them just buried it and did nothing with it. When the owner returned and was angry with the man who just hid the talent and did nothing with it. This parable can easily be applied to us, God has entrusted us with many resources, are we investing them in ways that they multiply and increase? I am not just talking about in a bank account. I am talking about investing them in Kingdom things. If we are unsure of what that means take some time to read through Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5-7. He talks about many Kingdom things, but mainly are we investing in the lives of others and in the spreading of the message of Jesus with our resources? They are not just for us, but they are to be shared.

I believe God has given us these resources to sustain our lives, add to our lives, and to give us the necessary tools to do His work. But, I also believe God wants us to enjoy life (Jesus said He wants to give us the desires of our hearts). So, I think we can also use the resources available to us for enjoyment. Having fun, going on a vacation, is certainly not against God's purpose for His creation. We just have to keep a healthy balance and not forget the other reasons we should be using them.

The best response for this answer comes from Colossians 3:17; “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” We have to be careful not to live selfish lives, but lives that bring glory to God. If we do that, there will be little doubt about whether or not we are using our resources for God's purpose.

Pastor Matt Huff

What does God want us to do when things are going well and it is hard to keep in contact with God?

Our Spiritual life often resembles a rollercoaster doesn't it? We have our highs and our lows – our mountaintops and our valleys. When we are in the valley we ask questions like how do I draw closer to God, how much longer God, what do You want me to learn. When we are on the mountaintops we might say thanks at first and then we just enjoy the view. Ever wonder why we have so many ups and downs – I doubt God intended it to be that way – I think He prefers us to be on the mountaintop. So, how do we stay on the mountaintop longer than usual?

We would do well to listen to the warning Moses gave the Israelites before entering the promised land; “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. “In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ (Deuteronomy 8:11-17).

It is incredibly easy to get comfortable in the easy times and to forget about God. When we do we think we are self-sufficient and we start to take on a little thing called pride. We no longer need God because we think we are good enough. When pride gets into our heart we can rest assured a valley is soon to follow. We become like the turtle who wanted to spend the winter in Florida, but he knew he could never walk that far. He convinced a couple of geese to help him, each taking one end of a piece of rope, while he clamped his vise-like jaws in the center. The flight went fine until someone on the ground looked up in admiration and asked, "Who in the world thought of that?" Unable to resist the chance to take credit, the turtle opened his mouth to shout, "I did--." Don't become so comfortable that you forget about the One you are holding onto.

Moses also gave some instructions so this wouldn't happen. He said, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you....“But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:10, 18). Israel actually did this a few times, like when they built altars to God after great victories or created a special feast to remember the Passover and God's delivering them from slavery. We would do well to follow those actions when we are on our mountaintops. What things can we do to remember Him when things are going well? How can we be a people that live a life of thanksgiving and trusting god always even when times are good?

I think a good start is to make it part of our practice. We are good at asking God of things, how good are we at thanking Him and then remembering all He has done? Perhaps we keep a journal to remind us of the good things God has done. We have phones now with reminders and calendars on them, maybe we set a reminder on the anniversary of one of God's many blessings in

our lives. We may not build an altar, but we can use that idea to erect memories that keep us grounded in the good times. So, in those good times, spend a lot of time praising God for it and reminding yourself why the time is good in the first place; because God did it.

Pastor Matt Huff

What are the most helpful habits, practices, rituals, rhythms, and things you do to further your relationship with our Creator?

I think the answer to this question varies from person to person. There are some basic things we all must do to get to know God and learn more about who He is, but ultimately some of our best practices are going to be left up to what works best for us. We cannot always do what everyone else is doing, we need to figure out what makes sense to us. Paul told the church in Philippi to do that; "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Jesus had His own custom of going away from everyone to pray. Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." The key here is that He did it often. When we find what works for us we need to make sure that we are doing it on a regular basis. So, what works best for you?

For me it is having devotional time with God first thing in the morning. That is when my mind is the freshest and I can focus on Him. I don't yet have a day's worth of distractions to take up my thoughts. So, I try to find time first thing in the morning to spend with Him. The length of time that I spend often varies depending on what is on my heart and what He is saying to me. Sometimes I spend that time reading His word, sometimes it is just in prayer, and sometimes it is just in silence before Him. I just make it a point to have some time in the morning set aside for God. I find if I stick to too much of a schedule during that time that I get bored and lose focus because it becomes too routine.

There are some disciplines that we need to work into our life on a regular basis, how you work that in is totally up to you. First, it is very important that we are in God's Word on a regular basis. That is where we gain tools and principles we can use to live the life God has for us. It is where we learn about God's character and how He has worked throughout history. It is an essential tool that God wants us to use. Do you read it or listen to it? Do you read a chapter a day or 5? Do you memorize Scripture or just let it sink in? Those are the things that are up to you, just be sure to spend time in His Word.

We also need to make sure we spending time in prayer. That's our communication with the Father. When I say prayer I am not just saying our want list. I am talking about time devoted to talk and to listen. It is ok to just be quiet in our prayer time. We need to take time to pray. When you do it is up to you.

We need to gather together with fellow believers. There is just something that we get from being with others who are on the same journey as us. Sunday has traditionally been the best day for us to gather, but with people's busy schedules that might not be the case for you. Maybe you just want more community than what Sunday morning church can offer. That is fine, just find a group to get together with on a regular basis. When we link arms as the body of Christ we are stronger.

I also think we need to make serving part of our spiritual discipline. God has commanded us to love one another and to give our lives for each other. The best way for us to do that is in service to one another. When we love as God asks us to, we grow in ways we didn't think we would. God takes those moments and uses them to mold and shape us. So, we have to find ways to get involved and to serve.

There are many ways you can work these things into your life. Exactly how you go about doing it is up to you. The most important thing is that you do something. Make it your custom just as it was Jesus' custom to go into the wilderness to pray.

Pastor Matt Huff

How is it possible that God did not have a mother or father - that He has always existed?

This question really cuts to the heart of what it means for God to be eternal. In John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We also see in Genesis 1:1 that it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It is here that we find clues as to the nature of God.

The Bible is stating here that He existed before the beginning. From our perspective, it is hard to grasp an existence outside of time without a beginning. If God existed before the beginning does that mean that He has always, and always will exist?

Again, if we turn to the Bible we can find a response. In Micah 5:2 it says, "From you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." To cut right to the chase this is saying that Jesus will come and rule in Israel (also known as a Messianic prophecy) and that the One (Jesus) who comes has existed from eternity. Eternity in this context is always, or forever. This gives us another clue to the nature of God.

God was there in the beginning, and we are told not just in the beginning but always. One of the hardest things to understand about God is that He exists without a beginning or an ending. He created the universe in which we live, and it is in this universe that we measure time and place beginnings and endings.

God the Father is not human and is not bound to move through time with us in the same way. He has always existed and will always exist. He was not born to a mother and father because He has always been. In this ever-changing world, God is THE constant.

He does not need a beginning because there is no before Him or after Him. In Malachi 3:6 the Bible quotes God as saying, "For I, the Lord do not change". Hebrews 13:8 tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever".

Thomas Aquinas was a brilliant theologian who lived during the 13th century said the following, "He endures beyond every age i.e. beyond every kind of duration. For age is nothing more than the period of each thing... if any other thing were conceived to exist for ever... then God would still reign beyond, in as much as His reign is simultaneously whole."

This is to say that God reigns and exists as a whole, while we live only in this moment and in this time. We have a beginning, we have an end, but God simply is.

Pastor Ryan Barker

Why do some people not believe in Jesus?

Many people do not see their need for a savior. Others know that there is a serious problem with the world, but do not think that believing in Jesus will make any difference. Some have been hurt personally (or seen someone they love get hurt) by the people who claim to follow Jesus. Still others simply have not heard the Good News.

To many people, the world that we live in holds much fulfillment and happiness. There is always something to entertain your mind or your body as you go about life and there doesn't seem to be something missing unless you dig deeper. We find that there is a desire for something more than just the physical entertainment available in our world.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 2 is that before becoming Christians we are dead in our trespasses and sin. This doesn't mean that we were physically dead, but that we were spiritually dead and that we lived bound to sin. Romans says that we are slaves of sin and the result of living in that sin is death. Christians believe that if you live under sin then you will go to hell. What the Bible also tells us is that God came here in Jesus Christ and gave us a pathway out of that enslavement.

One of the consequences of being spiritually dead in sin is that you cannot always see that there is a better way that God intended for humans to be. We were created to live in a relationship with the one who created us but sin damages that relationship. But God has made a path for us to walk in right relationship with Him and to join Him in eternal life through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Another of the main reasons that people do not want to follow Jesus is because His name is regularly tarnished by those who claim to follow Him. This means that while people preach forgiveness and the love of God, they look down on people and treat them like they are filthy or gross. This is not an uncommon accusation against Christians and unfortunately it is often true.

We must strive to allow the Holy Spirit to continually make us more and more Christlike until as Paul wrote in Galatians, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me".

Christians have an opportunity to be the light of Jesus in this world. If we will step forward in His name, more people will see Him and come to know His saving grace.

Pastor Ryan Barker

When Moses gave his last message to the Israelites before he died – why did God give them (and us) free will, when He knew how badly it would turn out?

For reference here is the passage I believe you are talking about in Moses' final speech: Deuteronomy 31:29 (Moses speaking)

For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands."

To put it simply, God gave us free will because he loves us enough to give us a choice. He knows that people who are yet unsaved are going to make choices that lead them down a path contrary to Him. He also knows there will be those who choose to enter in to the relationship that He created us to be in.

The Bible tells us that we were made in the image of God. This is from the Genesis account of creation where God says, "Let us make man in our own image, according to Our likeness" (Gen 1:26). According to the Article of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene, "We believe that the human race's creation in Godlikeness included the ability to choose between right and wrong...".

It is this choice that Adam and Eve made to bring sin into the Garden of Eden and the rest of the world. However, we also can respond to the grace of God and turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

In many ways it would be easier to live a Christian life if we were to receive a sort of injection on our first day as Christians and no longer had the ability to choose between following God or not. However, there would not be the same fulfillment in our relationship with God if this were true.

The Bible tells us that God delights in us and that our choice to follow Him brings him joy. What delight is there in a slave who cannot choose whether to love you or not? Luke 15:7 says, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Clearly it brings God (and all of heaven) joy when we turn from sin and follow Him.

I believe that God gave us free will because He desires a relationship with us that is freely chosen and fully conscious. He loves us enough to allow us to choose that relationship and to have sent Jesus to die on the cross to make it fully available.

Pastor Ryan Barker

If you can't prove the Old Testament, then why do you believe it?

The simple answer to this is that we can prove many of the things that are found in the Old Testament. A bit of a longer answer is that while many of the things that are mentioned are difficult to place, we have evidence that the Old Testament is a reliable manuscript. When held up against other ancient manuscripts that we consider to be accurate, the Bible stands strong.

Let's look at the historical evidence. If we are looking at the Bible as a historical document (which I can tell you is not necessary according to many theologians), there are many places that we can start. The first step is a general idea of the truth of the Book. Questions like: Are the places real; Do they mention real events in history or are they only able to be proven by the person who wrote it down; Are there animals that only exist on it's pages; Is there evidence of the people groups they talk about; and similar questions will give us a good base.

The Old Testament revolves around a specific people group known as the Israelites. This people group still exists today. Their history is clearly documented and easily verifiable from the time of the Romans forward. Not all the Israelite people are part of the religious group that makes up those who still practice what is called Judaism and follow what they call the Tanakh. This is the Christian Old Testament. It is made of three sections known as the Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings). There are some differences in the book make up and in the order of the books, but that is another topic. Judaism is the religion that Jesus and the people in the Old Testament practiced

There are many people groups mentioned in the Old Testament that are easy to identify throughout history and can be found in the area that the Old Testament was written. Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, Philistines, Moabites, Midianites, Ishmaelites, Persians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and many others are mentioned in the Old Testament and have both archaeological and written history attached to them. There are also locations mentioned in the Bible attached to those people groups that are verifiable and can be traced through both genealogy and archaeology to that time and place.

There is also evidence of the Israelite people living consistently in the land of Israel for a very long period. In the Balfour Declaration of 1917 the United Nations recognized that the Jewish people have lived in Israel since the time of Joshua onward. While the time of Joshua is up for serious debate, this international recognition of their placement in Israel does add to the validity of the Old Testament. If they weren't there, or had no settlement or civilization, then there would simply be no reason to continue checking the validity of the Book.

Many of the major events in the Old Testament are documented by other cultures and historians as well. The Bible claims that the Israelite people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians and the Assyrians. This is recorded by the Babylonian Chronicles kept by Nebuchadnezzar and there are also detailed lists of the plunder taken from the Jewish Temple. There is clear archaeological evidence of a massive invasion and warfare in the area from that period of history.

There are accounts in the Bible of people who ruled or lived during different periods of history. The Book of Daniel mentions Belshazzar who had no evidence for existence outside of the Bible

until the discovery of the Nabonidus Cylinder which states that he was a ruler in Babylon during the time that Daniel is writing about.

Another historical event is recorded in Daniel. In Daniel 5 the story is told of a feast at which God wrote on the wall that the kingdom would be destroyed. It is also said in the prophecy that the kingdom would be divided. This was a historical event that is well recorded. Historical texts tell us that Cyrus rerouted the Euphrates river and entered the city by night to take it in the Battle of Opis during a night of celebration because the Babylonians believed that their city was impregnable.

David and Goliath is one of the most popular Bible stories and we have also found evidence for pieces of it. The gate to the city that the Bible says was Goliath's hometown (Gath) has been found, as well as evidence of the name Goliath in that town. This could be another Goliath but is significant in that the name was not simply made up by someone wanting to make David awesome.

There is also the Tel Dan inscription that recounts the story of an Aramean king who claimed to have defeated the "king of Israel" and the "king of the House of David". This is again an outside source corroborating the existence of a major Biblical character.

There has also been evidence found of the Exodus from Egypt. This is a major piece of history for both the Israelite people and for Christians. The timelines for the crucifixion, the ascension of Jesus, and the day of Pentecost all relate back to this narrative. Two separate teams have gone into Saudi Arabia and found not only physical evidence of Mount Sinai but of ancient Jewish writing and drawing that has no other reason to be there.

These teams found an ancient menorah painted in a cave with the Jewish word for God and an altar with Egyptian cows painted in several places around it. They found a rock that had evidence of being a geyser that is recounted in the Bible when the people asked for water. They also found pillars set up in the way that is described in the Exodus around the mountain.

We also have found that the Old Testament has stayed consistent over time. One major concern is that the Bible has been rewritten over and over and we no longer have any idea what it originally said. However, this has been shown to be only a misconception.

In 1947 the Dead Sea scrolls were found. This was a huge treasure trove of ancient documents that had been preserved in a cave and were found by a shepherd who (thankfully) didn't just sell them on the black market. When the texts were analyzed there were some great discoveries made. One was an entire manuscript of the Book of Isaiah dating back to 75 BCE. What they found was that it was 95% word for word copying of the text. The 5% differences were in misspelled words or omitted letters. Fragments of texts were also found that date as far back as 250 BCE and the same level of accuracy is found.

This speaks to the seriousness with which the Biblical texts were carried down through the years. The Jewish scribes saw their work as passing down the very words of God. This was such a serious task that they would throw out an entire scroll if an error was found because they truly believed that what they were doing was of utmost importance. They were right.

There is more evidence of the historicity of the Old Testament. I have all the documentation for each piece of evidence presented here if you would like to see it and I am happy to sit down and go over it with you. It is even something I consider fun.

Pastor Ryan Barker

I don't feel persecuted very often and it seems that the Gospels say we can expect that if we are on the right path. Do you think we are off course?

Matthew 5:10

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

John 15:18-19

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

2 Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

There are more references to be found to this idea in the scripture but that is a good sampling.

First let me say that it is entirely possible that you are living a life that is unpleasing to God but pleasing to the world and so you are not experiencing any persecution. It is the easiest answer to give because it is simply that you are not doing what Jesus says you would be persecuted for. This could be intentional, or it could be something that has just happened over time and you have the opportunity now to change that and live for God. If that is the case, then change what you are doing. Follow God with everything you have and leave nothing back.

There is also the definition of persecuted and hated to be considered. Simply because we aren't being publicly executed or tortured doesn't mean that there is not persecution of Christians in America. I know someone who lost their job for holding a Bible study on their lunch break. When I was in a college, many people would disregard my opinions or degrade me for being a Christian who allowed my belief system to impact my behavior. I know of a high school class where the teacher will call out high school students who are Christian and mock their religion openly in the classroom. There are scientists and professors who claim to have lost their job for being openly Christian. Christian clubs are cancelled, and crosses are taken down from public spaces because they are labelled offensive.

While these things aren't the worst definitions of persecution I would put them in that category. There is yet another reason that you may not feel much persecution. You live in America. A place that is largely accepting of the Christian (and others) belief system. For the most part if you want to pray before you eat, people aren't going to be upset about it unless you demand that they pray with you. America is still 71% Christian according to polls and that means most likely people won't care that you want to lead a Godly life. This isn't an excuse, but it is a reason that Christians are less persecuted here than they are in other parts of the world.

Here are some questions to help you approach the question more personally. Examine what you do in your daily walk with God. When you go about your daily life are you recognizing God in it? When you talk to people do you mention that you go to church? If you don't do something because of your belief in the damage it does to your relationship with God what is the reason you give? Do you censor God out of your speech in certain situations where it might make people think less of you?

If you aren't being persecuted for being a Christian that doesn't automatically mean that you are doing something wrong. However, it is a great opportunity for you to check that you are living life the way that God intended you to. A good question I heard once is this, "If you were accused in a court of law of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Pastor Ryan Barker