

40  
DAYS OF  
*DOUBT*

DEVOTIONS FOR THE SKEPTIC



ERIC HUFFMAN

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WEEK 1

**DOUBTS  
ABOUT GOD**

*Do you think God ever gets stoned?  
I think so...look at the platypus.*

*—Robin Williams*

DAY 1

## IS EXISTENCE REASON ENOUGH TO BELIEVE IN GOD?

**A**theism makes sense. I may be a Christian now, but I still think people have some very good reasons for rejecting supernatural beliefs and embracing atheism. Just think about all the innocent people in the world who are suffering right now. By the time you finish this sentence, hundreds of children will have died in places like Afghanistan and Somalia—and even in more developed nations where cancer centers treat children who are battling that vicious, indiscriminate disease.

Atheism is not irrational, especially when you consider the hackneyed arguments some Christians make to support their faith in God. Arguments like, “The universe exists, so God is obviously real,” which is a lot like saying, “Coffee exists, so Juan Valdez is obviously real.” Yes, coffee obviously exists, and yes, it may seem that coffee didn’t just *appear* for no reason. But

1. raw coffee beans are the result of natural selection;
2. coffee farming, harvesting, and roasting processes are the results of many generations of trial and error and scientific experimentation;
3. it would be ignorant to assume that one man, Juan Valdez, is solely responsible for all the coffee just because he’s the one coffee grower you know by name.

Juan Valdez is a fictional character, but even if he were real, there have been a million other coffee growers over many generations. So why can't we just say, "Coffee comes from natural processes, is fine-tuned by science, and we don't need to know *why*. More important, coffee is *amazing*, so let's just relax and enjoy our time with coffee."

Now, replace *coffee* with *the universe* and you'll see why atheism makes sense to so many people: "The universe comes from natural processes, is fine-tuned by science, and we don't need to know *why*. More important, the universe is *amazing*, so let's just relax and enjoy our time with the universe."

Sometimes I'm still tempted to think like an atheist, but deeper reflection leads to deeper truth. Coffee must come from *somewhere*, right? The grounds come from beans, the beans from plants, the plants from soil, the soil from earth, the earth from primordial gas, ice, and dust, collected and partitioned 4.5 billion years ago by gravity, and gravity from... OK, we have no idea where gravity comes from. We used to think it was simply a magnetic pull, until Albert Einstein showed gravity to be a curvature in the space-time continuum. Gravity actually causes space and time to bend.

Try and wrap your mind around that one for a minute, and if during that minute you happen to drift into space, near a black hole where gravity is much stronger, those sixty seconds will equal one thousand years here on Earth. And if the books and movies I've consumed are correct, you'll return to find a planet in ruins, being harvested by alien robots, while what's left of the human race subsists underground. But you'll only be sixty seconds older than you were when you left, and you'll tell them all the stories about the way things used to be. They'll make you their commander, and you'll lead the great human uprising of 3018.

But let's get back to the coffee. We all know we have more than just

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*nature* and *science* to thank for this gift: coffee comes from primeval components, manipulated by gravity, fine-tuned by innumerable, impossibly perfect conditions over 4.5 billion years, nourished by nature, enhanced by science, and cultivated with care by human beings.

Now replace the word *coffee* with *my life*, and you'll begin to see why belief in God makes sense.

### Today's Scripture

“What may be known about God is plain to [human beings], 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.” (Romans 1:19-20a)

### Today's Prayer

Creator God, when doubts fill my mind, renew my hope and joy.

(from Psalm 94:19)



## DAY 2

## IF GOD EXISTS, WHAT IS HE LIKE?

If you happen to be a Christian, you were almost certainly born into a Christian family and/or a majority-Christian nation. You probably wouldn't be a Christian if you were born in Pakistan. If you were born in ancient Greece you wouldn't have believed in one God, but a pantheon of gods and goddesses. It would seem that your beliefs, whatever they are, are socially conditioned; therefore, it follows that your beliefs can't be trusted as reliable indicators of objective Truth.

If that is the case, then all beliefs are relative, and if all beliefs are relative, then no god is truly God, and no truth is universally True. But there is a major flaw in this logic. If every belief system is the artificial product of social conditioning and can't be trusted, then so is the belief that all belief systems are artificial products of social conditioning and can't be trusted. The relative truth argument is a house of cards.

The credibility of any belief system—including Christianity—should be considered based on the veracity of its arguments. People who are most reluctant to consider the Christian God often have more problems with Christians than they do with God. Such is the case of atheist author Sam Harris, who famously wrote, “Even if we accepted that our universe simply had to be designed by a designer, this would not suggest that this designer is the biblical God, or that He approves of Christianity.”<sup>1</sup> Harris and other atheist leaders often make this logical leap: God is not real, and even if He is real, He's not the Christian God.

It's understandable why some people hate Christians and want nothing more than to discredit Christianity; many have been hurt or

offended by judgmental believers. In the same book, Harris also wrote, “Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tormented, tortured, and killed people in the name of God for centuries, on the basis of a theologically defensible reading of the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> I may not agree with Harris’s assessment of history but I can at least understand why some people project their negative opinions about Christians onto the question of God’s existence.

But there exists in Harris’s (and others’) reasoning a glaring weakness, as pointed out by the very witty G. K. Chesterton in 1908:

The modern [intellectuals] speak... about authority in religion not only as if there were no reason in it, but as if there had never been any reason for it. Apart from seeing its philosophical basis, they cannot even see its historical cause. Religious authority has often, doubtless, been oppressive or unreasonable; just as every legal system has been callous and full of a cruel apathy. It is rational to attack the police; nay, [in times of great oppression] it is glorious. But the modern critics of religious authority are like men who should attack the police without ever having heard of burglars.<sup>3</sup>

Chesterton’s point is that a culture faces great danger whenever its intellectual elites assume the role not only of social critics, but of supreme deconstructionists. He continues, “The human intellect is free to destroy itself. Just as one generation could prevent the very existence of the next by all entering a monastery... so one set of thinkers can in some degree prevent further thinking by teaching the next generation that there is no validity in any human thought.”<sup>4</sup>

Honest reflection about the nature of our existence is part of what makes us human. So what happens when you set your own negative experiences with religion aside and ask more basic questions, like:

If God were real, what would we expect Him to be like?  
Would we expect the Creator to care about His  
creatures?  
Would He crave relationships with the things He has  
made?

When it comes to questions like these, people of all religions and people of no religion tend to find some common ground. We all agree, for example, that to love people is better than to hate them. We all agree that taking care of vulnerable people—children, the elderly, the sick, and so on—is the right thing to do. We all agree when someone makes the ultimate sacrifice, giving their life for others, they are heroes worthy of honor and praise. Most of us agree that love is the highest moral good.

It stands to reason, therefore, that if an absolute, moral Creator exists, He would reflect the highest possible good. If His essence is not love, then He would be something less than God. A true God would care about His creation, and He would be especially concerned about His weakest, most vulnerable creatures. He would be willing to lay down His life for others, without demanding anything in return. His very essence should be love.

In other words, if God is real, we should expect God to be *exactly* like Jesus, who said God personally feeds and looks after the birds, adorns flowers with beautiful “clothing,” and knows what we need before we even ask (see Matthew 6:26-32). With stories like the lost sheep and the prodigal son (both in Luke 15), Jesus insisted that God desperately desires a personal relationship with His children (that’s us). And by His death on the cross, Jesus revealed to the world a God who is willing to die—joyfully—for the well-being of all humanity. Even those who reject Him.

When I finally realized that Jesus represents the truest form of God

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the world has ever known, everything began to change for me. If you're ready for a change, too, begin by drawing a line between the silly, spiteful things some Christians have said and done and the true, loving God revealed in Jesus Christ.

### Today's Scripture

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you." (the voice of God, Jeremiah 31:3)

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."  
(1 John 4:8)

### Today's Prayer

I confess I've judged You according to the words, attitudes, and actions of Your worshippers. Be patient with me, and help me to have the courage and the will to seek You for myself.

## DAY 3

# WHY DOES GOD NEED TO BE WORSHIPPED?

Let's face it: worship is weird. For many people it brings to mind all kinds of bizarre imagery, from ancient rituals like human sacrifice to people literally drinking the Kool-Aid (see Jonestown). As hard as we try to make modern worship less peculiar for people (unlimited coffee and glazed donuts, anyone?), it's still very strange human behavior.

Imagine visiting Earth from another planet on a Sunday morning. You walk into a church expecting to observe meaningful human interaction, and you see all the people sitting in rows, reciting the same words in monotone unison. These entranced humans enter, stand, sit, and exit in lockstep. Their leader clearly wields some creepy, invisible power over them because just by saying a few magic words, every head instantly drops and every eye closes until he says "amen" and they all wake up. Then he says it's time to eat some poor guy's flesh and drink His blood, so you head for the door. You snatch a donut on the way out, because not even a mortified alien can resist a platter of fresh donuts.

Why do people worship God?

Why does God need or require us to worship Him?

Wouldn't that make God, I don't know, the world's worst narcissist?

I once attended a major concert featuring a premier female singer-songwriter. I don't want to name-drop or anything, so let's just say she's *gorgeous* and it causes *bad blood* between my wife and me when I look at her. Her music fills a *blank space* in my heart beyond my *wildest dreams*

and I became so entranced during her show that I had to *shake it off* and remember I'm a grown man and not *twenty-two*.

It was Taylor Swift, you guys! OK, stop judging me.

When she appeared on stage, engulfed in smoke and surrounded by dancers and fireworks, it was transcendent. Everyone knew all the words, so we sang every song together. We laughed, we cried. We raised our iPhones to the sky. We lifted our hands in praise. It was maybe the best worship service I've *ever* been to.

It was right up there with that NFL playoff game I attended where, in preparation for the contest, seventy thousand men sought the favor of the football gods by offering up countless cows, swine, and birds to the heavens. In the hours that followed, we all chanted, cheered, and wept tears of joy when the evil Raiders were vanquished at last by our hometown heroes.

I left that game sure of two things: first, nothing compares to Texas barbecue, and second, everybody worships something. The brilliant author David Foster Wallace (who was an atheist for much of his life) once offered the commencement address at Kenyon College in Ohio, and he had this to say about worship:

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the best reason for choosing a God to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as

smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on. The insidious thing about these forms of worship is that they are unconscious. They are default settings.<sup>5</sup>

A few years after delivering this address, Wallace took his own life, but he left us with the staggering notion that absolutely everyone worships absolutely, and if you worship anything but the Absolute, it will eat you alive.

We choose to worship God—specifically the God of the Bible, who revealed Himself to us as Jesus—because we want love to be our default setting.

## Today's Scripture

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker.” (Psalm 95:6 NKJV)

“Above all else put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:14-17 ESV)

## Today's Prayer

I've tried worshipping just about everything *except* You, God, and I still feel incomplete. Today I choose to worship You by putting You at the center of my life.

DAY 4

## WHY HAVE PEOPLE ALWAYS DESIRED GOD?

**I**t's true that most everybody in human history—across all times and places—has believed in a god or many gods, but is that really evidence for God's existence? People used to believe the Earth was the center of the universe and the best way to cure a cold was to let a pouchful of leeches suck all your “bad blood” out. Just because everyone believes something doesn't make it true.

To many skeptics, it seems obvious that humanity's historic need for God was evolutionary: we believed in gods because, at some point in our past, such faith was beneficial to our survival as a species. Religion was nothing more than a function of Darwinian natural selection. But the skeptic will say those days are gone; human survival is no longer aided by belief in God or gods. In 2010, Larry King asked renowned scientist Stephen Hawking about God, and his response summarized modern academia's most prevalent sentiments about religion. “Science can explain the universe without the need for a creator,” Hawking said. “The scientific account is complete. Theology is unnecessary.”<sup>6</sup>

So it would seem that whatever religious beliefs remain are the useless leftovers of our primeval past. Like wings on an ostrich or nipples on a man, faith in gods once served a purpose, but now it's nothing more than an evolutionary misfire.

That argument used to make sense to me, and if you already hate religion, it can be cathartic to believe theology is nothing more than a



relic from a bygone era. But are we really prepared to so boldly condescend the beliefs and longings of billions of people over thousands of years into something as crude and meaningless as ostrich wings and male nipples? Are we willing to say that all supernatural beliefs are nothing more than misguided, biological holdovers from our cave-dwelling days?

Such an argument fails to get to the heart of the matter: *desire*. What is the origin of human desire? More important, what is the origin of our near-universal desire for God?

Think about other universal or widespread human desires like hunger, thirst, sex, companionship, and beauty. Each of these desires has a real and satisfying endpoint: food, water, procreation, pleasure, friends, and art, for example. We aren't capable of *craving* something that doesn't really *exist*—we wouldn't know where to begin!

Christian author N. T. Wright once explained this truism by telling a story about the night he had a powerful dream, but when he awoke, he couldn't remember what the dream was about. "Our passion for justice often seems like that," he wrote.

We dream the dream of justice...a world put to rights...where we not only know what we ought to do but actually do it. And then we wake up and come back to reality. But what are we hearing when we're dreaming that dream? It's as though we can hear...a voice speaking about justice, about things being put to rights...the voice goes on, calling us, beckoning us, luring us to think that there might be such a thing as justice.<sup>7</sup>

Maybe we believe in esoteric ideals like justice, hope, and love because we know, somewhere in this world, justice, hope, and love exist.

The same logic applies to theology. Why have humans always longed

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for God? Maybe it's because that desire, like every other human longing, has a satisfying endpoint. We desire God because God is real.

### Today's Scripture

“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one LORD, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things came and through whom we live.”

(1 Corinthians 8:6)

### Today's Prayer

You have made me for Yourself, O Lord, and my heart is restless until it rests in you. (Adapted from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Book 1, Part 1, AD 350)

## DAY 5

WHY WOULD GOD CARE  
WHAT I HAVE TO SAY?

I recently interviewed an atheist who used to be a pastor. In fact, he's the son of one of the most famous Christian evangelists in the world. When I asked him what led to his decision to leave Christianity, he said, "I just kept praying for people, and nothing would happen. For me, it wasn't about hypocritical Christians or anything; it was just, like, 10,000 unanswered prayers."<sup>8</sup>

I know a lot of people who believe in the power of prayer. Many well-intentioned Christians think they can change God's mind and bend His will when they pray. These people pray as if their lives depend on it. They also listen, because they believe God often talks back to them. Many skeptics equate such behavior with insanity. Upon learning that Vice President Mike Pence believes Jesus sometimes tells him what to do, a popular comedian and TV show host quipped, "It's one thing to talk to Jesus. It's another thing when Jesus talks to you. That's called mental illness, if I'm not correct, hearing voices."<sup>9</sup>

Even though I'm a pastor now, prayer still feels like insanity some days. I want to be a "prayer warrior" like so many of the Christians I admire, but sometimes I can't help feeling like people who pray to change God's mind are delusional, narcissistic, or both. Even if God exists, why would any individual's prayers cause God to change His mind? Do we even want to believe in a God who adjusts His entire business model based on a few negative customer service reviews? Why should God care what we have to say?

I've heard there are two kinds of people in the world: those who lead with their heads, and those who lead with their hearts. Head-people tend to rationalize everything. Before *feeling* something in their hearts, they have to process it in their minds. Heart-people go with their gut: before they *know* something is true, they first need to *feel* that it's right.

Many skeptics are head-people. I'd much rather *think* than *feel*, even while praying. I'm pretty good at thought-prayer: reflecting on God while gazing at the stars, or critically analyzing the Bible in search of meaning. I'm not as comfortable with heart-stuff: opening up, showing emotion, carrying on an intimate conversation.

While there are plenty of examples of head-prayer in the Bible (see Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 90:2; 111:2), the Scriptures don't entirely let head-cases like me off the hook. The primary focus and foundation of prayer in the Bible is the heart, not the head.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He began with "Our Father..." The word He used for father is *Abba*, the most casual, intimate Aramaic word for "father," which could be more accurately translated as "daddy." I presume the Bible translators couldn't bring themselves to start the most important prayer in the Good Book with "Dear Daddy..."

Nevertheless, that's how Jesus started His Model Prayer. Not with "Almighty God," "King," "Lord God," or "Master." Not even with "Our Father," really. Just *Daddy*, a word so tender and personal that most adults can't even say it out loud without giggling.

Go ahead; try it. Get down on your knees and start a prayer by saying, "Hi, Daddy." Weird, right?

It's weird because most of us think we're too grown up for God to be like a daddy to us. But Jesus was a grown man in His thirties, and He called God "Daddy" and asked for basic things like food, forgiveness, and protection. So one of two things must be true: either I'm more sophisticated

and knowledgeable about prayer than Jesus, and I know more about God than He does, or Jesus knew that God wants the kind of relationship a good Father has with His kids.

When you love your Father enough to talk to Him, or just to spend time with Him and to know Him, He'll always be your Daddy, no matter how grown up you get. And He'll *always* want to hear what you have to say.

## Today's Scripture

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Luke 11:9 ESV)

## Today's Prayer

*Abba*, it's hard for me to be so tender. It's hard for me to pray with my heart. So I'll just say this: I want what You want. I want to trust You like a child knows his or her dad. Thanks for being patient with me.

“Faith is permitting ourselves to be seized by the things  
we do not see.” —MARTIN LUTHER

---

*Do you ever wonder whether you’re really a Christian?  
Do you feel like an outsider—even among other believers?*

---


Call it existential doubt. Call it “the dark night of the soul.” Whatever you call it, it’s real. It is personal, it is painful, it is distressing, and it can last for years—maybe even a lifetime. But you are not alone.

*40 Days of Doubt: Devotions for the Skeptic* is for all those sports-talk-listening, eye-rolling, Game-of-Thrones-loving, abnormal believers out there. If you’ve ever felt that your mind and soul were fighting, you’ll find solace in these awe- and wonder-filled reflections by pastor and author Eric Huffman. This devotional helps us understand how we can cope with our questions and provides insightful answers during our times of doubt.



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