

Do you know God?

Man has always been in the quest for knowledge. Right from childhood, we educate our children to know right and wrong. Our education system is based on the need to acquire knowledge. Exams are passed or failed based on a test of knowledge. This quest for knowledge is in everything we do. Journey to space, new research in science, medicine, space technology and many other fields are all in the search for the elusive answers. In fact knowledge is often seen as a response to all questions.

This pursuit for answers, this search for knowledge has been for many years and many people been extended to God. Often, we hear the famous question who is God? What is he/she like? Where does he/she lives? And many others questions such as this.

In the past couple of weeks, I have met many who are struggling to understand or in their words have knowledge of God.

Someone once said,

“All my life I have been confused about the whole religious world so I tell people I am agnostic. Sometimes I think there is a GOD and sometimes I don’t. It all seems unreal to me but I want to learn about it maybe help me believe and get a better understanding. Because if there is a GOD I want

to develop a relationship with him. I just want to learn about GOD and Jesus. I am so confused.”

Last week, I went to a seminar with a Humanist from the British Humanist Association. The speaker, described himself more as an agnostic (i.e. not sure of the existence of God but would not deny it) rather than an atheist (denying the existence of God).

As you can imagine, the discussions were sharp and interesting. When pressed to clarify why he thinks there may be a god, he described his awe when he examines the universe and the complexity of nature and how everything seems to work seamlessly.

On the other hand, he cannot believe there is a God when he looks at the state of the world and the wretchedness of humanity.

Brian's story

On a personal level, he was born into a family where God has never had a place or been mentioned to him before he started school. As a 12 year old, he prayed for the first time for his sick mother to be healed, promising to believe in God if she survives the cancer. Alas, this was not the case, and this strengthened his unbelief. In short, he is ready to worship the created rather than the creator.

Another thing that stuck with me from this encounter is his use of the word, Belief! He made statements such as:

“We belief in living a life peace and harmony with everyone. We belief that man does not need any divine command or intervention. We belief that religion was made to make human submissive to societal laws. We belief that we should do to others what we would like them to do unto us”.

This made me realise that in fact, even those who call themselves non-believers, believe in something! For people like Dawkins and his cohort, it is science and philosophy, for the humanist, it is a certain way of life.

PAUL AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

This way of thinking is not new. In our reading from Acts of the Apostles, Paul was in Athens, which at that time was a major centre of learning and culture, where philosophers plied their teachings.

Many of these philosophers are the earliest protagonist of some of the thoughts prevalent today. As Paul pointed out, they were worshipping gods they do not know. They were worshipping the created rather than the Creator.

Paul’s argument to the Athenians is that God can be known through His creation but God is not material. He is beyond human reach yet close and even intimate. God can neither be quantified nor studied.

The unknown God has the face, not of the Athenian idols – mere figment of human imagination – but of Jesus. In Christ and through Christ, we have the privilege of been allowed to call God our Father. And in this we know God.

GOD AS FATHER OR CREATOR IS NOT ENOUGH

But knowing God either as Father or Creator is not sufficient. God loves us more than that and He wants to develop a relationship with us. He wants us to experience Him rather than know Him.

There's a great exchange in the movie *Good Will Hunting* between a kindly psychologist, played by Robin Williams, and a troubled young genius, played by Matt Damon. At one point, the psychologist says this—

"So, if I asked you about art, you'd probably give me the skinny on every art book ever written. Michelangelo, you know a lot about him. Life's work, political aspirations, sexual orientations, the whole works, right?

But I'll bet you can't tell me what it smells like in the Sistine Chapel.

And I'd ask you about war, you'd probably throw Shakespeare at me, right, 'once more unto the breach dear friends.' But you've never been near one. You've never held your best friend's head in your lap, watch him gasp his last breath, looking to you for help."

The point is that there's a world of difference between intellectually understanding something, and truly knowing and experiencing

something. Christianity is not just a collection of propositions about God but it is the all-satisfying experience of God's love for us in Christ.

Jesus throughout His earthly life wanted His followers to know the Father. In John 14:9, he says, *"If you have seen me, you have seen my father"*.

Nevertheless, he wanted them to experience God. Knowing is never enough. Experiencing God is the utmost task for us Christians.

It is no wonder that Jesus, in our Gospel reading promised that the Father will send us an Advocate, His spirit to be with us forever.

A spirit, as we know can only be experienced. And the more the space we give to God's Spirit, the more we experience God.

This week as we prepare for the service of Ascension on Thursday, the week of Prayer for God's Kingdom to come and the Pentecost. We need to explore ways to experience God in our lives and that of our church.

I want to suggest four ways of doing this.

The first is to accept that God is real and accept Christ as our personal saviour. The second is to study His Words and dwell on His commands as written in the Bible. The third is constantly seeking the Lord through prayers and acts of worship. And the fourth is to fellowship with other Christians.

My prayer for you today is that you will not only know God, you will have a personal experience and relationship with him. In doing this we will get to experience God more, and better reflect His attributes to those around us.

It is then that we would be able to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope we have in God.