



THINKING *Family*

Thinking Family has been created as a resource for parents, in conjunction with the Thinking Series by Andy Steiger of Apologetics Canada. Thinking Family addresses the five Thinking Series questions in the context of family, the greatest place to engage both our children's hearts and minds.

The Thinking Series.

Five Questions Worth
Thinking About.

What is the meaning of life?

Does God Exist?

Do all religions lead to God?

Why is there evil?

Is there life after death?

Parents can look to Thinking Family for:

- ▶ thoughts on important faith questions from a parenting perspective,
- ▶ family discussion starters and,
- ▶ references to additional resources.

Thinking Family can also be found online at:

<http://www.apologeticscanada.com/category/apologetics-for-parents/>

What Gives Life Meaning?

Voices Speaking on Meaning

For some of us, the question ‘What Gives Life Meaning’ sounds incredibly philosophical and, philosophy not being one of our strengths, we move on. We’ll leave that to the scholars! Some might say we can’t know the answer to this question. Some of us (who are honest) would say we just don’t have the time or energy to consider this. Others find that they can’t get past this foundational question.

So, is it important to ask and discuss this question in our families? Actually, without being aware of it, we are already talking about it in our families every day, whether explicitly or implicitly through our actions and decisions. Answers to the meaning of life are also being preached constantly to our kids by voices all around them. The first step towards considering this question may be to become aware of these ever-present messages on life’s meaning.

Voices in our culture today are speaking of life’s meaning through both positive and negative messages. Negative messages about meaning include materialism, consumerism, power, status, and wealth. We must talk with our children about how these forms of meaning are deceptive and will leave us searching and unfulfilled. Voices around us also say life has meaning through positive messages such as:

Philanthropy. Schools host events for international charitable projects. The Christmas season includes numerous requests for donations to charity and community. Birthday parties raise money for charity. Celebrities are applauded in the media for their donations and foundations. Being a generous, helpful person gives life meaning.

Success. Students are competing more and more to get good grades in school so that they can attend university and begin successful careers. Sports are becoming more



competitive at younger ages as players spend more time in training, practices, and competition. Parents pour their hours and energies into their careers. Success in school, sports, and career give life meaning.

Relationships. Social Media can now largely quantify relationships. How many ‘friends’ do you have? Technology facilitates staying in touch with those we care about. Television, music, and movies continue to tell of lives being fulfilled by the perfect relationship with your true soul mate. Families are doing all they can to maintain a strong bond in the midst of hectic schedules. Relationships give life meaning.

All these things do give life meaning, in the sense that they have personal significance. They are enjoyable, valuable, and important. However, when I think of passing these values along to my kids, I feel like there must be something more. There must be something that will carry them through even when their relationships don’t go well, when they aren’t experiencing success, and when they don’t feel like they are contributing enough. *Because their lives are meaningful, regardless of all these things.* Our hearts tell us there is meaning to life that is deeper than the things that we define as personally significant.

What Gives Life Meaning? (p. 2)

In a blog post titled 'The Meaning of Life in 600 Words or Less,' Andy Steiger tells of a drawing that his young son drew:

“Allow me to illustrate what I learned years ago about discovering life’s meaning with a picture my son drew. Coming home from work, I found one of his masterpieces taped to his bedroom door. It contained two large stick figures and two small ones. The two large stick figures were circled with a line through them. I could have guessed at what the picture meant, but I might have been wrong. I could have given it personal significance (subjective meaning) but I would be no closer to understanding its intended meaning (objective meaning). So, I did the one thing necessary to know the meaning of anything. I asked the author: my son.”

Our Intended Meaning

The deeper meaning of life that our hearts are speaking of is our intended meaning: what we were created for. As Andy continues to explain, to know the intended meaning of our lives we must ask the author of life, God. Only finding and living out the purpose for which we were created will bring true and lasting fulfillment. Jesus explained that we are created to first love God and then to love each other. This is our true purpose. This is the message about life’s meaning that I want to communicate with my children. I will need to make a conscious effort to communicate this message to my children each day, in order to be heard above the many other voices competing to define life’s meaning.

Asking questions about the meaning of life can be the beginning of a journey that asks other important questions, including “Who is the author of life?” The Thinking Family blogs follow the Thinking Series in considering important life questions, such as ‘Does God Exist?’, ‘Do All Religions Lead to God,’ and ‘Who Is Jesus?’ These questions are part of discovering and teaching our children how to find meaning in our lives.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS

How do people try to give meaning to their lives? What makes them feel important and special?

A popular quote states, “Don’t ask what the meaning of life is. You define it.” What are your thoughts about that? Do you agree or disagree?

How might understanding the meaning of life change our behaviours and values? What does it look like to love God and to love others?

FAMILY RESOURCES

Andy Steiger. [The Meaning of Life in 600 Words or Less](http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2012/05/09/the-meaning-of-life-in-600-words-or-less/). May 9, 2012.
<http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2012/05/09/the-meaning-of-life-in-600-words-or-less/>

Apologetics Canada Podcast 009 [Thinking Series: What is the Meaning of Life?](http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2014/02/06/ac-podcast-009-thinking-series-meaning-life/) February 6, 2014
<http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2014/02/06/ac-podcast-009-thinking-series-meaning-life/>

Apologetics Canada. Think For a Minute. What Gives Life Meaning? www.youtube.com February 18, 2013

Chris Sherrod. “Home-Field Advantage.” [Apologetics for a New Generation](#). Sean McDowell. Harvest House Publishers, 2009.

McFarland, Alex. [The 21 toughest questions your kids will ask about Christianity and how to answer them confidently](#). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013.

Apologetics Canada. [Think For a Minute. What is the Meaning of Life?](#) www.youtube.com March 25, 2013

Does God Exist?

Detective Work

Do you enjoy a good mystery? Often kids do! Lately our family has been enjoying the adventures of the Hardy Boy brothers as they follow clues to solve a mystery, asking good questions along the way. Children are naturally curious and come up with great questions. One that we may encounter is “How do we know that God exists?”

As true with any question raised by our children, answering with the most integrity comes when we speak out of our own heart, experiences and journey. To do this, I must ask myself, “Why do I believe that God exists?” Many parents will feel that ‘I just know’. This ‘knowing’ comes out of experiences, knowledge and information that we have gathered. So we can begin by pointing our children towards those same things.

For some, pinpointing and articulating exactly what it is that draws us to the existence of God may be really difficult. It may be helpful then to become familiar with some of the common types of arguments for the existence of God. In this list, you may identify something that has been significant for you. You may also see something that might be helpful to the unique nature and temperament of your child. Either way, there are resources (some listed at the bottom of this blog) that can help you become more familiar with any given argument.

Lee Strobel, in his book titled *Case for a Creator For Kids*, approaches the question of the Existence of God like detective work. He encourages kids to gather information by looking, thinking and asking and then to put together everything they have learned. He explains that though you might not be able to ‘prove’ your conclusion, you can get enough information to make a very good guess.



Divine Fingerprints

All the arguments for the existence of God are like clues that, put together, form a very strong case for the existence of a powerful, loving God. Timothy Keller refers to these clues as “Divine Fingerprints”. He explains that every argument for God can be rationally avoidable at some point, but cumulatively form a compelling case. Here are some of the most commonly referenced clues:

Design

This argument claims that our experience shows that design indicates a designer. Many examples can be given, which one speaks to you most from your experience?

Cosmology

The study of how the universe was formed. The universe had an origin which scientists call the Big Bang. Kalam’s argument is applied to show that everything that has a beginning has a cause outside itself. Therefore the universe has a cause outside of itself, which is a clue that there is something other than the natural world.

Physics

The study of how things work in the world. The Fine Tuning / Anthropic principle describes how the universe appears to have been created in exactly the right way to let human beings survive. Moreland and Meuhlhoff illustrate using a 'life on Mars' illustration and also use 'number doodling' that shows the improbability of life as we know it happening by chance.

Beauty

Our hearts sense there is something more when we experience beauty, though our rational minds may say that beauty, love and truth are illusions. Keller goes on to say that this heart response is not just a feeling, but an appetite or desire. St. Augustine reasons that these unfulfillable desires are clues to the reality of God.

Morality

Though we may be taught that all moral values are relative to individuals and cultures, we can't live like that. We live under a set of external moral standards and believe in human rights and the inherent dignity of each individual. This is a clue that there is moral code given by a Creator.

There is not one argument or experience that will 'work' for every person, including for our kids. It may be helpful to write down your story as a parent. Note what convinces you that God not only exists but also is looking after you. Share that story with your kids, including lots of illustrations from your life and experience. As we as parents share our story, our children will begin forming their own story.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS

Have you had to solve a mystery lately (such as missing TV Remote?) How did you look, ask, think and decide?

What do you think is the most sensible way to explain how the universe started, and why?

Puzzle Illustration: Solving a big question like this is like putting together a puzzle. No one piece alone tells the story. Which pieces fit together best to create a picture? When we put together all the pieces that point to the existence of God, we get a more reasonable picture. How do you feel about the puzzle?

FAMILY RESOURCES

Lee Strobel. [Case for a Creator for Kids](#). Zonderkidz, 2010.

Parents and older kids may also enjoy the Case for A Creator DVD by Lee Strobel.

YouTube "Think for a Minute, Does God Exist?" by Apologetics Canada

J.P. Moreland & Tim Muehlhoff. [The God Conversation Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith](#). Intervarsity Press, 2007

William Lane Craig. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/kalam> (Video explaining the Kalam, Cosmological argument)

Reasons To Believe. www.reasons.org A website that focuses on the relationship between science and faith.

Timothy Keller. [The Reason for God Belief in an Age of Skepticism](#). Dutton, 2008.

Do All Religions Lead to God?

The Mountain

Happy Holidays! This seems to be a popular seasonal greeting this year! In fact, each year it feels like I see fewer signs that say 'Merry Christmas'. Though we may have different perspectives on the motivation or impact of these changes, I believe we would all agree that the 'holiday' greetings reflect our pluralistic culture. We benefit from the richness of diversity that pluralism brings and we also struggle as claims to truth are seen as narrow-minded and, sometimes, even as dangerous.

Our children are not immune to this culture we live in. They are taught a new type of tolerance by their peers, teachers and the media. Today tolerance no longer means accepting people of different cultures and faiths. Tolerance now means we should celebrate other faiths without claiming ours to be exclusively true. To our children's ears, a claim that Christianity is the only way to God may sound intolerant and be difficult to accept. We may need to wrestle with the question of whether all religions are equally valid paths to God with our children. We need to help them live confidently with a Christian worldview today and equip them to respond with sensitivity.

Illustrations are really helpful in beginning a discussion, especially on this topic. For example to illustrate the commonly held perception that all religions lead to God, ask your child to imagine a mountain with many different paths leading to the top, some paths winding and others more direct. Each path represents a different religion and the top, the perceived common goal of finding God. Our children may relate to this analogy as it acknowledges the sincerity of each path and the diversity of the world's religions. To point out where this illustration and commonly held perception break down, Moreland and Muehloff, [in *The God Conversation*], suggest asking,



"Who waits for you at the top of the mountain?" Comparing the answer to this question from different religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity will begin to open up the idea that these world religions are really quite different. For example, a Buddhist would say there is no one at the top and a Hindu would say there are thousands of gods and goddesses. A Muslim would say only one God (Allah) is at the top, a Jew would claim YHWH, the God of Abraham is there and a Christian, one God within whom are three persons.

The Maze

Moreland and Muehloff propose a better illustration of the world's religions to be that of a maze. When entering the maze, you immediately face a choice – which path you will take as you try to reach the goal of getting to the centre, which represents finding God. Some paths will walk in parallel for a while, signifying similarities between religions, and some will lead to dead ends. The challenge is to find the one path that leads you to the final destination, the centre. The maze illustration can lead to discussion about your or a child's personal decision of faith and what would cause him or her to choose one path over another. It may also spark interest in what types of 'dead ends', such as contradictions or illogical teachings,

are found in different religions.

This fall I attempted to do a corn maze with our two boys. We did well at first, but soon we were deep in the middle and kept seeing the same sign post over and over again. As it began to get dark, I got pretty nervous as I realized we were really lost and I didn't know how to get to the exit, or even back to the beginning! A miracle happened as we finally stumbled upon a bridge where a person sat who could see above the maze and directed us out. Like the person on the bridge, God sees the entire maze. He came to earth at Christmas to show us the way to God. The maze illustration helps us to talk about how Jesus is uniquely qualified out of all the world's religious leaders to show us the right path to the centre - God. This includes his unique claim to divinity, ability to forgive sins, performing of miracles and his resurrection from the dead.

Begin With What We Know

Before delving deeply into the theological and philosophical differences in world religions with our children, I am reminded of the encouragement to search for 'The Question Behind the Question'. By asking what has led a child to ask a question about different faiths, or what they already know about them, we will be able to respond better to their need. In this case, a question about whether all religions lead to God may be coming from a concern for what will happen to their friends or those around the world who don't believe in Jesus. When encountering tough questions like this, Moreland encourages us to "begin with what we know and move to what is less clear." We can teach our children what we know from Scripture, for example God's love and desire for all to be saved, and to trust in God for what we do not understand.

There's much room for growth for us as parents in all of this. It may be a stretching experience to discuss other religious beliefs or share how we came to choose one path in the maze of different beliefs. Remember, we don't need to be an expert in any of these things. We can journey alongside our children, share, ask questions and learn together, as we trust God to be at work to reveal His truth in their hearts and lives.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS

The Hindu Parable of the Elephant is a very popular illustration today that people use when discussing whether all religions lead to God. Ask your children whether they have heard of this yet and discuss their thoughts. Andy Steiger explains the parable and the critical assumption it contains in his article titled "Do all religions lead to God?"

<http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2012/09/07/do-all-religions-lead-to-god-2/>

Some people say that religious beliefs are like a big mountain where God lives on top. At the base of the mountain are individuals who are trying to get to the top. Each may choose a different path but all paths lead to the top. What do you think about that? What seems right or wrong to you?

FAMILY RESOURCES

J.P. Moreland & Tim Muehlhoff. The God Conversation Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith. Intervarsity Press, 2007
Apologetics Canada. "Think for a Minute, Do All Religions Lead to God?" www.youtube.com
March 12, 2013.

Andy Steiger. "Do all Religions Lead to God?" <http://www.apologeticscanada.com/2012/09/07/do-all-religions-lead-to-god-2/>. Sept. 7, 2012.

McFarland, Alex. The 21 toughest questions your kids will ask about Christianity and how to answer them confidently. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013.

Strobel, Lee. Case for Faith For Kids. Zonderkidz, 2010.

Why is There Evil and Suffering?

It would be a lot easier to sidestep this question than to try to answer it. Theologian Albert Mohler defines the question of evil as the “greatest theological challenge we face.” So perhaps our intimidation is somewhat justified. However, as parents, we must recognize the potential impact that questions regarding evil and suffering can have on the foundation of our children’s faith in either the existence and/or the goodness of God.

I believe the topic of evil in the context of parenting looks a little different than it might elsewhere, for example in an academic debate. As parents, we need to be sensitive to how and why the question is being raised. For example, many ‘why’ questions may be encountered at a very sensitive and vulnerable time in the child’s life, such as when a family member has passed away or a child is experiencing a serious illness. Times like these may require more hugs, love and reassurances of faith in who God is rather than complicated, philosophical explanations.

Regardless of circumstance, it is important to determine the motivation behind a child’s questions of why evil and suffering exist in order to respond appropriately. A child may be asking these questions on an emotional or intellectual level. The first thing we need to do is to listen. As Alex McFarland encourages, “One of the most effective ways to find *the question behind the question* is to begin by saying, ‘That’s a great question. What do you think?’ When you ask that question you should remain quiet and allow your child to articulate what he or she is thinking while you listen closely.” He suggests we observe body language and other nonverbal cues, restate our understanding of the question and possibly ask further questions such as “What led you to ask about this?” These steps help to put us in a much better position to give an appropriate and helpful answer.



An Apparent Dilemma

As we understand the question behind the question, we will see there are many different aspects to the question of evil. The resources at the bottom of this blog will help equip parents to respond to many of them. In this article, I would like to focus on the very popular apparent dilemma: *If God is good, wise and all-powerful, then why doesn’t He remove (or at least restrain) the evil in this world?*

Timothy Keller discusses how for many this dilemma either calls into question the existence of God or leads a person to determine that they can’t personally trust or believe in such a God. Apologists who address this dilemma point out that it is actually a strong argument for the existence of God. Here’s a chance to teach an introductory logic lesson to our children. Ask them to look at the dilemma and see if they can find the assumption the person is making. Hint: In this dilemma, the person is actually assuming that there is a ‘good’ and an ‘evil’. This leads to the question “What defines good and evil?” Without God, there are no moral absolutes, yet those who pose this dilemma are expressing that things aren’t as they should be. So instead of being an argument against God, it turns out to be an argument for him. If there really is good

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and evil, then there must be something or Someone that serves as the standard.

“So when your children come to you with questions about pain and suffering, give them praise for understanding and acknowledging that there is a standard, a measuring stick for good versus evil. Reinforce that their desire for a world without evil and suffering, a world that is filled with beauty and the absence of pain, comes from and is shared by the God who created everything to be “very good.”
(McFarland)

Answering With Hope

Finally, we can address the question of evil and suffering with hope. Through God’s Word, we know that both evil and suffering are only temporary. We live in a fallen world, inhabited by sinful people but we will one day live with Jesus eternally in paradise where there will be no mourning, crying or pain (Rev 21). God has a plan to rid the world of all evil. At the perfect time, he will create the perfect New World as described in the book of Revelation. And lastly, though we might not know why God allows evil and suffering, we know what the answer isn’t. It can’t be because He doesn’t love us or doesn’t care about our situation. God cares so much that He was willing to take our suffering on himself when Jesus died on the cross.

There are many other questions that our children can ask on this topic and, fortunately, many resources to help. If a difficult question comes your way, don’t be afraid to respond with ‘I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you in a few days’ and then go seek out an answer. We want to demonstrate that our faith can stand up to tough questions and build confidence that answers can be found.

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS

What kinds of ‘unfair’ things have you noticed at school or in the neighbourhood? Why do you think some people do wrong things?

The Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-45). The story of Joseph can be used as an illustration of God using suffering for good. “We can see good reasons for at least some of the tragedy and pain that occurs in life. Why couldn’t it be possible that, from God’s vantage point, there are good reasons for all of them?” (Keller)

The Parable of the Weeds (Matt 13:24-30). This parable can be used in response to “Why doesn’t God wipe out all the wicked people?”

FAMILY RESOURCES

McFarland, Alex. [The 21 toughest questions your kids will ask about Christianity and how to answer them confidently](#). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013.

Strobel, Lee. [Case for Faith For Kids](#). Zonderkidz, 2010.

Apologetics Canada. “Think for a Minute, What is Evil?” www.youtube.com March 5, 2013.

Timothy Keller. [The Reason for God Belief in an Age of Skepticism](#). Dutton, 2008.

J. Warner Wallace. [Why Would a Good God Allow Pain and Suffering?](#) www.str.org August 9, 2013.

Ravi Zacharias. [How Can a Good God Allow Evil?](#) www.youtube.com May 27, 2010.

William Lane Craig. The Problem of Evil. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-evil>

Who Is Jesus?

The Ultimate Question

Recently, I read a blog that listed “65 Apologetics Questions that Every Christian Parent Needs to Learn to Answer”. Wow – that’s a long list! I agree that there are multitudes of questions and challenges to faith that our children will encounter. How do we even begin addressing these and where do we stop? I believe the answer is to focus on core questions, such as the five questions in the Thinking Series by Apologetics Canada (listed below). Knowing how to answer each of these core questions will better prepare us to face the numerous other challenges that may come. I also believe that these core questions lead to one ultimate question, that once answered, will guide our children’s lives in answering all others: **“Who is Jesus?”**

*“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13 NIV) Imagine Jesus asking that question today and the responses he would receive! Though there are many different ideas about who Jesus is, I like how C.S. Lewis famously narrows it down to 3 options: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord. In his book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis argues that Christ’s claims about his own divinity were so bold that He cannot possibly be construed as a great moral teacher and nothing more. Either his claims were false, making Him a horrible liar or a complete lunatic, or they were true, making Him God Incarnate and worthy of Lordship. As parents, we can walk through Christ’s claims about Himself and these three options with our children and discuss their thoughts and conclusions. Lee Strobel’s ‘Case for Christ for Kids’ is a good resource for walking through this together.*



Building Confident Faith

Ultimately, our consideration of who Jesus is must lead to investigating the claim of the resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead, then He is God and we must believe all He taught. The Apostle Paul writes that our faith is useless if Christ is not raised (1 Cor 15:12-19). I like how Sean McDowell defines faith as ‘trusting in what you have good reason to believe is true.’

We build confident faith in our children by demonstrating that we have good reasons to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

I encourage us as parents to share with our kids why we believe Jesus rose from the dead and how we have come to believe He is Lord. We may share from personal experience or historical evidence or both. Our testimony will be powerful in our children’s lives.

In our testimony, we have the opportunity to model the importance of seeking out and finding good reasons to believe in Christ. We live in an awesome time with access to many excellent apologists who can walk us through compelling evidence for the resurrection. I will provide some suggested resources below that can help us articulate why we believe in the historical resurrection of Jesus.

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Some of these resources explain a strategy called ‘minimal facts’ which is focussed on creating a strong case for the reliability of the resurrection while only using those facts that are nearly unanimously agreed upon by all historians, even those that are skeptical or hostile to Christianity. This strategy can be particularly valuable in a culture that is largely skeptical of the Bible, as it makes a compelling case for the resurrection outside of the gospel accounts. I also value how Timothy Keller challenges the skeptic to answer historical questions regarding the rapid emergence of Christianity and willingness of the disciples to die for what they believed.

May God bless you and your family as you seek truth and the answer to this important question:

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”
(Matthew 16:15 NIV)

FAMILY DISCUSSION STARTERS

When you hear different stories, how do you decide who is telling the truth? What kinds of things do you consider? [Strobel]

If age-appropriate, view a short video clip on YouTube such as ‘Who Is Jesus?’ by BlueFish TV to hear different people’s ideas about Jesus. Have you heard some of these ideas before? How do you feel about these ideas? This is an opportunity to expose our kids in a safe environment to what the culture and society are saying, rather than waiting for the culture to do it for you.

What story in history do you like to read about? How would you investigate to find out if the story really happened?

According to early church historians, all of Jesus’ disciples were killed for what they believed and preached except John. Imagine you were one of the first disciples. Would you have died for something you didn’t believe in or that you knew wasn’t true? What does history tell you about what the disciples believed? [Strobel]

Why do you think the resurrection is so important to Christians? What hope did they hold to in the first century that we can continue to hold to today?

FAMILY RESOURCES

McFarland, Alex. [The 21 toughest questions your kids will ask about Christianity and how to answer them confidently.](#) Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013.

Strobel, Lee. [Case for Faith For Kids.](#) Zonderkidz, 2010.

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