

## Andrews University Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

6-2016

# Questioning God?

John Peckham

Andrews University, [jpeckham@andrews.edu](mailto:jpeckham@andrews.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Peckham, John, "Questioning God?" (2016). *Faculty Publications*. 177.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/177>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

**John C. Peckham, PhD**, is associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



# Questioning God?

For as long as I can remember, I have had a lot of questions; especially “why” questions. As a child, more than once I could not sleep at night because so many questions were bouncing around inside my head, particularly questions about God and His love and justice. I remember struggling with the question, “Why would a loving God finally destroy sinners?” I figured the answer would be in one of my dad’s books.

So I prayed and I looked and looked and looked. As it got later and later into the night, I kept thinking, “If I just look a little bit longer, surely I’ll find the answer.” Sometimes I found answers that I took to be satisfactory; yet, I came to learn that even such “answers” led to more questions.

I continue to ask a lot of questions now; this has been *one of the* keys to knowing God intimately. However, perhaps you have been taught or heard someone teach that we should be careful not to ask too many (theological) questions.

It is common in some circles to downgrade the importance of asking questions and seeking a deeper knowledge of God. “It doesn’t matter what we know,” some say. The trends of culture in recent times seem to undergird this. As Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.”<sup>2</sup>

Is it important to seek knowledge about God? Of course, we must distinguish between true knowledge and that which is “falsely called ‘knowledge’ ” (1 Tim. 6:20, 21).<sup>3</sup> True knowledge is frequently praised throughout Scripture. For example, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7; cf. Prov. 10:14; 12:1; 14:18; 19:2).

In Hosea 4:6, God emphatically proclaims: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27).

And Paul emphasizes a battle of the mind, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5; cf. Phil. 1:8–11).

## Questions and answers

The knowledge of God that Paul refers to here requires plowing deep into God’s revelation, particularly in His Word. This requires a great deal of humility and teachability. If you think you know enough already, you are very unlikely to learn. If you are unwilling to ask questions and seek answers, how will you come to the knowledge of God?

Although many fear asking questions of God, it is striking to see in Scriptures how often God welcomes questions. Genesis 18 records a conversation Abraham has with God. The patriarch’s question concerns the exceedingly wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah: “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (Gen. 18:23). God answers “no”; Abraham does not give up: “Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen. 18:24, 25).

God replies, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.” And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:26, 27). Notice that not only does Abraham ask very difficult and pointed questions, he does so with great humility and reverence.

Abraham does not stop with his first question. He repeats the same basic question: What if there are only 45, only 40, only 30, only 20, and finally: “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten” (Gen. 18:32).

Moses also repeatedly asks God hard questions. To take just one of

many examples: when the Israelites murmur against Moses at the increased workload laid upon them by Pharaoh after Moses asks for their release, Moses asks God: “ ‘O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this

LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, “Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?” But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian’ ” (Judg. 6:13). Again, God unmistakably answers Gideon, bringing deliverance to His people.

lesson we should learn is: it is acceptable to ask questions of God, even hard questions, if they are humbly asked in the right spirit. However, be prepared to receive God’s answer, which may not be what you expect or seek (cf. Habakkuk). In the New Testament, likewise, imprisoned and deeply discouraged, John the Baptist

*It is acceptable to ask questions of God, even hard questions, if they are humbly asked in the right spirit. However, be prepared to receive God’s answer, which may not be what you expect or seek.*



people, and You have not delivered Your people at all’ ” (Exod. 5:22, 23; cf. 32–34; Num. 21).

Did God answer Moses? Indeed, with wondrous miracles and deliverance, culminating with the Exodus itself.

In a similar fashion, Gideon asks God about the severe oppression by the Midianites: “ ‘O my lord, if the

Psalm 88:14 agonizingly expresses the thoughts of many who are undergoing trials: “O LORD, why do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?” (cf. Isa. 63:15). Such questions demanding an answer from God for personal agony and suffering are common throughout the Bible.

Consider the case of Job. Or read through the book of Lamentations. The

sends the question to Jesus: “ ‘Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’ ” (Matt. 11:3). And then Jesus Himself, hanging on the cross, asks the most striking question of all: “ ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (Mark 15:34).

Exceedingly difficult questions indeed. Yet, Jesus encourages us to ask, though always in faith: “ ‘Ask,

and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7). Thus, the Bereans were commended as “noble” because “they received the word [of the apostles] with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11; cf. 1 Thess. 5:21).

### Theology is relational

Nevertheless, we seem to hear more and more often sayings like: “I don’t want theology, I just want Jesus” (as if you could receive one without the other). “Don’t give me religion, give me relationship.” Teaching systematic theology, I am often made aware that some have negative opinions of theology. They often think of theology as cold, abstract, and dry.

Theology is nothing of the sort! What is at the center of true theology? God! And what is the character of God? Love. And what is love if not relational? It is a terrible misunderstanding to say

“I love God, but I don’t want theology.” It is almost like saying to my wife, “I love you, but I don’t want to know anything about you. Don’t ask me any questions, and I won’t ask you any questions.” That is not the way a relationship in marriage works. Because I love my wife, I want to know her as intimately as I possibly can.

In an analogous fashion, theology is relational. While there is an abundance of counterfeit theology, genuine theology is coming to know the living God of love Himself! “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

### Good questions

We hear so often: “You ask too many questions.” “You just don’t have enough faith.” “We should not ask questions like that!” Yet, in this age of increasing biblical, theological, and spiritual apathy, when people ask us *why*, particularly young people, should

we not be excited that they are asking the questions instead of turning them away because their questions make us uncomfortable?

Many react negatively to questions because they perceive such questions to be a threat. Yet, I believe that the better we come to know God, the more we come to love Him and the less threatened we are by honest questions. Truth loses nothing by close investigation.

To wrestle with God is acceptable, even as Jacob did (Gen. 32), as long as you refuse to let go of Him. Some people try to wrestle God away from them with their questions. But, as long as we are holding on to Him and seeking the truth in His Word, God can handle our questions. He is far bigger than our questions.

We are not to be skeptics (John 20:24–27) but to ask in faith. At the same time, we should always be “ready to make a defense [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give an

**FREE DOWNLOAD  
SERMONS &  
RESOURCES**

**www.gcevangelism.com**

Providing free download PowerPoint® - ready multimedia graphics and other resources. News and ideas to motivate and to facilitate preaching the Three Angels Messages of the everlasting Gospel of Jesus and His imminent Second Coming.

Design: EVANGELIA.CO

More information:  
GENERAL CONFERENCE Ministerial Association [www.ministerialassociation.org](http://www.ministerialassociation.org) / email: [costar@gc.adventist.org](mailto:costar@gc.adventist.org)

GCEvangelism



account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Yet, in doing so, we need not be *defensive*.

How can I know that I am asking the right questions? It is not the content of a question that makes it good or bad but the motivation. Do you ask because you do not want to believe? Is your question itself a thinly veiled attack? Do you intend your question to be a defense mechanism? A question wielded as a weapon is a bad question. On the other hand, good questions are motivated by the sincere quest for answers. Are you asking because you genuinely desire to know while recognizing that the answer may extend beyond your grasp?

Jesus often entertained and even elicited these kinds of good questions from honest seekers, drawing them to ask the right questions that would lead them to the most important answers

(e.g., with Nicodemus in John 3 and with the woman at the well in John 4).

In seeking answers, we must remember how little we know, indeed that we do not even know how much we do not know. At times, we find what we take to be satisfactory answers to our questions; yet each “answer” may lead to more questions. Indeed, each answer may be only a partial answer, one more piece of the grand puzzle that we are still trying to put together, though we no longer may expect to complete the puzzle.

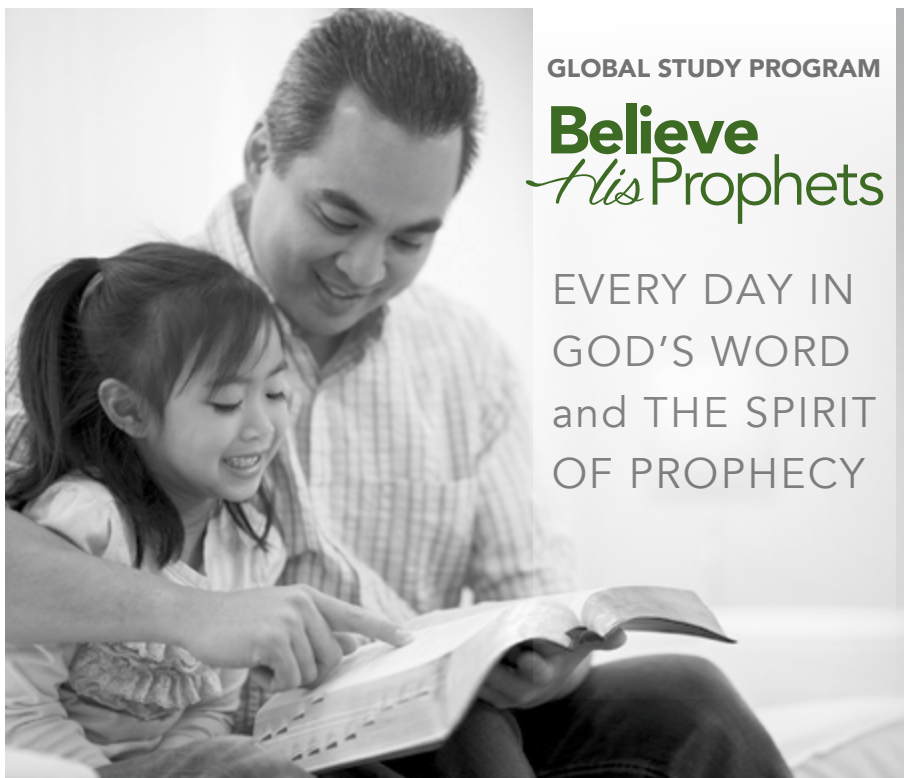
Yet, one thing we must do is to respond regularly to the invitation of James 1:5: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Asking theological questions has led me to some of the most profound worship experiences of my life.

My faith in God and love for Him have grown and taken deeper and deeper root, which I hope is manifest in my life. Of course, I have still got more questions. But I never want to stop getting to know God better; similar to the way in which I enjoy growing in my relationship with my wife year after year, not seeking an endpoint where I am finished getting to know her. How could we say to God, “I love You, but I don’t want to know You more deeply?”

I want to know Him more and still more. How about you? 🙏

- 1 John C. Peckham is the author of a number of articles and books, including most recently, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).
- 2 Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2010), 2.
- 3 All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or visit [www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine](http://www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine).



GLOBAL STUDY PROGRAM

## Believe *His* Prophets

EVERY DAY IN  
GOD’S WORD  
and THE SPIRIT  
OF PROPHECY

### A worldwide study of the Bible and inspired writings

*Believe His Prophets* is a five-year journey through the Bible and selected writings of Ellen White.

- daily Bible readings
- daily interactive blogs
- weekly Spirit of Prophecy selections