

## The first and last question - Pete Greig

What is God asking us in 2024?

### Genesis 3v1-9

3 voices: v1 serpent (satan); v2 Eve; v9 God. The questions of satan and God have echoed through time. How we answer these 2 questions will affect us in 2024. **What were best and hardest questions asked of you?**

Humans are inquisitive - it enables wonder and innovation. We think that God has all the answers, but he is the ultimate inquisitor! When we ask questions we are at our most God-like. Jesus asked 307 questions, was asked 187 questions but only answered 3 ! TS Eliot (in *The Rock*) "*Oh my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger. Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.*"

### **Did God really say?**

This Q beats at heart of cynicism and destruction. Satan didn't say "God didn't say" but introduced doubt which subtly undermines and causes us to question our convictions. This question underlies many of the controversies in the church; haunts those who walk away from Christian commitment or deconstructed faith. **Do we have questions about our faith, future, calling, God's promises to us?**

### **4 ways to be sure that God really did say**

- Scripture - but many question authority of the Bible
- Christian tradition and Global Church - but many try to rewrite orthodoxy
- Voice of the Spirit (prophetic) - but many treat prophecy with contempt 1Thess 5v20
- Inner voice of Conscience - but many ignore God's whisper to holiness calling it repression and shame

**Which of these ways do we find easy / hard?**

We need to hold on to these themes - God really DID say. Evidence suggests that if we read from the Bible at least 4x per week there is positive change in our behaviours: less likely to feel lonely, suffering relational bitterness, addictive dependency, etc and more likely to share faith with others.

### **Where are you?**

This is from the Father heart of God and shows his desire for personal relationship with us - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* Jn 10v10 *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.* Luke 19v10 Prodigal Son Luke 15v11ff.

See Hound of Heaven poem by Frances Thompson, Holman Hunt's Light of The World with Jesus knocking on the door (Rev 3v20). **Do we sense God is hounding us or knocking on our hearts?**

Andy Squyres tried to follow God on his own terms but God didn't fulfil his obligations to Andy's ways so Andy deconstructed his faith, giving up prayer, praise, church, etc but found his heart become sad and dry. *The ache of my heart was for Christ himself and I was not being satisfied by the promises made by my own deconstruction. The Spirit began chipping away at my hard-heartedness and I realised that in every way I am a child, a fool of Christ and for that there is no antidote. So I am relegated to suffering the consequences of utter trust in Christ.* (Full text on next page)

His journey of deconstruction began with the question 'Did God really say?' His return to faith began with God saying 'Where are you?' This is the most important question as the human response to trauma and shame is either:

- Fight - pushing others away. God says "Where are you? Don't push me away."
- Flight - hiding or running (like Adam and Eve). God says "Where are you? Don't hide from my love."
- Freeze - becoming numb/detached. God says "Where are you? Dare to be present."

**What's our go-to response to trauma and shame?**

### **Our response**

Did God really say? Acknowledge your cynicism; renew trust in Scripture, prophecy; re-sensitise conscience Where are you? Have you been hiding from God's love? Review Bible reading habits; let God in; Open up

**Encourage Bible reading plans - Bible in a year; Lectio 365; YouBible; Bible Project. Offer accountability**

14 January 2024. Emmaus Rd., Yvonne Arnaud, Guildford (2nd service)

**Andy Squyres testimony:**

'I thought if I gave my money to God, he would give money to me. I thought if I prayed for the sick that they would recover every time. I thought if I went to church and sang loudly and moved my body just so, I would always feel God's presence. I thought if I declared God's protection over myself and my people, no adversity could come near us. I thought that God wanted me to be successful and wealthy so that I could be a blessing to others. It was my destiny. Somehow I thought that these were God's terms so I was shocked when he did not fulfil his obligations in these transactions.

So I course corrected. I started a new project. I said "to hell with all this" and withheld my money, withheld my faith, withheld my exuberance. I quit praying for the world to be set right. I closed my mouth. I concluded that only idiots go swimming in the foolishness of praise. I quit expecting miracles. As a scathing critique and judgement against my misunderstandings of God I invested heavily in cynicism, skepticism, and unbelief. I concluded that the safest and most prudent way forward was to live as a philosophic materialist, eschewing the supernatural and emphasising the rational. On the outside I remained a Christian but I traded away the white hot heat of faith for a dispassionate, dignified and intellectual way.

But soon my heart became sad and dry. A new dissatisfaction became apparent. The newly wrought sense of freedom that arose within me after escaping my religious naïveté soon evaporated. The reaction which I had applied to my initial fundamentalism produced results which proved just as unsatisfactory. I missed being faith-full. I missed singing. I missed the simple act of believing. I missed losing myself for the sake of others. The ache of my heart was for Christ himself and I was not being satisfied by the promises made by my own deconstruction. The Spirit began chipping away at my hard-heartedness and I realised that in every way I am a child, a fool of Christ and for that there is no antidote. So I am relegated to suffering the consequences of utter trust in Christ.