

TALKING
with YOUR KIDS
about
God

30 Conversations
Every Christian Parent
MUST HAVE

NATASHA CRAIN



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Natasha Crain, *Talking With Your Kids About God*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Natasha Crain

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Crain, Natasha, 1976– author.

Title: Talking with your kids about God : 30 conversations every Christian parent must have / Natasha Crain.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Books, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017026984 | ISBN 9780801075520 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian education of children. | Christian education—Home training. | Apologetics.

Classification: LCC BV1475.3 .C735 2017 | DDC 248.8/45—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017026984>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2011

Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney & Associates, Naples, Florida.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Natasha Crain, Talking With Your Kids About God
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To my mom and grandma Elsie—
two ladies who always exemplified
what it means to love the Lord.

Contents

Foreword by Sean McDowell 15

Acknowledgments 17

Introduction 19

Part I: The Existence of God

Overview 29

1. What Can We Learn about God from Nature? 33
2. Where Did the Universe Come From? 41
3. Where Did Life Come From? 49
4. Where Did Our Moral Understanding Come From? 58
5. What Is the Difference between God and a Flying Spaghetti Monster? 66
6. How Much Evidence Do We Need to Be Confident God Exists? 73

Part 2: Science and God

Overview 83

7. Can Science Prove or Disprove God's Existence? 87
8. Do Science and Religion Contradict Each Other? 95
9. Do Science and Religion Complement Each Other? 103
10. Is God Just an Explanation for What Science Doesn't Yet Know? 110
11. Can Science Explain Why People Believe in God? 118
12. What Do Scientists Believe about God? 125

Part 3: The Nature of God

Overview 135

13. What Can We Learn about God from the Bible? 139
14. What Does It Mean That God Is Love? 147
15. What Does It Mean That God Is Just? 154
16. Why Does God Seem So Harsh in Parts of the Old Testament? 161
17. How Can God Be Three Persons in One? 169
18. Why Didn't God Reveal More of Himself in the Bible? 177

Part 4: Believing in God

Overview 185

19. Why Do People Believe So Many Different Things about God? 189
20. Do All Religions Worship the Same God? 198
21. Is What You Believe about God Simply a Matter of Where You Grew Up? 206

- 22. Why Do Christians Sometimes Doubt Their Belief in God? 214
- 23. How Do We Know God Hears and Answers Prayers? 223
- 24. How Can We Develop a Relationship with a God We Can't See or Hear? 231

Part 5: The Difference God Makes

- Overview 243
- 25. What Is the Meaning of Life? 247
- 26. Do We Really Have Free Will? 255
- 27. What Should We Do with Our Lives? 262
- 28. What Is Our Responsibility to Other People? 270
- 29. How Should We Make Sense of Evil? 278
- 30. Why Does Biblical Hope Matter? 287

Notes 297

Foreword

Do you care about raising your kids in the Christian faith? Are you afraid that the culture might capture their hearts and minds? If these are concerns you have, as I do, then this book is for *you*. Natasha Crain is committed to helping parents equip their kids with a biblical worldview. As a parent of three young children, I thank God for her efforts.

While there are both many people who write on apologetics (myself included!) and many books on parenting, Natasha has a unique angle—*she writes about apologetics as a parent for parents*. She takes tough concepts and makes them accessible, while providing practical ways to share these truths with kids.

As parents, we have the greatest influence on our children. That's right, you and I influence our kids more than celebrities, athletes, youth pastors, teachers, and friends. So how can we best use that influence? Studies reveal that one of the most important things we can do is have conversations with our kids. Yes, simply *talking* with them about God, and other tough questions about faith, is one of the most important steps we can take (see Deut. 6:4–9).

This is why *Talking with Your Kids about God* is so critical and timely. Natasha identifies thirty of the most important questions kids need answers to today. And she equips us with not only knowledge about these issues but also practical steps on how to have fruitful conversations with our kids about them.

Please allow me to offer three suggestions and some words of encouragement for when you read this book.

First, you don't have to be the expert. This book will equip you with all you need to know to have meaningful conversations with your kids. If further questions arise along the way (which is a good thing!), then seek answers from experts together. Just being willing to have these conversations is half the battle.

Second, begin as early as possible. There's a temptation to put these questions off, but this is a big mistake! Kids who have wrestled with tough questions *before* they are challenged are much more likely to maintain a vibrant faith than those caught off guard.

Third, just do what you can. Having *some* of these conversations is better than none at all. Ideally, you want to get through all these questions (and more), but simply beginning the process and doing what you can have tremendous value.

As parents, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by all the voices vying for the hearts and minds of our children. But don't be discouraged. We can make a difference. My parents had conversations with me about God, and it made a big difference in my faith. And this is what I try to do with my own kids.

I hope you will get a copy of *Talking with Your Kids about God* and begin these conversations today. My prayer is that God will use this book to both motivate and equip you to help your kids develop convictions about their faith. Go for it!

Sean McDowell, PhD,
Biola University

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank God for unexpectedly leading me into this journey of writing and speaking about apologetics. I had no idea when I started my blog that it would lead to this, but I'm so glad God had better plans than what I envisioned.

I want to thank my husband, Bryan, for being extraordinarily supportive of the time needed for me to write books and for always being my first set of editorial eyes. I am so grateful for your love and can't imagine life without you.

Thank you to Rebekah Guzman, Chad Allen, and the whole Baker team for their professionalism and their passion to publish this book, and to Liz Heaney for her editorial prowess. It has been a pleasure working with each of you.

My sincerest thanks to Sean McDowell for his willingness to write a foreword for the book and to each of the endorsers for their kind words. Your support means a lot to me.

Many thanks to my calm and wise literary agent, Mark Sweeney, for his work in placing the book and for his continued guidance.

I doubt I would be an author at all if not for my first editor, Steve Miller, who saw something in my blog writing that led him

to reach out to me about writing books. He has believed in my abilities as a writer and in the importance of parents learning apologetics since we first met. Thank you, Steve, for your amazing support and encouragement.

Jim Wallace has been an unbelievably helpful mentor in all things writing and speaking. Jim, it's a privilege to know and learn from you.

Last but not least, I greatly appreciate those who agreed to read early drafts of the book and provide valuable feedback: Jason Byerly, Troy Caya, Alisa Childers, Ray Ciervo, and Dick DiTullio. Your time and willingness to help meant a lot to me. A special thank you to Doug Beaumont for lending his keen philosophical and theological insights to the project. The book benefited greatly from your review!

Introduction

My backyard is where plants go to die.

Each year when spring rolls around, I think I can grow a few potted plants outside and enthusiastically head down to the local nursery. I buy plants with beautiful green leaves, already starting to produce fruit, and drive home ready to take on the world one homegrown tomato at a time.

Within a month, my plants die . . . every single time.

I can't pretend I don't know why—I'm the world's laziest waterer. I start off strong but soon fail to water the plants until they're almost dead. Feeling guilty, I then drench them with buckets of water one last time, but it's too late. They can't recover, and soon they're in the trash.

Last year I was determined to do things differently. With my characteristic spring enthusiasm, I picked out pepper, tomato, and basil plants. I meticulously watered them *every* day. But despite my discipline, the tomato plant soon turned yellow, the basil plant was burnt by the sun, and the pepper plant was devoured by caterpillars.

Not knowing what to make of all this, I finally purchased a gardening book to learn more about keeping plants alive. I

couldn't believe how much there was to consider! I thought gardening was simple—dirt, seeds, and water. In reality, it's a lot more complex.

- *Each plant has unique needs.* Even if I remembered to water each day, my discipline wasn't going to keep my plants thriving, because different plants have different needs. The tomato plant turned yellow because I watered it *too* much.
- *Plants need more than one ingredient and in the right amounts.* I had assumed that plants simply need water to grow. I hadn't considered the amount of sunlight each one needs, nor the type of soil or fertilizer. The basil plant died from too much sun.
- *The environment plays a major role.* Not only did I need to proactively give my plants what they require, but I also needed to proactively protect them from predators. Caterpillars were able to eat my pepper plant because I hadn't warded against them.

One afternoon as I thought about my failure as a gardener, I was struck by the resemblance between what plants need for physical growth and what kids need for spiritual growth.

But how much more important is the care of our children's souls?

If I really cared about growing plants, I would have educated myself on gardening much sooner. It just wasn't a priority. But as parents called to the all-important role of leading our kids to know Jesus, we can't afford to just "give it our best shot" and see what happens, with a possible do-over next spring. Too much is at stake, and good intentions are not enough. We have to know what we're doing.

We need both *direction*—the knowledge of what to do—and *discipline*—the commitment to doing it.

Discipline and Direction: A Key Relationship

To better understand the importance of discipline and direction for Christian parenting, consider these three scenarios:

1. *When we have no discipline and no direction, we're leaving our kids to wilt spiritually.* This happens when we're inconsistent in "watering" their spiritual lives (no discipline) and when we don't understand all that they need to thrive (no direction). It's an easy trap to fall into when we're busy. Our spiritual training ends up being a mealtime prayer here and there, a wishy-washy commitment to church, and occasional references to the Bible thrown in for good measure (especially when someone's behaving badly). If guilt takes over, we may "drench" our kids with more church activities or devotionals for a while, but for many kids, it's too little, too late.
2. *When we have discipline but no direction, we're working hard but not necessarily doing the work our kids need most.* I had this problem when I faithfully watered my plants each day, not realizing how many other factors were involved in helping them grow. Despite my intentions, the plants still didn't have what they needed to survive. Similarly, some parents are very disciplined, in that they're consistently mindful of their kids' spiritual development, but they're not knowledgeable of the many "ingredients" that go into a strong faith or the "environmental factors" that will challenge their efforts today. *Research has shown repeatedly that at least 60 percent of kids from Christian homes turn away from faith by their early twenties.*¹ Clearly, the hard work of many well-intentioned Christian parents is not resulting in thriving spiritual lives for their kids as adults. Discipline without direction can be dangerous.

3. *When we have discipline and direction, we're confident.* We know we're doing what we should to help our kids develop a deeply rooted faith. We're setting aside time each week for our family to grow together spiritually and weaving faith throughout our daily lives based on our knowledge of what our kids need. We know we'll never be perfect parents and that, ultimately, God is sovereign, but we rest in the comfort of knowing we're being as faithful as we can be to our calling.

I think it's clear which scenario we should want for our homes.

This book will help get you there.

It won't give you discipline—you're the only one who can prioritize your kids' spiritual development—but it will give you direction.

What Kind of Direction?

When I started my Christian parenting blog, NatashaCrain.com, in 2011, I was a *discipline without direction* parent. I was committed to raising my young kids in a Christ-centered home, but I wasn't sure what I should be doing. I started the blog simply thinking I would meet like-minded parents and exchange ideas about raising faithful kids.

But as my readership grew and people started sharing my articles with friends online, something unexpected happened: my blog began attracting a stream of challenging comments from skeptics of Christianity—comments I had no idea how to answer.

There were challenges about how I knew God existed.

About the relationship between science and the Bible.

About God's actions in the Old Testament.

About the plausibility of miracles.

About the amount of evil and suffering in the world.

About contradictions in the Gospels.

About the reasonableness of hell.

About everything you can imagine.

Despite having been a lifelong Christian, and despite having spent hundreds of hours in church and Sunday school, I was not prepared for this onslaught. I realized that my kids were growing up in a very different world than the one in which I grew up. Teaching them about Christianity wasn't going to be as simple as "dirt, seeds, and water." My kids were going to need a lot more from me, and I had to find out what that was.

It was time to become a more educated gardener.

I launched into an in-depth study of Christian apologetics—how to make a case for and defend the Christian faith—and over time transformed my website into a place where I help equip other parents with the same knowledge. It's become my passion, and today more than 250,000 people each year read my blog.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to write an apologetics book specifically for parents: *Keeping Your Kids on God's Side: 40 Conversations to Help Them Build a Lasting Faith*.² It covers conversations across the major subject areas of God, truth and worldviews, Jesus, the Bible, and science. To follow *Keeping Your Kids on God's Side*, I wanted to write books that dig into one of these major subject areas at a time, delving into many more questions than was possible in a book covering multiple areas.

That's what *Talking with Your Kids about God* does. This book is a resource for Christian parents on thirty of the most important subjects kids need to understand about God in light of challenges from our secular world. Whether you've read *Keeping Your Kids on God's Side* and are looking for the next step in your learning or want to jump directly into this in-depth resource on the subject of God specifically, you'll find the direction you need to have thirty important faith conversations that will benefit your kids for a lifetime.

How to Use This Book

First and foremost, *Talking with Your Kids about God* is designed to equip you, the adult, with the knowledge you need to have these conversations with your children. In other words, don't hand this book directly to your kids—it's not written for them! This is *your* guide.

That said, it can be intimidating to figure out how to talk to kids about tough subjects even when you understand those subjects yourself. It helps to have guidance on how to break down the content into manageable pieces of conversation centered on the most important points—so that's exactly what I've provided at the end of every chapter.

Each “Conversation Guide” has three sections: “Open the Conversation,” “Advance the Conversation,” and “Apply the Conversation.”

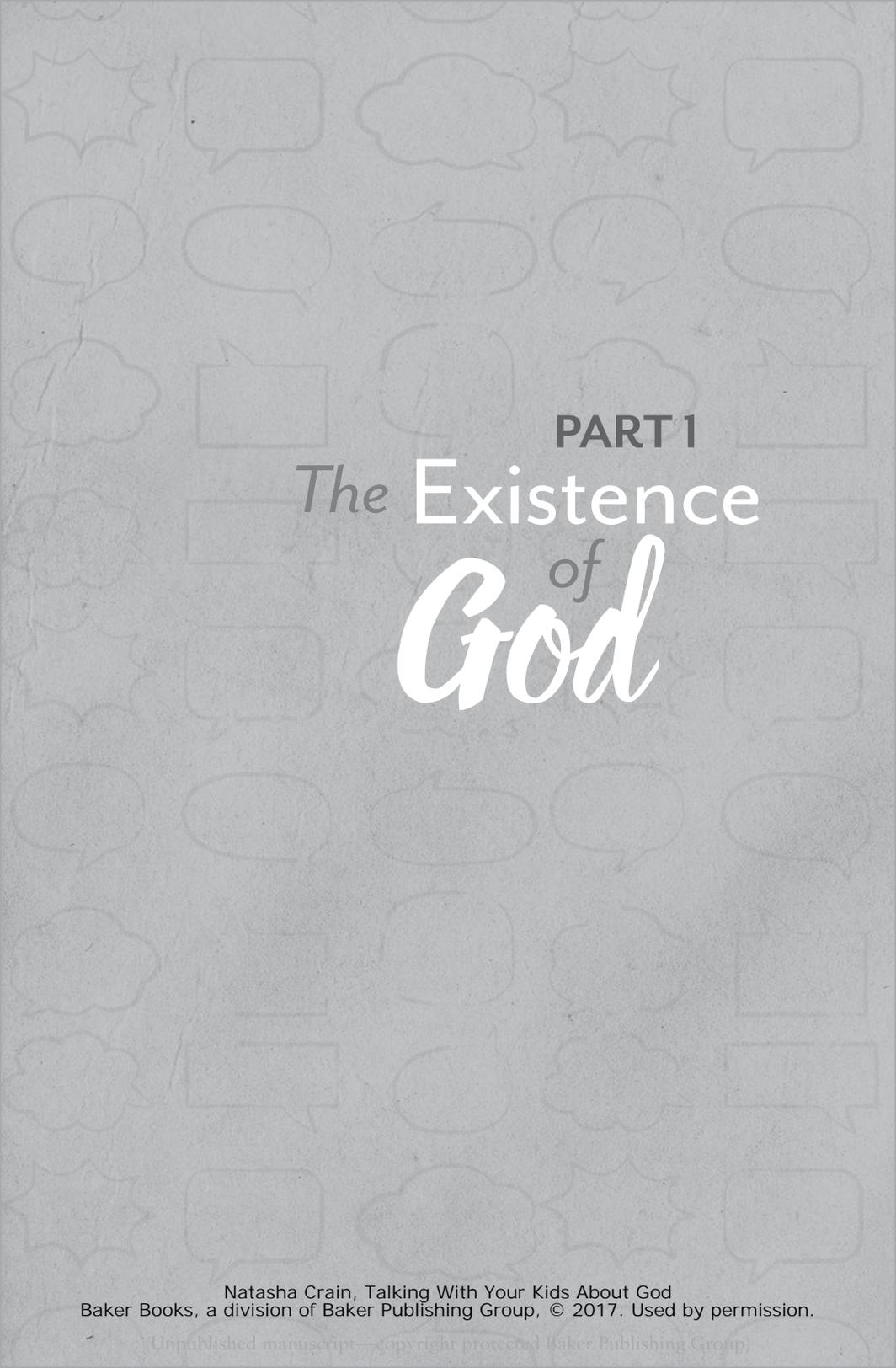
In “Open the Conversation,” you'll find one or two questions intended to get your kids thinking about the subject. Resist the temptation to dump a chapter's worth of knowledge on them at that point. Instead, listen to your kids' answers and ask follow-up questions to learn more about their thoughts.

In “Advance the Conversation,” you'll find two or more questions to help you probe the key ideas from the chapter. These questions will not cover every detail you read. They'll give you the opportunity to highlight the most important points, then it will be up to you to decide how deep to take the conversation. Discussion tips are offered with most of these questions.

In “Apply the Conversation,” you'll find a quote from a skeptic of Christianity that pertains to the subject. Most are taken from conversations between Christians and skeptics online. They're the kinds of comments your kids are most likely to run into on their own eventually. After reading the quote together, ask them to respond to it based on what they learned from the chapter.

Don't shy away from doing this, no matter how old your kids are. If you help your kids apply their learning by responding to these quotes, I have no doubt you'll find this activity to be one of the most valuable parts of this book.

Are you ready to become a more fruitful gardener and help your kids thrive spiritually? I know you are. "Plant" yourself in a comfortable chair, and let's dive in.



PART 1

The Existence
of
God

Natasha Crain, Talking With Your Kids About God
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Overview

A couple of years ago, my husband and I were invited to a dinner party with a few other new parents from our kids' Christian elementary school. After we worked our way through appetizers and the requisite small talk, the conversation turned to our respective faith backgrounds. One of the moms confessed that, as much as she loved the Lord, she struggled with how to share her faith with her son—so she had enrolled him at a Christian school where others might be able to do a “better job.”

Another mom replied, “Well, I don't worry too much about it. I just tell my daughter that believing in God is like believing in Santa Claus. Some people believe, and some don't. It's a matter of faith.”

I glanced over at the mom who said that, ready to laugh *with* her at the idea of placing God and Santa in the same category.

But she wasn't laughing.

She had just matter-of-factly shared what she honestly thought was a helpful way of explaining belief in God's existence to her daughter, and other parents around the table nodded approvingly. I continued poking at my salad, contemplating just how annoying I would be if I suggested we stop to define the biblical notion of

faith and evaluate the differences between faith in Santa and faith in God. I concluded I didn't want to rain on the remaining festivities, so I just kept eating—something I still regret.

If an atheist had overheard our dinner party conversation, they would have delighted in my friend's comparison of God and Santa because that's precisely how atheists want us to think:

God and Santa: two entities with no evidence to demonstrate their existence.

God and Santa: childish beliefs people should outgrow once they understand there's no evidence to demonstrate their existence.

Philosopher Daniel Dennett is one of many atheists who have made this comparison, saying, "The kindly God who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight—that God is, like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in."¹

Here's the good news: atheists talk about God's existence (or lack thereof) in specific, predictable ways. That means we have the reference point for how to prepare our kids accordingly. We don't have to fumble around, hoping that what we've taught our children about God's existence will somehow be enough to ground their faith. In fact, if we do just fumble around, speaking about God in whatever terms feel most comfortable to *us*—like comparing God and Santa—we may unintentionally set our kids up for spiritual vulnerability.

Knowing that atheists consistently claim there's "no evidence" for God, we need to raise kids who understand what, exactly, that means and how to think critically about such claims. Part 1 of this book is designed to help you do just that. In these chapters, we'll explore the evidence for God's existence in nature and how that relates to the claims of skeptics.

If thinking about God's existence in these ways is new to you, please don't feel alone. While most Christians are prepared to speak

to God’s existence based on their personal experiences, few have studied the *objective* evidence for God’s existence in nature. This independent evidence, however, is critical to understand because people can have contradictory personal experiences. For example, atheists may believe God doesn’t exist based on what *they’ve* experienced. By teaching our kids about the objective evidence for God’s existence in nature, we’re preparing them for a world that wants them to believe their personal experiences with God are no different from a child’s personal “experience” with Santa and that they’ll find no more evidence for God outside themselves than they’ll find for Santa at the North Pole.

Three Keys to Impactful Conversations about the Existence of God

1. *Introduce these discussions by explaining why it’s so important to learn about the evidence for God’s existence in nature.* Most kids will identify that they can know about God from the Bible and from their own experiences, but, like most adults, they’ve probably never had the opportunity to engage with the evidence for God’s existence in nature. To get kids thinking about the subjects in part 1, ask, “How do you know God exists?” Be sure to affirm that personal experience is important in the life of a Christian, but explain why it’s also important to understand the objective evidence God has given us in nature.
2. *Clarify terms.* The nuanced meaning of certain words is important for these discussions, so be sure to clarify up front what they mean (and, remember, younger kids may have never heard these words before). Key terms in this section include *atheist*, *agnostic*, *skeptic*, and *theist*. An atheist, as we’ll use the term, is someone who believes there is no God.²

An agnostic is someone who believes nothing is known or can be known about the existence or nature of God. A skeptic is a broader catchall category of people who reject the claims of Christianity (note that skepticism in general can have many meanings, but this is what it will mean in the context of this book). A theist is someone who believes in a God who interacts with his creation (for example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all theistic faiths).

3. *Help kids remember the evidence by teaching them to memorize the “big three” questions covered by chapters 2, 3, and 4: Where did the universe come from? Where did life come from? and Where did our moral understanding come from?* While many other subjects could be discussed with respect to the evidence for God’s existence, these are three of the most important and frequently debated in today’s world. Even if kids don’t remember all the chapter details, the questions themselves can serve as a “mental directory” for key concepts in the future.

1. What Can We Learn about God from Nature?

One afternoon my three kids came running into the house. My five-year-old proudly revealed a large Spiderman bouncy ball that had made its way into our backyard.

“Mommy, look! We have a new ball! It was just sitting by the barbeque!”

Rest assured, we have plenty of other balls rolling around our backyard. But, of course, the novelty of one that had suddenly appeared was very exciting.

“It probably belongs to Mason. Just throw it back over the fence,” I told them. Mason lived next door.

“But, Mommy,” my older daughter pleaded, “we don’t *know* it’s his, so we shouldn’t assume that and just give it to him. It could belong to anyone.”

My daughter was technically right; we didn’t *know* it was his. Unless he showed up and proved his ownership, we couldn’t be sure. Still, I pushed my daughter on her logic.

“You’re right. We don’t *know* it’s his. There are millions of *possible* explanations for how it got here. I heard some kids visiting our other neighbors this weekend. Maybe it’s theirs. Or maybe

the wind blew it over from a house farther away. Or maybe it fell from an airplane or an alien put it there or maybe it popped into existence all by itself!”

My kids looked at me, unamused, and impatiently awaited the point they knew was coming.

“While there are tons of possible places the ball could have come from, by far the most *likely* place is Mason’s house. He’s the only kid in a neighboring house who regularly plays in the backyard, we know he loves Spiderman, and balls from his yard have landed in our yard before. Throw it back.”

With that, they threw it over the fence and announced they were now “totally” bored. (Without this incredible new ball, of course, there was suddenly nothing to do.)

Like the Spiderman bouncy ball, the universe doesn’t verbalize where it came from, why it’s here, and what we should do with it. But that doesn’t mean we can’t evaluate all the information we do have in nature to draw reasonable conclusions about these things.

In this and the next five chapters, we’ll be looking at the universe, life, and our innate moral knowledge—the “balls” in our backyard—to learn how nature powerfully points to the existence of God. But before we do, we need to clarify what these pieces of evidence can and cannot tell us. That’s the subject for our first chapter.

General Revelation: God’s “Word” in Nature

As Christians, we believe God has revealed himself in the inspired words of the Bible’s authors. Indeed, the Bible is our most extensive source of knowledge about him. But Christians often overlook the natural world as another important source of God’s “Word” to us.

The knowledge about God that we obtain through the observation of nature is called general revelation. Psalm 19:1–2 says, “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.” The apostle Paul says there is no excuse for not believing in God because he has so clearly revealed himself in nature:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Rom. 1:18–20)

Paul goes on to say that God has also given humans an innate knowledge of right and wrong—a moral conscience:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Rom. 2:14–16)

It’s clear that the Bible confirms God has revealed himself in the natural world and that we should expect to find evidence for him there. But what specifically can we learn?

What Nature Reveals about God

When we study the natural world, we see there’s good reason to believe God exists given what we observe. For example, when we study the origin of the universe in chapter 2, we’ll learn that science points to the universe having a beginning. It hasn’t been around forever. But things don’t pop into existence on their own.

Something or someone causes them to exist. The something or someone that caused the universe to come into existence had to have been *supernatural*—beyond nature—since it created nature. As such, that supernatural thing or person would have to be (among other things) spaceless, timeless, immaterial, and uncaused. This description is clearly consistent with the Christian concept of God.

Similarly, we'll see in chapter 3 that evidence from physics and biology strongly points to the conclusion that life is the product of a purposeful intelligence. In chapter 4, we'll learn how our innate understanding of morality points to a moral lawgiver with authority over our lives. Nature doesn't tell us everything that the Bible tells us about God, but it provides good reason to believe that a Being consistent with whom we call God exists. In a secular world that's quick to reject the Bible with little consideration, the evidence for God's existence in nature can be the one thing that opens the door to discussing the truth of Christianity with nonbelievers. And, for Christians, this evidence can embolden our confidence in what we believe.

That brings us to this important question: If the evidence we'll be looking at is so compelling, why doesn't everyone agree it points to God?

Why People Disagree about the Evidence for God in Nature

If you ask an atheist how much evidence there is for God in the world, they will likely say there is *no* evidence for the existence of God. Meanwhile, if you ask a Christian the same question, they will likely say there's *extensive* evidence for the existence of God.

So what's going on here? How can people draw such vastly different conclusions? To answer that, we need to understand four key points about the nature of any evidence that doesn't literally speak for itself.

1. *Evidence is a body of facts that require human interpretation.* Evidence itself doesn't say anything. All evidence must be interpreted. Think about the Spiderman ball in our backyard. The ball itself didn't verbalize anything. It was my kids and I who offered explanations for its appearance. We all looked at the same evidence—the ball—and yet came to different conclusions due to our varied assumptions, the available information, our life experiences, and our motivations. For similar reasons, people look at the evidence in the natural world and inevitably draw different conclusions. That doesn't make the evidence any less valuable for consideration. It's simply the nature of *any* evidence.
2. *Because evidence requires human interpretation, there will always be multiple possible explanations for it.* An atheist once told me that he wasn't impressed by the “supposed evidence for God” because there are plenty of possible naturalistic (non-God) explanations for what we see in the world. But that's a poor reason to reject any *one* of those explanations. I offered alien involvement as a possible explanation for the ball in our backyard, but that didn't make it any less likely that the ball belonged to Mason. The relevant question is not how *many* possible explanations there are but rather which is the most *likely* explanation given the evidence.
3. *If we rule out certain possible explanations before considering the evidence, we won't ever conclude that the evidence points to those explanations.* Many people presuppose that God doesn't exist and will consider only naturalistic explanations for what they see in the universe. But if we rule out God before we even consider the evidence, *of course* we will conclude there's no evidence that points to God! This would have been like my kids telling me the ball couldn't be Mason's because . . . they know it could never be Mason's, regardless of the evidence.

4. *The best explanation for a body of evidence is often debatable and rarely certain.* It's easy to rule out certain possible explanations for evidence once we determine they're unlikely to account for what we see. For example, it wouldn't have been difficult to decide it almost certainly wasn't an airplane that dropped the ball into our backyard. But what if we had *two* neighbors with young boys who often played in the backyard with balls? We still might have had better reason to believe the ball was Mason's, but that conclusion would have been far less certain. When studying the natural world, the possible explanations for evidence are far more complex, and it's often not so easy to determine what is more or less likely. We may determine a *best* explanation, but even best explanations aren't certain.

With this chapter's context in mind, we're now ready to start looking at the evidence itself. We'll begin in the next chapter with the origin of the universe.

KEY POINTS

- While the Bible is God's most extensive revelation, he's revealed himself in nature as well (this is called general revelation).
- Evidence from nature—such as the universe, life, and our innate moral knowledge—provides good reason to believe that a Being consistent with whom we call God exists.
- There are four key reasons why not everyone agrees that the evidence in nature points to God:
 1. Evidence is a body of facts that require human interpretation.
 2. Because evidence requires human interpretation, there will always be multiple possible explanations for it.

3. If we rule out certain possible explanations before considering the evidence, we won't ever conclude that the evidence points to those explanations.
4. The best explanation for a body of evidence is often debatable and rarely certain.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Open the Conversation

- Imagine that you grew up without hearing anything that's in the Bible. What, if anything, do you think you would be able to know about God from looking at the world around you?

Advance the Conversation

- Read Psalm 19:1–2; Romans 1:18–20; 2:14–16. What does each passage say the natural world can tell us about God? (*Be sure to introduce the term general revelation.*)
- Most of what we know about God comes from the Bible, but, as we just saw, nature also gives us many good reasons to believe God exists. Why do you think evidence for God's existence outside the Bible and our personal experiences is important—for both Christians and nonbelievers? (*It gives Christians more confidence in their faith and can open the door for discussion with those who reject the truth of the Bible.*)
- (*Share the ball story from the beginning of this chapter.*) Like the parent and the kids in this story, people can draw very different conclusions about the meaning of any evidence depending on their assumptions, life experiences, and motivations. What are some ways those things might impact whether people believe the evidence in the natural world

points to God? (*Discuss your child's answer, then walk through the four reasons why people disagree about evidence.*)

Apply the Conversation

- Atheist author Dan Barker says, “I am an atheist because there is no evidence for the existence of God. That should be all that needs to be said about it: no evidence, no belief.”¹ Based on what you learned in this chapter, when someone says there’s “no evidence” for God (or anything else), what questions could you ask to clarify what that person means?