

YOUR QUESTIONS, GOD'S ANSWERS

1. How can I find out who I really am?

Young people wonder “Who am I, really?” more often than older people do. Older people often think this is because young people know so much less. I think it is because young people know something *more*—one thing, at least, that older people often forget: that everybody’s real self is a mystery, that once we stop fooling ourselves, we recognize that we don’t know who we really are. The whole human race can learn this one great lesson, at least, from teenagers: to be human is to wonder who you really are.

Lesson One is to know that we don’t know. Socrates, the great ancient Greek philosopher and “the father of philosophy,” was called the wisest man in the world by the Delphic oracle (prophet); and the only way Socrates could interpret that saying was that he was wise only because he alone knew he was *not* wise.

In other words, there are only two kinds of people in this world: the wise, who know they are fools, and fools, who think they are wise. Read more about this in Proverbs 14:33, Isaiah 29:13–14, and 1 Corinthians 1:19–20.

Jean Vanier, the founder of an international organization for helping the multiply handicapped, says that the handicapped have taught him something about himself that is more valuable than anything he has ever taught them about themselves. From them he has learned that “we are *all* ‘the handicapped.’”

All of us, at any age, can have an “identity crisis.” To be human is to lack knowledge of our complete identity, to know only what we have been *so far*, not what we are yet to be. Day by day, year by year, choice by choice, we make ourselves into *this* kind of person or *that* kind of person. Every time we change anything in the world, we also change ourselves a little. Every time we help or harm another, we help or harm ourselves. Our selves are always under construction.

Who then can possibly know my whole self? Much of me *is* no longer; for it is in the dead past, and no one remembers it all. Much of me *is* not yet; for it is in the not-yet-born future, and no one knows what the future holds.

Except one. God, our Creator, knows us, all of us, because he designed us, just as a writer designs characters in a novel. Only our Author knows us completely. In God's mind, and there alone, can we find the secret of our identity. God alone knows all things, our past, our present, and our future.

Therefore only by finding God can I find my true self. That's where the secret of my identity *is*. To try to find out who I am by ignoring my Creator is like trying to find out who a character is by ignoring the character's author.

But how can *I* know *God*? I'm only a human being, and not the most brilliant human being in the world, by any means. How could little me possibly figure out the mind of the great God?

No way. But I *can* know God on one condition: if God takes the initiative and tells me about himself and about myself, if God teaches me, if God "reveals" himself (Jn 6:44-45).

That's what the Bible is: God's revelation, God's words about who he is and who we are.

2. How will the Bible help me to know myself?

The Bible is God's book, God's word to us. God "inspired" the human authors of this book. That means that each book in the Bible has *two* authors, the human one and the divine one. The Bible is the word of God in the words of men.

That name, "the word of God," is also the name of a person. Jesus is also called "The Word of God" (Jn 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13). The Bible, like Jesus, has two natures, human and divine.

Like Jesus, the Bible is *wholly* human and *wholly* divine at once. It's not that some parts of it are only human and other parts only divine. All of it is human, for it was written

by human beings, and all of it is divine, for these human writers were all inspired by God. That does not mean that God whispered in their ears the exact words to write, but that God providentially arranged for these writers to write just what he wanted us to know. He also providentially arranged for the Church, which Jesus left us, to pick just the right books to be included in the “canon,” or list of books in the Bible.

Now since the Bible is God's book, and since God holds the secret of your identity (question 1), to find the secret of your identity you must read the Bible.

You get to know yourself only by getting to know God your Author. But you get to know God most perfectly by getting to know Jesus, “the visible likeness of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Therefore you get to know yourself best only by getting to know Jesus.

He is the main point of this whole book.

3. How can I understand the Bible?

There's a right and a wrong way to read the Bible. The wrong way is to look *at* it. The right way is to look *along* it. It is like a finger, pointing beyond itself to Jesus.

An animal can only look *at* things. When you point to your cat's food with your finger, your cat will look at your

finger. But a human being can also look *along* things, can treat a thing as a *sign*, can ask what it *signifies*, what it means.

What this book signifies, the whole meaning or significance of the Bible, is Jesus. Even the Old Testament points to Jesus. It was written centuries before Jesus, but it points forward to him (Lk 24:25–27). Jesus once said to the Jewish leaders of his day who studied their Scriptures (the Old Testament) but did not believe in him, “You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! Yet you are not willing to come to me in order to have life” (Jn 5:39–40).

Imagine how foolish someone would be if they looked at all the details of a painting of someone’s face and then didn’t recognize the real person when that person showed up. That’s what you do if you read the Bible without getting to know Jesus.

The whole Bible is a portrait of Jesus. Every part is like a line in his face. The point of reading this book is to get to know him, and the best place to begin reading about him is in the Gospels.

The four Gospels are four different accounts of the life of Jesus by four of his disciples. I suggest you read Luke’s Gospel first, because it is probably the easiest and most

exciting one. Then read the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's story of the early Christian Church.

Browse around in this book as you would wander around in a large and beautiful garden. There is no one method or gimmick for reading the Bible. No one can understand *everything* in it, and no one can miss getting *something* valuable out of it. It is like a friend that way. Which of your friends understands *everything* in you? Not one. But which of your friends understands *nothing* about you? Not one. This book is your friend. You can get to know it more and more every day, for it is God's revelation, and you get to know God more and more every day. One thing is certain: until you die, you will never outgrow this book.

4. Where did I come from? Where am I now? Where am I going?

If you're asking those questions, you're asking the three most important questions about life. The Bible is the most important book in the world because it answers those three questions.

Where did I come from? The Bible's first words are: "In the beginning... God created heaven and earth" (Gn 1:1). And in that universe "God created human beings, making them to be like himself" (Gn 1:27). King David, who wrote many of the Psalms, on one occasion prayed to God,