

QUESTION: I've never been able to confidently say "I believe in God". I'm trying so hard to believe in God, I want to so badly. When I pray I feel silly like I'm talking to myself, I just can't grasp the idea that there is something supernatural out there. If there is a God can he recognize this struggle? If I were to all of a sudden die would I go to hell because I don't believe in God or would he know that I tried and I wanted to believe and let me into Heaven?

ANSWER: Thanks for these very thoughtful questions. I'm pleased to hear the earnestness with which you're struggling with the biggest of all possible questions.

So let me break this down a bit. About the impossibility of believing in the supernatural: I think we may be caught up in feeling like this has to be FIRST some kind of emotional experience or experiential confirmation before we can say, "I believe". It doesn't. I believe that relationship with God thru Christ DOES entail some emotional experience and experiential confirmation... however, the idea of just accepting the existence of God or that there is something supernatural out there, can begin just as a simple intellectual acceptance of a conclusion based on evidence. Let me give you a couple of examples:

Can you accept the fact that time is relative? That means, time can travel at different "speeds" for different people depending on how fast they are traveling relative to each other. Seems like a crazy thing, doesn't it? Time just seems like, time – a constant, the same for everyone. If I travel to the end of the galaxy and back again and it takes me 10 years to do it at 100 times the speed of light, when I come back it should be 2018. But it won't be. If you travel like that, it will be "2018" to you, but to the people on earth it will be 2700+. Because time is NOT constant.

Now, you and I can't "feel" that this true. It seem incredible stuff. But based on the evidence from theoretical science, it is true. Time is relative. Now you and can KNOW this, but it doesn't change our life at all. Doesn't affect us one bit. But the property of the universe is still the same: Time is NOT an absolute value. Only when you travel at great speeds would you and I be able to EXPERIENCE the truth that Einstein had been teaching us all along. Belief in God can start out just like our belief in some of the theories of science. There's ZERO emotional component to it to start. It's just seeing the flow of the evidence and then accepting that, and eventually, start taking risks in that direction.

That is what you're doing when you pray. You've assessed some theoretical evidence, and you have taking the risk of talking to the air, to test the theory that there might be a Being out there, invisible to your eyes, who can see you and hear you and respond to you personally. The fact that it seems incredible that such a being exists should be no more of a problem to you than the idea that time is relative. Both cannot be experienced physically, but strong evidence is pointing at the fact that both ideas are true. Your first step toward God is with your MIND not necessarily your heart. You can call this a step of faith if you want, but it's no more a step of faith than when a scientist creates a hypothesis on a piece of paper. He has no hard data yet, all he has is a working theory BASED ON evidence. If all he could ever do was ONLY go with what was already known totally to the senses, there would be no science!! For science depends on the faith that the universe is rational and responds to rational inquiry and rational categories.

So there are several categories of evidence you mind will lead you to if your mind is open: 1. Evidence from Design, 2. Evidence from First Cause 3. Evidence from morality. There's amazing data that you can uncover if you really do want to believe as you said that has huge implications for the existence of God. A few good books on this, the Language of God by Dr Francis Collins, and Case for a Creator by Lee Strobel. Whether or not you've experienced God, if you look into it intellectually you can start to grasp the idea that the supernatural might not only be possible, it might be required!

When you say, 'I can't grasp the idea' make sure you're not limiting what you think is possible by your own arbitrary definition of the impossible. If you do, there's not just religious ideas that you'll struggle with, there's physical ideas about the 'incredible' universe you and I live in that you'll also not be able to accept.

Another example: Extra dimensionality. The study of science is revealing now that there are extra dimensions beyond the 4 dimensions of our experience – height, depth, length and time... As many as 11 dimensions have been theorized by science. Does that seem crazy to you? No one has proved conclusively that such dimensions do exist, but strong evidence from physics says that these dimensions DO exist and that if we could climb inside them, we might be able to travel through time!

So if science is finding that there may be extra dimensions beyond sight and sound, why is it so hard to accept that there might be a God beyond the dimensions you and I travel in? You're not a flat-earther, are you? Of course not. Well, flat-earther's were people who couldn't accept evidence for something that was beyond the grasp of their immediate experience. They were of course, wrong. Those that were right were those who accepted evidence that was hard to grasp in immediate experience (the earth FEELS flat after all!) It was purely intellectual at first, in response to more in-depth evidence. THEN, as people chased the evidence where it was leading, they EXPERIENCED a round earth! First Columbus and then Astronauts who saw it's roundness with their own two eyes.

So yes, immediate experience may say, no God. Can't touch him or feel him or hear him. Yet, it's all the most subtle evidence that suggests he is there. Just as it's the most subtle and incredibly complicated evidence that suggests the more incredible things about our universe are in fact true.

So don't feel silly about accepting where the evidence is pointing, even if your immediate experience rails against it. The whole reason you're even pursuing the question in the first place is that there is more to life than what I grasp immediately with my 5 senses. No one would have ever gone up in a spaceship if we ONLY went with our immediate experience, and no one would have ever prayed either.

You have prayed, which shows a willingness in your mind to go with that evidence. So my suggestion to you is to not focus on finding the "immediate" type of evidence for God right now (like, he talks to me, I "sense" him near me, I hear his voice). Focus rather on the subtle evidence: why is there something rather than nothing? Why do I have a moral sense? Where does design come from? Why are there laws at all in the universe, why are they so consistent, why are they so finely tuned? Can luck and chance explain everything? Once those questions get you pointed to the God hypothesis, then your brain will keep you pressed into the facts, even when your heart isn't sure. Just as Columbus's brain kept him going west when his heart and his crew demanded that he turn back before he fall off the edge of the earth!

Keep going west! You're following the best evidence. You're not accepting simple child's answers: "hey I can't see God he must not be there!" That's a boy's philosophy. That's flat earth thinking. Before you follow your heart, follow your mind. Love God with all your MIND as Jesus told us to do. And then your heart and experience will follow, if there is a God. If there isn't, walk away, because then it's all just time and chance and matter and you should just do whatever gives you jollies and damn the consequences! And if that philosophy hits your wrong, then ask, WHY?!? That's more evidence.

When I pray, I feel I'm often talking to myself. But then I keep on talking and keep on praying... and then, all of sudden, there's a thought that is NOT MY OWN in my head. It's truly inspired. And that's where God meets us. God says in the Bible, "you find me, if you seek me, with ALL your heart." An important qualifier: "all your heart". Stay pressed in to the hunt for truth.

Your concern about eternity is important. I can't say what God will do with someone who sincerely WANTS to believe but can't. Jesus says God will not judge you for what you didn't know. But only God knows you inside. Only God knows if you sought him with ALL your heart, or if you held back or suppressed truth that was put before you. That you will be held be responsible for, the Bible says.

But the truth is you may be far closer to the Kingdom than you think, because you are still seeking, and Jesus said those who seek will find.



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