

Many people think Christianity is not for the likes of them. But what if God exists? That would change everything. *God – Is He out There?* is a clear explanation of what God says about Himself without talking down to people. It's a great opportunity to think about the most important questions of all: Does God exist? What's He like? And what's it got to do with me?

Tim Chester

Pastor with Grace Church, Boroughbridge,
tutor with the Acts 29 Oak Hill Academy and author of over 30 books

I was the last person to say we need another evangelistic tool in the midst of so many already. That is, until I read this first workbook, *God – Is He Out There?*, by Mez McConnell. It is brilliantly simple and accessible to anyone searching for answers about God and truth, and yet biblically sound and clear about what it truly means to know Christ and walk with Him. Mez has a sensitive pastor's heart and a burden for the urban poor that oozes with every page. This book is a clear and needed contribution from one of the most careful and wise thinkers on caring for the poor in our generation.

Brian Croft

Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky,
Senior Fellow, Church Revitalization Center,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

A life committed to following Jesus isn't easy, so we need all the help we can get! I'm thankful, then, for a resource like this. In *God – Is He Out There?* Mez McConnell tackles the difficult – yet central – questions of Christian theology in a way that is accessible, practical, and personal.

Jared Wilson

Director of Content Strategy, Midwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri;
Managing Editor of For The Church, Midwestern's site for gospel-centered resources

A bangin' little book for those asking life's big questions...
especially those who don't know about Jesus!

Dai Hankey

Cheeky git and gospel ninja!

(... and Pastor of Hill City Church, Pontnewynydd, Wales)

God – Is He Out There? is such a practical tool for discipling believers in the basics of the Christian faith. Both new and mature Christians will find Mez's book helpful for understanding some of the foundational questions most of us have. My advice: Grab a copy and walk with a few others believers through it.

Robby Gallaty

Senior Pastor, Long Hollow Baptist Church,

Hendersonville, Tennessee

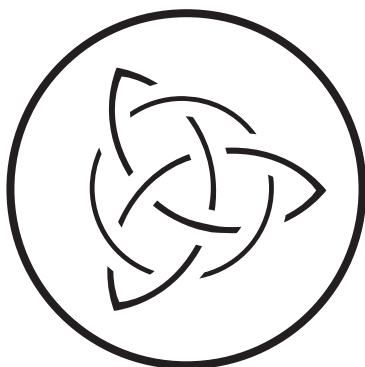
Mez McConnell gives us a beautiful and relatable road map to walking someone through the most important questions they'll ever have. *God – Is He out there?* connects the dots between our doubts and the divine. A wonderful read.

Albert Tate

Founder & lead pastor, Fellowship Monrovia, Monrovia, California

and contributor to *Letters to a Birmingham Jail: A Response to the*

Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr



GOD

IS HE OUT THERE?

MEZ MCCONNELL

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION.....	8
CHAPTER 1	
IF GOD EXISTS, PROVE IT THEN! PART I	11
CHAPTER 2	
IF GOD EXISTS, PROVE IT THEN! PART II	23
CHAPTER 3	
IF GOD EXISTS, THEN WHAT IS	
HE LIKE? PART I	35
CHAPTER 4	
IF GOD EXISTS, THEN WHAT IS	
HE LIKE? PART II	45
CHAPTER 5	
IF GOD EXISTS, WHAT DOES IT	
HAVE TO DO WITH ME?	53
CHAPTER 6	
IF GOD EXISTS, THEN WHAT'S	
WRONG WITH OUR WORLD?	61
CHAPTER 7	
IF GOD EXISTS, WHAT'S JESUS	
GOT TO DO WITH IT?	77
CHAPTER 8	
IF ALL THIS IS TRUE, NOW WHAT?	85

PREFACE

I didn't grow up going to church. Christianity was something completely alien to me. I grew up on the street and the only time I went to a church was to bury a friend who died too young. God, in His grace, saved me after I got out of prison. When I first went to church it seemed such a strange place. Now I am a pastor in a poor community called Niddrie in Edinburgh. There are so few helpful books and resources that are relatable to people in my community. That is why we wrote this series of books. Accessible, relatable and interactive workbooks for new Christians living in unchurched and disadvantaged communities. For this book I asked Brian Davis to help me. He is a pastor at the Risen Christ Fellowship in inner-city Philadelphia. I pray that as you study this book you will grow stronger in your faith.

MEZ McCONNELL

Pastor Niddrie Community Church

Director 20schemes

INTRODUCTION

The First Steps series will help equip those from an unchurched background take the first steps in following Jesus. We call this the 'pathway to service' as we believe that every Christian should be equipped to be of service to Christ and His church no matter your background or life experience.

If you are a church leader doing ministry in hard places, use these books as a tool to help grow those who are unfamiliar with the teachings of Jesus into new disciples. These books will equip them to grow in character, knowledge and action.

Or if you yourself are new to the Christian faith, still struggling to make sense of what a Christian is, or what the Bible actually says, then this is an easy to understand guide as you take your first steps as a follower of Jesus.

There are many ways to use these books.

- They could be used by an individual who simply reads through the content and works through the questions on their own.
- They could be used in a one-to-one setting, where two people read through the material before they meet and then discuss the questions together.
- They could be used in a group setting where a leader presents the material as a talk, stopping for group discussion throughout.

Your setting will determine how you best use this resource.

A USER'S KEY:

As you work through the studies you will come across the following symbols...



JACK – At the start of each chapter you'll meet Jack and hear something about his story and what's been going on in his life. We want you to take what we've been learning from the Bible and work out what difference it would make in Jack's life. So whenever you see this symbol you'll hear some more about Jack's story.



ILLUSTRATION – Through real-life examples and scenarios, these sections help us to understand the point that's being made.

STOP – When we hit an important or hard point we'll ask you to stop and spend some time thinking or chatting through what we've just learnt. This might be answering some questions, or it might be hearing more of Jack's story.



KEY VERSE – The Bible is God's word to us, and therefore it is the final word to us on everything we are to believe and how we are to behave. Therefore we want to read the Bible first, and we want to read it carefully. So whenever you see this symbol you are to read or listen to the Bible passage three times. If the person you're reading the Bible with feels comfortable, get them to read it at least once.



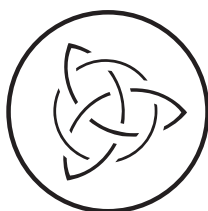
MEMORY VERSE – At the end of each chapter we'll suggest a Bible verse for memorisation. We have found Bible memorisation to be really effective in our context. The verse (or verses) will be directly related to what we've covered in the chapter.



SUMMARY – Also, at the end of each chapter we've included a short summary of the content of that chapter. If you're working your way through the book with another person, this might be useful to revisit when picking up from a previous week.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

GOD exists and
He has proved it
by creating the
world and the
human race.



1. IF GOD EXISTS, PROVE IT THEN!

(PART I)



JACK

Jack shuffles into the church building one day looking a little unsteady on his feet. A big, powerfully built man, he mumbles something about God and the church and slumps into a chair. After a bit of coercion you discover that he is in his mid-30s and comes from a Catholic background. The slurring, he claims, is down to his prescribed medication but you suspect that he is more than a little high on some form of street drug.

It turns out that he has heard about the church from friends and wants help to get his life sorted, even though he has no idea what he means by that. With a little questioning you discover that he is religious in that he believes in a God of some sort. He just doesn't know what. In Jack's mind, if there is a God, then He is definitely not interested in people like him. Jack has no clue about the Bible and he thinks the church is just for old women and posh people. But he's turned up because he's desperate to turn things around and this is the last resort.

Recently, his life has begun to seriously decline. One of his closest friends died of an overdose and he feels like his heroin habit is spiralling out of control. He's beginning to wonder more about the point of life. Why are we here? What's it all about? Is there any meaning to it all? He's full of doubt, fear, anger and questions.

WHERE DO WE BEGIN WITH JACK?

Jack asks some great questions.

Why are we here?

What are we doing on this big globe we call earth?

What is the point of it all?

These are the big questions of our day. Indeed they are the big questions of the history of the human race. We all want to find meaning in our lives – whether we come to church and believe in God or not. We want our lives to mean something. We want to think there is some significance to it all.

Who are we really?

What are we all about?

One thing is for certain. Most of us, like Jack, would be pretty confident that the Bible and the church have got nothing much to offer when it comes to this stuff.

But Jack, like most people, would be wrong.



ILLUSTRATION

I play a game with my two girls every year on their birthday and at Christmas. Like all children, they absolutely adore receiving and opening presents. They are just desperate to know what presents my wife and I have bought them and they will try any and every trick to find out ahead of time what's inside the packaging. Without fail one of them will sidle up to me at some point and ask what I have bought for the other one with the promise that, *'I will keep the secret. You can trust me, dad. I won't say anything.'* I always refuse, tell them to wait and they squeal with frustration. They want to know. They *need* to know. Instead, I keep my mouth shut until the

day arrives and they can find out for themselves what the gift is. But that doesn't stop them trying other tactics. So, if they can't get me to tell them then they begin trying to guess. They shake the box and shout out hundreds of different things hoping to pick up a clue in my reactions. Sometimes they convince themselves it is a particular thing right up to the moment they open the present and discover something different altogether. The only way they ever have real certainty about what is inside the wrapping paper is to tear it off and reveal what's underneath. That's when they finally know for sure what their gift is. Almost always it is never what they thought it was going to be and they are usually miles off the mark.

The same can be said about discovering the truth about God.

Many people think they know the answers to the secrets of the universe. Many people like to make wild guesses. They come up with all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas about how the human race came into existence. Does the Vatican sit on top of a giant spacecraft? Are we descended from an alien life force? Are we nothing more than evolved beasts?

Who knows?

Can we ever know for sure anyway?

Jack is one of those guys that think nobody can know for certain if God exists and nobody could ever know for sure what He is like. In Jack's world God is

unprovable

and

unknowable.

STOP

Q: What do we think? Is Jack right? Can the existence of God be proved? Can anybody really claim to know God for sure?

**ILLUSTRATION**

Imagine if we had to spend our entire lives sitting in a room without any windows. There is a door in this room but the handle is on the other side. In other words, there is no way out and there is no way of knowing what is on the other side of that door. There may be something or there may be nothing. You and your friends are constantly trying to figure the problem out. Some of them claim to hear noises out there but others say it's all in their imaginations. Some people try and guess what's out there and some can't be bothered because, after all, most of it is pure speculation. Some people are claiming they know 100% what is out there even though they've never ventured out of the room in their life. The bottom line is that none of the people in the room know for sure.

That is how most people think of the meaning of life and the existence of God.

The human race is trapped on this planet and many believe that we have no way of knowing for sure if there is anything out there. So, anybody who claims to know for sure is met with suspicion. How can we know anything for sure? Have we seen it with our own eyes? Where is the proof? The only way anybody in that room could have certainty about what was on the other side of the door is if it was opened and revealed to them.

This is always the first lesson a person has to accept about the Christian faith. This is what Jack has to understand.

We can never know anything for certain about the existence of God unless HE chooses to reveal it to us.

Google can't help us.

Our friends can't help us.

The only way anybody can know for sure is if the God 'out there' reveals Himself to us 'down here'. *This is precisely what the Christian faith claims He has done.*

1. GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN THE WORLD HE HAS MADE.

What does Jack believe about the world that he sees? He's not sure. Evolution, right? That's a (sort of) fact in Jack's mind. Yet, he doesn't quite know how to explain it. He just takes it as a fact because that's what scientists say and, anyway, he saw a bit of a programme on the TV about it once. Also, there was a Big Bang, wasn't there? He doesn't actually think about it much because it gives him a bit of a headache. Again, he doesn't really know how the world got here but it can't be God because nobody really believes that stuff anymore, do they? For Jack life is almost completely pointless. We live and die and that's it. There might be a God or there might not. Who knows? Who cares? What does it matter? It's not going to make his life better one bit, is it?

STOP

Q: What do we think about Jack's view of the world? How do we think the world got here? Does it matter? If so, why? If not, why not?

The Bible has a different view of the world than Jack's. In fact the Bible says that one of the ways God has revealed Himself to us is:

through this world that He has made.



'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork' (Ps. 19:1).



'For what can be known about God is plain to them [the human race], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they [the human race] are without excuse' (Rom. 1:19-20).



ILLUSTRATION

If we opened up the bonnet of a car and found a brand new engine we wouldn't, for one second, think that it got there by itself. Each part of the machine has a part to play in making the whole thing run smoothly. A working engine is a feat of creative and engineering genius. God proves His existence to the human race by His creation of the world, which is a work of stunning genius from start to finish.



JACK

'Hang on a minute,' says Jack. 'If that's true then why is this world so messed up? Why so much pain and suffering?'

Good questions.

We will get to them later in our studies on God.

But right now we are trying to lay the foundations. Once we get the foundations in we can start looking at some of the problem areas. For now, back to the point:

God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world through the creation He has made.

STOP

Q: What sort of things can we know about God just by looking at the world?

He must be **smart** when you think about how all things hold together in this world.

He must be **creative** when you think about the beauty and variety of created things.

He must be **powerful** when you think about the mountains, the seas and the powerful forces at work in our universe.

What's even more incredible is that God did all this simply by speaking it into existence. Many people want to write off the world as a cosmic accident, a chance event or the result of a bang. But the world around us speaks of a great designer, a planner, somebody creative and, above all, somebody extremely powerful.

2. GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN RACE.

The world is an amazing place full of many wonders but there is nothing on the planet to compare to the human race. But let's remember that Jack believes in evolution and, therefore, doesn't think that human beings are any more important or different than any other creature on earth. Or does he?

STOP

Q: Is there a difference between a human baby and a puppy? Is one of them more valuable than the other? Defend your answers.

Human beings are extremely complex creations. Even something as small as the human eyeball is just so intricate and well put together. The retina contains 130 million rod-shaped cells, which transmit impulses to the brain through 1 million fibres, and handles 0.5 million messages simultaneously. It is a feat of design

and engineering. We could go through practically every other organ in the body and discover similar marvels.



JACK

'So what!' says Jack. 'Dogs have eyes. Don't we share the same DNA with apes too?' So that proves the Bible is wrong!

STOP

Do we agree with Jack? What, if anything, makes us different from the animal world?

WE ARE INTIMATELY FORMED

Genesis teaches us that. God is clearly active in the creation of the world and all living things, including us. Look at the language of Genesis 2:7.

Man was *'formed'* by God and then *He breathed life into us.*

That suggests intimacy and craft—there is no room for an evolutionary process at this point. We were formed from the earth and we return to the earth. Our very breath here is a God-given gift – there is intimacy in our creation. He didn't just start a process and stand back from it to let it develop.

WE ARE MADE IN HIS IMAGE

God said, *'Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness'* (Gen. 1:26). There are obviously similarities between man and the animals. Both were created from the same matter (dust), both given the breath of life and, therefore, many see a close link between humanity and the animal kingdom. But, in so many ways, we stand apart from the animal kingdom. We are similar yet, Genesis teaches, we are so very different. We are created in the image of God and animals are not.

The root of the Hebrew word for image, *tselem*, appears to mean ‘to carve’, or ‘cut up’. In other words, *man is almost literally a chip off the old block*. But what does it mean? Are we literally little gods then, as Mormons would have us believe? No, not really. Does God have a physical body then? No, He is a spirit, the Bible teaches us.

But man does have

reason,

intellect,

will,

morality,

a conscience

and emotion

and in Adam we were created

sinless

and good.

We have

the ability to communicate in languages,

creativity,

love,

holiness,

immortality

and

freedom.

It is important that we understand the high nature of our creation and that is why the Bible mentions the phrase ‘image of God’ three times in two verses (Gen. 1:26-27). It is clear that both men and women share a common humanity and an equal worth before God, but it is interesting that they are not equal in terms of being constituted in His image in exactly the same way. Man is from dust and woman is from his flesh and bones. Woman is dependent on the man. Yet man is also dependent on the woman, ‘for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God’ (1 Cor. 11:12).

**Men and women are worthy of equal dignity –
only evolution reduces us to the same worth as a flea.**

Man and woman are the crowning glory of God’s creation. And all of this is described in the Bible as ‘very good.’

The work of creating humanity is finished.

In other words, the human race was made

**for God
and
by God.**

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE SOULS

It is the soul that gives us a unique place in the world. It is what connects us to God. It’s what makes us know deep down inside that there is something more to life than what we currently experience. (It is one of the reasons that Jack feels as empty as he does.) The human race has been made with an ability to question and a deep sense of right and wrong. When we lie to people, whether we are Christians or not, we know deep inside it’s wrong. When we hurt

another person, we know deep inside it's wrong. We know, through our conscience, when we have done a wrong thing.

Nobody has to tell us this.

We just know.

Where does this come from?

The Bible says in Romans 2:14-15 that we know right and wrong because God has written His law on our hearts. He has engraved it there, even before we were born. Every human being is born with a conscience. It tells us that the person who created us is righteous and holy and perfect and good. God put these things into our hearts so that when we do wrong we would not have any excuse.



MEMORY VERSE

'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork' (Ps. 19:1).



SUMMARY

Jack needs to know that life is not pointless. It is not random. God does exist and God does care about him and his life. The world around us, and even Jack himself, is proof of God's existence.

But there's more...