

OCTOBER 27 2019 | JONATHAN SHANKS

Does God Exist?

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

What is God? Who is God? Is there a supreme, higher intelligence beyond all that we see and perceive?

If God exists, what is He like? These are some of the really big questions of life. And as I look around, I appreciate, I am preaching to the choir.

I guess you're sitting there thinking, why is he doing this for us? But you know what? It's not the case for everyone here.

And even though we do believe there is a God, we believe that there is a God who loves us, there are times and seasons in life that we question that. Is that a fair statement?

So we're going to spend this morning asking the question, is God really there? Does he care? Does he exist?

Our first words expressed at our first official church service last week were these from John 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The text is a mirror of Genesis chapter 1, the first words of the Bible, in the beginning, God, the Christian world view.

The way that Christians see the world, as expressed in the teaching of the Bible, tells us that there is one God, he is good, he created all things, he is three in personhood, father, son, and holy spirit. In the beginning, God.

Now, you're not meant to apologize in preaching, but let me apologize. Today is going to be a bit longer. They're going to serve coffees halfway through.

No, they're not. But it's going to be a little bit longer than normal. So give me some grace.

And we're not going to actually spend as much time in the Bible as we normally would. This is not looking good, is it? Long sermon, not a lot of the Bible.

But we're talking about a question. Does God exist? You can't make all the argument from this, though there will be some.

I want to put to you that just from logic and from creation all around us, there is adequate truth to point us towards a belief in God. And I wholeheartedly believe that God exists. He loves us and he sent Jesus to show us how to live and to save us.

What can we know about the existence of God? I'm a married man. Many of you know that.

I'm married to Leanne. We are blessed with four children. And I'm pretty sure my wife loves me.

In fact, I'm very confident that I believe she does love me. Were you to ask me to prove that my wife of 27 years loves me, well, I would probably produce a marriage certificate. I'd show you our joint bank accounts.

I'd say she does these things that make me think she must love me. But could I prove to you that in her heart and mind, she loves me? Maybe not.

There are some things that are true, even though you can't prove them, in the same way you can prove other things. Is that fair to say? The existence of God is a bit like that.

We can't put God in a test tube.

We can't do some mathematical tests and sums and come up with God, but you can come, as I have and many here, to a place where you genuinely believe, with everything you can believe, that there's a God who made everything, and He wants to know me,

and I can interact with Him. I don't know if you've come to this point yet in your life, but belief is something you can't escape in life. We just can't be sure about everything.

So we're constantly living in a state of belief, but often unbelievers don't realize just how much they are believing, so how much they are people of faith. The Bible says that it is foolish not to believe in God.

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God, Psalm 14 verse 1. Foolish to not believe that there is a God.

But the Bible also says, without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Hebrews 11, 6. So we get caught, don't we?

It's foolish not to believe there's a God, but the Bible also says that to believe in God, you're going to have to do it by faith, which ultimately is going to look a bit foolish. So you get caught a bit both ways.

We have faith all the time without realising it. We take leaps of faith to believe whatever we are believing. I was a scripture teacher only last year, but also many years ago.

I remember teaching down at Carringbar High in the Sutherland Shire, and I was teaching for 10 weeks this bunch of year 10 students. We got to know each other pretty well.

And at the end, I was sort of summing it all up, talking about the meaning of life and the fact that there's a leap of faith required to believe that Jesus is who he says he is.

And I was drawing it on the board with the old chalk on the whiteboard back in probably the 90s, I guess. And this guy named Michael, I remember his name, Michael, he said, can I get up and share something? I said, go for your life.

So he jumps up and he comes over to where I was writing all about the meaning of life and the leap of faith that is required to be a Christian.

And he drew a stick figure, and then he said, the stick figure dies, and he drew a line and put the stick figure horizontal, and he said, carbon comes out, and that's all there is to life. Basically, you live and you die and you rot in the ground.

And then he tapped on that and he said, you can either believe this or you can take, and he drew an arc, you can take a leap of faith and believe what John has been talking about. He said, I rest my case, and he sat down.

He said, oh, thank you, Michael. I appreciate that. I said, can someone tell me what Michael said that was wrong?

And people gave me all these answers that were very Christian-like. And I said, no, no one's correct here.

What Michael did that was wrong was he tapped on the board and said, you can all stay here and believe this or take a leap of faith and believe something else. And I said, Michael, we don't all believe what you believe.

We don't all start where you believe. We've all taken a leap of faith to believe what we believe. And you're a believer too, mate.

And that's the reality. We are always believing in something. The question is, what are you basing that belief on?

I read a fascinating book some years ago about a man named Anthony Flew. Anyone heard of Anthony Flew? Yeah, Evan.

He loves his apologetics. He died at age 87. He was arguably the most influential atheist of the 20th century.

There were a lot of atheists in the 20th century. So this guy is a significant player. He was personally around in the 1950s having public debates with none other than CS.

Lewis in Oxford. Anthony Flew is a heavy hitter as far as atheists go. Excuse me.

Not a Christian, but he becomes a theist late in life. The well-known atheist, Richard Dawkins, who Flew said was a light hitter, a lightweight, as far as atheists go, he said something interesting about Anthony Flew.

Dawkins attacked Flew for leaving atheism, and he called it turguization. Anyone use turguization in their normal speech? Turguization.

It means apostasy. Apostasy. What an interesting statement for a leading atheist to make.

A hard-line scientist, a non-faith person, is hassling out a bloke who leaves atheism because he is abandoning the faith.

When Dawkins himself believes what Dawkins said that he believes in without empirical proof to back it up, that is, in faith, Dawkins says, I believe in Darwinian evolution. He's not assured of Darwinian evolution as a foolproof scientific test.

It's his belief. What do you believe about the existence of God? You may find, and I say this with all respect, it takes just as much belief to be a non-believer, an atheist, as it does to be a believer.

We're all believing. You cannot escape it. Imagine a primitive tribe.

They find this phone. And there's someone, it's got a bit of battery left, and there's someone speaking on the other end of the phone. And so, you know, it's a classic situation.

Some of the primitive tribe say, there's a real person. Somehow, we don't understand how it's done, but there's someone on the other end of that phone talking to us in a language we don't understand.

And there are others who we might call unbelievers, and they're like, there is no one talking. It's just making sounds. And one person says, no, no, I really believe.

We just don't understand what the language is, but someone real is on the other end of that phone. No, no, no. There is no one on the other end of that phone.

It is just an object. And so, the unbelieving primitive tribes people, they take the phone and they smash it, and they say, see, our point is justified.

Life is based on belief, the hunch that the probability of something being true is sufficiently high enough for it to be true. And sometimes you just can't prove that something is true.

Over 99%, well over 99% of planes take off and land where they're supposed to be. Some don't. But it doesn't stop us from going on planes.

Some of us have maybe suffered salmonella poisoning. I won't ask who, but that would be whoreful.

You could get salmonella poisoning from any food, certainly from takeaway, but it doesn't often stop us from doing it every now and then because we weigh up the probabilities, which is what we're doing in life all the time, and we take chances.

We should apply the same rationale to the existence of God. What is the probability of God existing?

I want to make two suggestions. They're a classic argument for the existence of God, and I hope that'll give you something to think about. The first is simply the thought that God is the best explanation for why things exist.

God is the best explanation. The most obvious thing about life is the fact that we exist. If you touch the person next to you, which you shouldn't necessarily do, but they are more than likely to be warm, which says they're alive.

But before that, a more profound and philosophical explanation or question is that, or understanding, is they exist. The person next to you exists unless you're in a dream. And as soon as something exists, you have a natural question that arises.

How does it exist or why does it exist? Is that logical? They're there.

I wonder why or how they are there. Philosophers call it the principle of sufficient reason.

Everything that exists really must prove the reason for its existence, and everything that exists is subject to another principle, the principle of contingency, cause and effect. So why is that thing there? Why does it exist?

Everything has a cause and effect. Every person is here because a mother gave birth to them. Every blade of grass needs water.

The principle of contingency, cause and effect, is why your mum growing up didn't say to you, oh, your room is messy. That must be no one's fault. It's the truth, isn't it?

We see something and we go, there is a reason why this has happened. Nothing is self-reliant. Two or three hundred years ago, two or three hundred years ago, atheists used to argue that the universe was just there.

Self-reliant. It was big. It was so far beyond us that it was like, it has no beginning.

It has always been there. And we didn't have to answer the question of why. Then along came Albert Einstein, the late 1800s, and he changed everything because he argued that the universe is not in a steady state.

He said it's all expanding like an inflating balloon. And Einstein's theory was confirmed by an American astronomer called Edward Hubble, who observed in 1929 that nearly all the other galaxies are moving away from us.

And so they realized that the universe must have been much smaller, that the universe must have had a beginning.

And then in 1965, after we discovered some background radiation in the universe, it was agreed by most scientists that there was a big bang that started everything off in the beginning. Now, this was a blow.

You may not realize this, but it was a blow to Atheists because it lined up with Genesis 1, which said that everything did have a beginning. Remember, God said, Let there be light.

The Big Bang Theory basically says that once upon a time, all the matter that currently exists in the universe was condensed and compressed into one tiny particle, smaller than a grain of sand.

And because of what they call quantum fluctuation, it exploded outwards. But it didn't just explode in any old fashion. This first explosion had to occur at just the right speed.

Too fast, nothing would ever settle down to exist in the universe. Too slow, and the universe would never get going.

The late Stephen Hawking, world expert on black holes in the universe, admits, if the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller even by one part in 100,000 million million, the universe would have re-collapsed before it ever

reached its present size. according to another leading physicist, Paul Davies, our universe is about as likely as you or I aiming at a target an inch wide on the other side of the universe and hitting the mark. What does this mean for us?

Because you might be thinking, why is he going on about this science stuff at church? The point is this, non-faith-based scientists are believers. You can't not be a believer.

It is so unlikely for the universe to turn up by chance. You've got to be a believer in chance.

So getting back to our principles, if we apply the principle of sufficiency and contingency, we ask the question, why was the particle there in the first place?

If it all just started by a particle that was there, and it sort of had this big bang and it all happened, you've got to put this principle of sufficiency and contingency in here. I've got a picture up here.

Everything that exists is everything in the circle. And everything that is in that circle is contingent on something. There's a cause and effect for that.

So if we're looking for what the cause is of everything, it's either in the circle or outside the circle. Does that sound logical? If everything that ever existed is in that circle, then the cause must be in the circle or outside the circle.

But we know the cause can't be in the circle because everything in the circle is contingent on something else. Are you with me? So the cause for everything must be outside the circle.

Anyone not thinking that's logical? If everything is contingent on something else, cause and effect, it's got to be in the circle.

So if we're outside of everything, we're outside of being contingent, then that cause must be non-contingent, uncaused, self-reliant, holy, independent.

It sounds very much like eternal, unlimited, and all-powerful, which sounds like a classic description of who.

So either you have an eternal, all-knowing, intelligent grain of sand, matter, outside of everything, or you have an eternal, all-knowing, intelligent, higher being, God. So that's the first argument for the existence of God.

He is the best answer to the question of why anything actually exists in the first place, let alone things with consciousness.

The second suggestion that's classically made about why God should exist is the argument of design, the teleological argument.

So the tribe that found the phone, they could argue about whether it was a living person on the end of the phone talking, but what couldn't they really logically argue about? Whether someone designed that thing.

I mean, if someone on the tribe said, look, I just really believe that this thing blew together last night in the sand, like, it doesn't make a lot of sense. It makes far more sense that somebody designed this device.

And for millennia, human beings looked at the vastness, the complexity of life on this planet and assumed there must be, assumed there must be a designer. There may be multiple gods, and there's one who creates them.

My fight as polytheists believe to create, but somebody is out there. Many believe in the one God, as we do as Christians. This is what David read for us in Psalm 19.

The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech.

Night after night, they reveal knowledge. They have no speech. They use no words.

No sound is heard from them. Yet, their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In essence, the world, the Bible says, the world around us screams out every day you walk in it, complexity, design, purpose.

Complexity, design, purpose. Someone is behind this.

And this thinking that every living thing has a designer was really relatively unchallenged just until the 18th century, the 1700s, which was somewhat ironically called the Age of Reason, when scientists began postulating that the origins of life

could be explained by chance processes over a really long period of time. So rather than having a designer, people started to think, well, if you had a long time, I guess stuff just happens.

This question about design, I think, is still a very powerful argument for the existence of God.

Remember, I mentioned when Richard Dawkins, a major player who's still around in what's called New Atheism, was asked, what do you believe in without full evidence to back it up? He said Darwinian evolution. This is interesting.

Charles Darwin himself, in *The Origin of Species*, admitted this, and I think I've got the quote there, to suppose that the I, with so many parts all working together, could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd.

But many of us think that if you want to get away from belief and the airy-fairy mythology you get to Darwinism, which we'd get taught at school, is rock-solid truth.

But if you go to the guy, Darwin himself, he goes, look, I've got some ideas, but I've got to admit, it actually seems absurd when you look at the nature of the design of life.

So we keep tracking way past Darwin, and we come to the 20th and 21st century, and people have understood a lot more about life, but it's still a mystery.

And so we've understood a lot about genetics, where life comes from, the minuscule stuff of cells, which we first of all thought were very simple, and then we realized now, there's no such thing as simple cells. They're all amazingly complex.

And it goes all the way back to DNA. It involves amino acids and proteins coming together in just the right way, as defined by a predetermined code. I'm no expert in this, but I have done my reading.

DNA.

Did you know that when the first cell from your dad met up with the first cell from your mom, they each brought 23 chromosomes to the party, and when those 46 chromosomes wrote out the design plan for the body, the life that was going to be made,

that is you, there were 3 billion characters in that genetic code, 3 billion characters. It would take 96 years to read out 1 character per second. Of the description, that is you. That's pretty cool.

Right now, there are 75 trillion cells telling you, you're you and not someone else. It's who I am. 500,000 cells die every 3 seconds.

500,000 are being reproduced. Every one of them carries the code to say, you are you, not someone else. The Bible says in Psalm 139, for you, God created my inmost being.

You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful.

I know that full well. Sometimes I love it when you find an old scripture written thousands of years ago, and they're saying things that we only realize now how true they are. Amen?

Talk about fearfully and wonderfully made. There's three billion characters to say how fearfully and wonderfully made we are. DNA is a problem for anyone who doesn't believe in intelligent design.

It's a major problem. The reason it's a problem is we're talking about more than biology, more than the physical. We're talking about linguistics.

We're talking about a language code, a design blueprint. DNA looks like this. C-G-A-T.

C-G-A-T. You would think it was rubbish. We would understand something like this.

Make his nose really big. That's what the top is saying. You have to believe me about that.

Why do we know what the second one says? Because you guys, I put into code an instruction. It would be gobbledigook for you if you did not know the way to translate the code, make his nose really big.

It's nonsensical. It makes no sense at all, but you did understand it because you know English. This is a problem if there is no God.

Because the cells come together and they send a message that needs to be received and decoded. How did that happen at the start? Where did the DNA code come from in the first living cell?

Where did the code and the means of translating it come from? They needed to be ready to go from the beginning. One is useless without the other.

We take language for granted. Who wrote the code? It looks a lot like forward planning and design, doesn't it?

It looks like, it looks like someone has organized it, that we've come from an intelligent source that existed before anything else did. Well, the Bible says, that's God. Atheism's alternative for this rationale of an intelligent being is this.

If you have long enough, anything could happen by chance. The funny thing is that Francis Crick, who with three other guys and maybe another woman, they discovered the structure of DNA in 1953.

So, the guy that knew more about DNA structure than anyone on the planet literally said this, there is literally zero probability of life coming into existence out of nothing by chance. He's not a Christian.

He's just one of the four smartest guys ever about DNA. You know where Francis Crick believes the original code came from? Anyone know?

Aliens. Aliens. Go with that if you want.

It's hard to say that without being cheeky, but that's a smart dude. Where does it come from, Francis? He goes, well, I can't go with God for some reason.

I'll go with aliens. And I would say, so Francis, you're a very smart guy. What are you basing that one on?

That's just a thought I had. Okay, so you abandon all scientific method. So this response sounds like doable if you just have enough time, anything could happen by chance.

So people used to have this argument, atheist argument called the monkey theorem. Basically, it says, if you put a bunch of monkeys in a room with a computer long enough, even a bunch of monkeys, they would write a Shakespearean sonnet. They could.

They could write a 14-line, beautifully put-together poem. They just need enough time. Because that's nothing compared to the universe coming together by chance.

So the British National Council of Arts, they thought they'd give it a go. And so they put one computer in a cage some years ago with six monkeys. And they let them type for a month.

And so what happened was, in one month, the monkeys typed out 50 pages of text. What they found was interesting was this. In 50 pages, there was not one English word.

And what that means is, there was not one time that space-l-space occurred. There was not once in that month that space-A-space occurred. So, this is where you need coffee, I know, because this is going to get boring.

But Nev's about to come alive, because he knows his numbers. So there were 30 characters on the keyboard.

To get space-A-space for a monkey, for the beginning of one word in the monkey theorem, to do a sonnet for Shakespeare, it's 30 times 30 times 30, because you have to get three in a row. So it's one in 27,000 chance to get one word.

They didn't get that in 50 pages. So then they worked out the chances of writing a Shakespearean sonnet, which has 488 letters, all in a row correctly by chance, as one in a number that is far bigger than the particles in the universe.

This is just a sonnet. This is not the DNA code. There are 10 to the 80th.

That's one with 80 zeros next to it, protons, electrons, and neutrons in the universe. It's a big number. Do you know what the possibility of writing a Shakespearean sonnet by chance is?

It's that number. One in 690th power. That's 488 letters right.

There are 3 billion characters in every one of us. I am a Christian, and I even get paid to be a Christian. So you might say, you're on the payroll, mate, of a believer.

Who are you to tell us whether we should believe or not? And I say, yeah, guilty is charged. But I'm also a human being who has doubts just like you.

And so when I question some of this stuff, I think to myself, wow, that's crazy town to believe that that could all happen by chance. Like it really is. My point is this.

Do not ever sit there and think people go on a church of the nutcases. We're the ones who believe in the fairies. Remember the sky fairy?

People always say that. The sky fairy is, oh, you're an idiot. I say, yeah, what do you believe in, mate?

One to the 690th power for a Shakespearean sonnet done by chance, let alone the universe, let alone one eyeball? So two suggestions for you to think about. Cause and effect.

It makes a lot of sense that God is the first cause. Design. It makes a lot of sense that God is the designer of all things.

Am I suggesting that you would know absolutely for sure? No, I'm not. I'm just quoting what the Bible says.

You can't please God without faith. Michael didn't understand it, but we should. Everyone takes a leap of faith.

Everyone does. So what do you believe in? How likely is your belief to be true?

What's it based on? Can I encourage you with this amazing thought that if God is truly the origin of life, and as the Bible says, He is love, He's not some weird abstract God who doesn't care about us. The Bible says He's love.

Try communicating with Him. Don't just talk about Him. Don't just argue whether He's there or not.

Try talking to Him. Simply stop and say, God, are you there, and do you care? And after you've asked the question, don't just sit there waiting for creation to speak.

Take a step towards knowledge. Open up a Bible and start reading the Gospel of John. And ask the question again, God, are you there, and do you care?

And what's your discovery is the God of the Bible, the God of Christianity is a God who didn't stay in heaven but came one of us, showed his humility in that he became one of us, lived this life and died on a cross, a brutal death for our sin.

When he lived his life, did he care? Yeah, he hung out with people who were ostracised by the community. He was amazingly loving, and the sort of person you wanna get to know that, the Bible says, is what God is like, and he wants to know us.

That's why Jesus died on the cross, so that our relationship with this God could be fixed, because this God is the sort of God we wish he was, a God who believes in justice, amen?

A God who holds the world and the universe together in a way that actually is a transcendent moral code running the thing. I want that God. I don't want some crazy God letting anything go.

The Bible says, no, no, there's a God who's in charge, and he's actually given us guidance about how to live in the beginning was God. And the Bible says, at the end of our life, God. So in the beginning was God, and he'll be there at the end.

But the question is, will you know him before you meet him? And is there anything he expects from us?

Well, I want to suggest to you as strongly as I can, if there is a God and he has expectations of us, you want to find out what they are before you meet him. So the Bible is really clear.

It says a lot about life after this life and what's required from us to enter that life. You and I exist. We do.

We exist. God exists. I'm in preacher mode now, just putting it out there.

There is a purpose behind your life and mine. There is a transcendent design for life, which includes moral requirements. There are consequences for how we live, both in this life and the next.

God has shown us what he is really like in his son, Jesus, through his life and death and resurrection. God requires us to believe that not only he exists, but he sent his son to die and rise again.

And through believing in his goodness, through Jesus, and by giving allegiance to him, Jesus, we receive life forever. God has promised to walk through this life with us by his Spirit who will be with us forever. That's the promise.

And it's a wonderful promise, and it's given to all who confess the name of Jesus and believe. Lord God, thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in creation. You speak to us just into our conscience.

But more than that, you have revealed the truth of who you are through your word, the written Bible.

And if that wasn't enough, and it wasn't enough, you became one of us and showed us who you are and what you are like and what you expect through your son, Jesus, who lived as one of us.

Lord, for those of us challenged here today with what we believe, would you help? Would you help? In Jesus' name, amen.