

## If God Is Real, Why Is He Hiding?

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Jonathan Rue  
Proverbs 25:2  
*Question Everything Series*  
01.30.11

In 2004, the British philosophy professor Antony Flew, who had been one of the leading champions of atheism for more than a half-century, shocked the world by changing his mind. Here's a guy at 81 years-old, who spend 5 decades publishing widely against belief in God. He produced more than 30 works against belief in God. He boldly proclaimed that he now believes in God and he changed his mind because of scientific evidence that led him to believe that it is more probable that there is a God.

### **SLIDE:**

#### **Image—Antony Flew**

Now truth be told, Flew didn't come all the way to belief in the God of the Bible, but he did come to believe in a super-intelligent God behind creation. But, he didn't become a Christian. So here is one of the most well-known and widely published atheists of the last century who had a distinguished career as a philosopher focusing largely on atheistic arguments against God's existence. And he has the courage to change his mind.

As you could imagine, this sent shockwaves throughout the atheist community. Many atheists come out against Flew and tried to discredit him by saying that he changed his mind in late life because he is afraid of dying. Other said that his mind weakened in later life. Flew is afraid, Flew is dumb. Well, Flew responded to the first critique by saying that those that criticize him miss the point, he still didn't believe in an afterlife, just a super-intelligent God behind creation so he is not driving by fear of something he still doesn't believe in.

When he was questioned about this and in regard to how many people he has upset by changing his mind, Flew said "that's too bad". "My whole life has been guided by the principle of Plato's Socrates: Follow the evidence, wherever it leads." And he weighed the DNA evidence and that is where the evidence led him, and I'll get into that in a minute.

If you want to read more about this there's a book you should pickup called, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind.*

### **SLIDE:**

#### **Image—There is a God**

So here's my question.

**SLIDE:**  
**Why isn't belief in God easier?**

Why does a guy have to spend 81 years following the evidence before it ultimately leads him to God? Now, it's not that difficult for all of us, most of us aren't pursuing the argument for atheism for decades. He was the world's leading atheist for 50 years and that's not likely to be the same degree of questioning that you and I are going through. And Flew didn't even get all the way there. He found Christianity to be the best case for God revealing himself, if you believed in "revelation" at all.

God does show himself in the world, but he's just not that obvious. I mean why doesn't he write something in the clouds or speak in a James Earl Jones Voice over the whole earth. I read about God writing on the wall in the Bible, God why don't you write me a message on the wall in my bedroom in the morning?

There are ways that we can see evidence for God.

What did it for Flew was evidence found in the complexity of the universe. DNA research, he said, "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved."

Francis Collins, who headed up the human genome project which mapped the entire human Genome which makes up our DNA, wrote a fantastic book called *The Language of God* and in it he said this about complexity of the universe:

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When you look from the perspective of a scientist at the universe, it looks as if it knew we were coming. There are 15 constants—the gravitational constant, various constants about the strong and weak nuclear force, etc.— that have precise values. If any of those constants was off by even one part in a million, or in some cases, by one part in a million million, the universe could not have actually come to the point where we see it.

Matter would have not been able to coalesce, there would have been no galaxy, stars, planets, or people.

—Francis Collins

The universe is so finely tuned, that the most probable thing is that there is probably some force or being behind it that is doing the fine tuning to expertly keep in this complex balance. There's a philosopher named John Leslie who says this probability works like this illustration: a man who is sentenced to die by a firing squad of 50 expert Marksmen. They fire 6 feet away from him and

nobody hits him. Since it is possible that even expert marksmen can miss even at 6 feet, it is technically possible that they all just happened to miss at the same moment. Though you could not prove that they conspired to miss, it would be unreasonable to draw the conclusion that they hadn't. It is just the far more probable explanation.

So there is evidence for God in the incredible complexity of the universe. There is also evidence for God in beauty. There is so much mystery in the meaning that we find in beauty. Take music for instance. There is some music in the world that affects me when I listen to it. It goes way beyond a mathematical formula of sound wave vibration bouncing off of receptors in my ears. Music moves me, it has a deeper affect than just playing and being received. I think about U2's song Beautiful Day.

**SLIDE:**  
**Image—U2**

**SOUND:**  
**Play Track #1**

There is a reason why 2 out of 3 brides want this to be their exit song at their wedding. There something about music that touches us deeply and points us to the transcendent beauty of God.

But of course there are other bands that make a better case for atheism than for God. Like Nickelback.

**SLIDE:**  
**Image—Nickelback**

**SOUND:**  
**Play Track #2**

So, there is evidence that speaks for God's existence but it would seem like he could be more obvious.

This is what Paul the apostle talks about in Romans 1:20

**SLIDE:**  
**Romans 1:20 (TNIV)**

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, so that people are without excuse.

We've been doing a series in JH called,

**SLIDE:**  
**Question Everything Series Graphic**

Tonight in the last night in our series and I've called tonight's message,

**SLIDE:**  
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Let me share with you one of my least favorite verses in the Bible.

**SLIDE:**  
**Proverbs 25:2 (TNIV)**

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.

I want this verse to say it is the glory of God to reveal himself clearly to me. I don't like the fact that this verse says it is his glory that he conceals something from me, I want to know! I don't like that God hides anything from me. This verse provokes a question in my mind, I don't know if it does for you, but I think is God playing games with us? Is he trying to play games and be manipulative?

Is God like Kelly Kapoor, from the The Office? You know Kelly?

**SLIDE:**  
**Image—Kelly Kapoor**

Kelly and Ryan have this relationship and it's full of manipulation and hiding. She's telling him, I'm pregnant so he'll take her to dinner that night. She just makes it up as she goes. Then she starts dating Daryl and then in the confession cam she tells us...

Daryl Philbin is the most complicated man that I have ever met. I mean, who says exactly what they're thinking? What kind of game is that? —Kelly Kapoor

Is that what God is like, is he like Kelly Kapoor, is hiding himself and playing games with us? I think no, the first answer is that God hides himself from us because if he showed himself to us we would die. Let's start there in 1 Timothy chapter 6.

**SLIDE:**  
**1 Timothy 6:15-16 (TNIV)**

...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

God dwells in unapproachable light. In the Old Testament when God was revealing himself in various ways it was clear that if God revealed too much of himself you were toast! You would die. If his presence was in the tabernacle and you didn't enter in just the right way you were dead. When they were carrying the Arc of the Covenant and you touched it, you would die. There is something about God that is too awesome and fierce that we can't handle it if God really reveals himself outright.

The second, is that is God fully reveals himself he is irresistible, we wouldn't be able to do anything else other than fall down and worship him. This is related to what I talked about last week, I talked about suffering last week. One of the things I said as why God allows suffering is that he's given us freedom and he wants us to choose him. He wants a loving, trusting relationship, that is what God is after. So, someone came up to me after last week and said, I understand your talk tonight, but I have a question. When God returns and recreates the heavens and the earth and we are living with God, will we still have choice? Will we still have the ability to choose for God or away from God, like God has given us now? The answer to that is that when we are seeing God, when we are on the new earth and God is dwelling among us, that we will see so much more of who he is that the only choice will be him. Because he is irresistible, once you get close to God, there is no turning away from that.

What I want to talk a little bit more about tonight. Why does God do it the way that he has done it? Why does God reveal himself the way that he does now? We have some evidences and there are some great evidences that God has given us about who he is and we've talked about some of those through this series. But, in the Old Testament we see God taking a more direct approach and we see what happens when he's just more obvious. When he just says, you want to see my presence and power, BOOM, I'm going to land it on you. Let's see what happens when he does that.

**SLIDE:**

**What happens when God takes a "direct approach"**

So, all through the Old Testament what happens and we see number one, when he's really obvious with his presence and his power, it doesn't last.

**SLIDE:**

**It doesn't last**

So, let's think about God' rescue of the children of Israel out of Egypt. He does 10 amazing, wonderful Plagues in Egypt, then he parts the Red Sea for them to

cross, then he closes it on their enemies after they are safe. Then they celebrate, Yeah, God is great. As soon as they get out in the desert they start grumbling, God we need food, so God gives them manna bread on the ground for them to pickup everyday. Then they say, we don't like this anymore, we want meat. So, God says ok, fine, here's all the quail you can eat, stuff yourselves. Then they say, back in Egypt we had garlic and leeks and spices, we don't like this food here. Moses goes up on the mountain and God gives them the law and when Moses comes down he sees that they have made a golden calf and are worshiping that instead of God. They are so forgetful, even though God is leading them by fire at night and a pillar of cloud during the day. It's never enough, if god is obvious and proves himself by writing your name in the clouds today, he's going to need to do it tomorrow for you, too.

If our faith is based on the miraculous and awesome, we have to have a steady diet of that to keep us going. We have to constantly have more of that. If God did something amazing in your life, would that be it for you? Would you trust in God for the rest of your life if you had one amazing encounter with him? I doubt it. If you base your faith miracles, you need a steady diet of them.

Jesus had an interesting encounter like this in Luke chapter 17. He goes into a village and there are 10 lepers who beg for his mercy and healing. Jesus says ok, go and show yourself to the priest and on the way to the priest they were cleansed of their leprosy. Leprosy was a defiling skin disease that made them outcast and restricted them away from their community, it was a terrible life change, you couldn't live in normal society. So, they go to the temple to be declared clean and re-enter society and on the way they are totally cleansed of their leprosy. Only one comes back to say thanks.

### **Story of 10 lepers**

#### **SLIDE:**

#### **Luke 17:15-19 (TNIV)**

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Jesus heals 10 guys and only one comes back to say thank you. The rest are like YES! I'm healed I'm back, I'm going to go do my thing. No thought that they should come back and say thank you and give glory to God. Isn't that us? The way that we relate to God so often, doesn't it look like this? God help me get through college, please! You get through college. God, help me get a job! You get a job. God, please I just want a woman in my life, I want to be married! You

get married. God, please give us children! Here's some kids. God, why did you give me these kids?! We just do that with God.

We just constantly ask for something else and something else. We so rarely stop and look back and give thanks for the ways that you have revealed yourself to me in the past. This is such a great practice because if you have followed Jesus for any length of time you know that you are going to hit a time where you ask where are you God? Why aren't you near, why am I not experiencing the closeness of your presence? That is the time, in those moments, to look back. You need to say God, let me remember the times when you have been faithful in my past. Let me remember that you have revealed yourself to me in clear ways, that you have provided for me, helped me. Let me say thank you, like this one leper came back and did with Jesus. Let me show gratitude for what you have done.

So, that is the first problem with this, that it doesn't last, but the second problem is that it can be explained away.

**SLIDE:**  
**It can be explained away**

There is always another way to explain something. So, let's say that God did do something really miraculous and across the whole earth James Earl Jones' voice spoke from heaven, this deep thundering voice rang out, "I am GOD, listen to me." There would be a scientist somewhere that says wait, wait, I know what happened, there was an avalanche and sound waves ricocheted off of the atmosphere and that's what caused the anomaly. If God did write something in the clouds, it would be molecules in the stratosphere that froze and formed the random collection of shapes. There are all sorts of elaborate explanations for everything. Philosophers today try to explain all human emotion, even love, by a complex combination of chemical reactions. There are people that think we never went to the moon. If you want to believe something different you can find a way to believe something different.

Jesus' miracles are the perfect example. Jesus would do miracles in front of the Pharisees and then they would run away and talk about how to kill him. They just weren't getting it, he was doing miracles to prove that he was God. Things can always be explained in a different way and a part of the reason that this happens is that we are living in a spiritual war. There is another spiritual power, other than God at play in the universe, that power is Satan and the demonic forces. Paul the Apostle tells us that we are affected by what he calls the god of this age.

**SLIDE:**  
**2 Corinthians 4:4 (TNIV)**

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

He says one of the things that Satan does is blind the minds of unbelievers. Part of the reason that when God does something miraculous and we have a hard time believing it is this blinding. Maybe this has happened, you prayed for a family member with cancer, or one of your friends who was in desperate financial circumstances and after praying for this there was a miraculous turn-around. Maybe your friend got a new job or there was a healing of somebody's physical body, but you are excited for a moment and then a month later you start to explain it away. You start to doubt that it was really God, you see several coincidences that you start to put together as random things coming together to work out for you. That is the influence of the god of this age trying to blind our minds. Trying to explain away the things that he is doing, so that is the second problem with the question of why God isn't more obvious. Even if he is more obvious, we can still explain it in a different way.

Thirdly, it doesn't produce love.

**SLIDE:**  
**It doesn't produce love**

God desires a loving, trusting relationship. That's why he created you and why he created me, that's why he created the universe. He desires a loving, trusting relationship with us. It is a two-way street. Now, the thing about God being obvious and taking the direct approach and revealing himself in big ways, it doesn't necessarily produce love. It produces awe and the thunder-struck realization that you like God a lot because he's giving you stuff and coming through for you. Then he essentially becomes a cosmic vending machine in the sky, you drop your "quarters" or prayers in and go to church. Then, I'm going to pick out that I want a new car, a good grade at school, a boyfriend, or this or that. Then I'm waiting for the vending machine to vend what I want. Is that a loving, trusting relationship or what? That's a transaction, we are giving God prayer and requesting something of him and he's giving us something back. It doesn't produce love, it doesn't produce what God is after.

It talks about the marriage relationship and love between a husband and a wife is not because of the husband giving the wife everything that she wants or the wife giving the husband everything he wants. That's not what produces love in a marriage. Let me take the analogy one step further, when you are engaged you are moving toward marriage, but the way that God has designed it is that we don't know each other fully during that season. We don't know each other in the Biblical sense, you follow me? Until marriage, that's what the Bible lays out, no sex before marriage. So, we want to get to know each other in engagement, you want all your issues out on the table, you want to know the character of the other



person, you want to know their personality and spend time together. But, there's going to be a part of that person that you do not know until marriage, then God gives you the gift to enjoy sex.

The way it works with God, God is revealing himself to us little by little and we're getting to know him. Scripture uses the analogy of Christ as the groom and the church as the bride. One of these things he sets up is that he wants us to fall in love with him before he gives himself fully to us. Now, not in a sexual way, it's a metaphor. But we aren't going to know God fully, just like an engaged couple won't know each other fully until the wedding night. So, until we see God face to face we don't get to know him fully. Because he wants to produce love in us. Jesus says this in Matthew 23.

**SLIDE:**

**Matthew 23:37 (TNIV)**

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

It's breaking the heart of Jesus, he's saying I want to gather you like chicks under my wings. It's a mothering desire, but we are not willing. God isn't going to show himself to prove a point, he wants to gather us like chicks who want to come. God is leading us to himself, he wants us to have the desire to find him.

**SLIDE:**

**God is obvious enough to be found and hidden enough to be loved**

Does this make sense? God doesn't want to overpower us with who he is, but he wants to reveal enough of himself for us to find him. And he does. Some of you are on the journey to finding who God is. You are reaching out for him and searching. God can be found, he is not playing games with you. He is going to give you enough to find himself. One of the ways he did this was in sending Jesus Christ. Paul tells us this in Colossians.

**SLIDE:**

**Colossians 1:15 (TNIV)**

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

God has given us an image of himself, even though he is the invisible God, he dwells in unapproachable light, he gave us Jesus to show us who he is. In Colossians 2, Paul says,

**SLIDE:**

**Colossians 2:9 (TNIV)**

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form

Christ isn't just a cheap imitation. All the fullness of the deity, of the godhead, is in Christ. Jesus Christ **is** God. So we've been given something, God isn't hiding himself entirely. Jesus in bodily form and the Holy Spirit to illuminate who Christ is.

Jesus tells us a fascinating parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor man and the Rich Man would walk by him everyday and never give him anything, then they both died. Lazarus was taken to Abraham's side, which is a metaphor for heaven and the Rich Man was taken to hell. Jesus describes that there is chasm between the two, and the Rich Man see Lazarus and calls out to Abraham, "I have five brothers, I don't want them to suffer this same fate, let Lazarus go to them and tell them to believe in Moses and the Prophets..."

**SLIDE:**

**Luke 16:29-31 (TNIV)**

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Even if someone rises from the dead. This is a parable from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus is the man who would be crucified on the cross and the only one who has been resurrected from the dead. That's what we have been given. So, according to Jesus, then if you have heard of that story and the miracle that God did in that for you, that is all you need to believe. Now, the Holy Spirit has to illuminate that for you, the god of this age has blinded our minds. The Holy Spirit has to open up your mind and heart, you might have heard this story 100 times, but maybe you've never been able to fully put your faith and trust in God, But, Jesus says, you have everything you need.

In preparing for marriage, you can have the best friends, coaches, mentors and teachers getting you ready. But, the time comes that you have to be ready to stand up there before God and everyone and covenant yourself for the rest of your life to that other person in marriage. You have to commit and stand up there and say those words. Then, comes the honeymoon.

Jesus is saying that you have the information you need. The Holy Spirit illuminates your heart to see it, now you just have to do it. You have to decide to believe it, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross. He's not hiding from you. God isn't maybe answering your requests in exactly the way you want him to. Honestly, I'm presenting a reason for why that is, but I don't know why God reveals himself in powerful ways sometimes and then not to others.

There is a mystery to who God is. There is a no control or understanding what God is all about. This is not an explanation of who God is and why he does some things and not others. I don't know why I went through a two year period where I just felt like God had left me, I felt empty inside. I was like, God where are you? All I know, is that God took me though it and brought me back into a faith-filled trusting relationship with him. It took me saying God, I believe in you, I'm going to put my trust in you even if I don't have the warm fuzzies to go with it.

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