

who

is

God?

ANDY ACHESON

who

is

God?

AND
WHY IT
MATTERS

10

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For my precious daughters, Lydia, Noá and Phoebe.

*I want nothing more than for you to know the God
this book is about.*



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Introduction

Why Should I Bother Reading This?

The last few years have been a bit much, haven't they?

Life in the world today so often feels chaotic, confusing, disorientating, and even a little disturbing. One disaster seems to roll into the next, and with every refresh of the page another news story appears, sometimes more shocking than the last. Whether it's Putin, or a pandemic, or a personal tragedy, the world seems to be spiralling and spinning out of control in all sorts of ways.

Take for example the environment. Evidence of climate change just keeps on growing, but no one seems to care enough to help. Who's even in charge of this planet? And it's not just the environment that seems to be out of control ...

It seems impossible to scroll down our feeds without seeing war and conflict in all sorts of places around our world. One day children play happily and the very next day goalposts are driven over by 40-tonne tanks. People hide in basements and bunkers as bombs and bullets rain down.

For lots of us suffering is far closer to home. Our cities and towns are bursting with blades; teenagers seemed to be attacked all the time. For some, the bleeps and beeps of hospital wards form the soundtrack to our sadness. Cancer. Disease. Heart problems. Brain tumours. Anxiety. Depression. The list goes on.

Then there's the internet which seems to be a Wild West, where no one really rules and we all have to watch our own backs. Artificial intelligence can put words in anyone's mouth, footage is doctored and it's impossible to know what is true and who we can trust. Chatbots have all the answers but how do I ever know

when I'm talking to a person or a machine? Technology never seems to be satisfied; it's exhausting.

How can we *not* feel worried and anxious in a world like this one?

* * *

A few months back my family and I were on a flight and I was sitting between my 4-year-old and 6-year-old daughters. The weather wasn't great and, as it turned out, our plane was the last one allowed to leave before the rest of the flights were grounded due to very high winds. We hit serious turbulence. You know the sort where the flight attendants stop trying to sell you stuff and sit down, strap their seatbelts on tight and make uneasy eye contact with each other? That sort of turbulence.

My little girls were worried, gripping my hands as our plane shuddered through the sky. But then the pilot spoke to us. He assured us all was fine; it was a bit windy but nothing to worry about – he'd been in much worse weather than this before and never had an issue. Instantly I felt the grip on my hands loosen. My four-year-old smiled at me, she said, "It's okay daddy,

the pilot said we don't need to worry!" And that was more than enough for the girls. They stopped cutting off the blood supply to my fingers and started asking me for sweets and whether we could get McDonald's on the drive home. It was a total game changer.

When everything around us feels noisy and messy and busy and scary – when the world feels totally out of control – we are prone to panic. How could we not? But what we need is someone who is bigger than us. Someone who knows better than us. Someone who can give us peace in the chaos. Someone who has been around longer than us, who has seen it all before, and who can keep us safe.

If we are going to be honest about the world around us – rather than block it out – the only thing that can stop us freaking out is to get to know God better. He made this world, and he rules this world, and as we get to know him more, we'll trust him more.

This book is all about the God who makes sense out of stress, and brings clarity to chaos. We're going to think about who God is and what he is like. We're going to see how really getting to know God helps us to make sense of what he is doing and has done in our world.

We'll see that he does what he does because he is who he is.

If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, why not allow this book to tell you more about the God you're trying to make up your mind about? What you believe about God is the most important decision you'll ever make, so you need to know who it is you're considering rejecting or following!

For those of us who already believe in him, this book will hopefully help you get to know him better. And as we do that, panic will be replaced by prayer. Fear by faith. Confusion by confidence.

Let's get to it!



Chapter 1

God is Love

There is so much suffering. And not just in an “out there, far away” sort of way. The brokenness is all around us, isn’t it?

Marriages collapse; grandparents die; depression is everywhere.

Is God there? Is God fair? Does God care?

How am I supposed to hold the idea of a good God *and* suffering in my head at the same time?

* * *

We hear people say: “There can’t be a God because of all I’ve gone through”, or “If God exists I don’t want to know him because of what happened to me.” I get it. It’s tempting to think that way. It’s natural to look at experience, draw conclusions based on what we see, and adjust our view of God in light of that.

Suffering is a massive problem. But if you start with the problem and try and work everything out from that, you can end up with a wrong conclusion.

For example, when my wife Katie was little she came to the conclusion that paving stones bled! After all, when she fell on the grass nothing much happened, but when she fell on the path there was blood on her knee. Totally the wrong conclusion. If you start in the wrong place, you’ll very easily end at the wrong place too. Like buttoning a shirt, if you start out of kilter, you’ll get every button wrong.

Instead of beginning with the problem, this book will start with God and try to understand the world in the light of who he is. And the first thing we need to know about him is that “God is love” (1 John 4:16).