

IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY ISN'T HE MORE
OBVIOUS?



Seeking Answers to the Hiddenness of God

Dan Paterson Exploring...

Why is God's hiddenness a problem? What does the Bible say about God hiding? Does God's hiddenness mean that God isn't there or that He doesn't care? What do I do in a dark night of the soul?

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WHY AM I READING THIS?

People the world over struggle to believe in a God they cannot see. Our secular age has trained us to think that the only things to be believed are things objectively proven by undeniable evidence. But for many people, both those who believe in God and those who do not, God's existence doesn't always seem to fit into this category. It seems the way God has chosen to reveal Himself and interact with the world is less obvious than we might want, if He does indeed exist. And the question is, *why*? Does it make sense that God can be hidden? Those questions are the point of this book. So if you're reading this, whether as a secular person or a believer in God, my hope is that something in the Christian story may speak to the question you have around God's hiddenness in a way that makes you open to seeking Him. For each short chapter there are some discussion questions for you to process with helpful conversation partners, and if you want to dive deeper, there is some recommended reading at the end.

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WHY IS GOD'S HIDDENNESS A PROBLEM?

The problem of divine hiddenness is essentially a problem of expectations. *Is God as real to you as you think he should be?* If you've answered *no* to that question, you're in good company. People the world over struggle to believe in a God they cannot see, or in a God who remains obscured by disappointments and unanswered prayers. It seems having a relationship with an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God isn't always what we imagined, because for those who believe in God, the disorienting experience of God's felt absence leads to all kinds of hard questions: *Why don't I feel my faith anymore? Why do I feel so alone if God is with me? Why hasn't my life turned out how I hoped? Why does it feel like my prayers are posted to a non-existent address?*

The Bible is littered with experiences of what we might poetically describe as the dark night of the soul, where people who love God often feel lost in the shadows of God's hiddenness. Take King David. Here is a man who knows intimately the grief of unanswered prayers after losing many of his children to sickness and sedition. And if you read the lyrics of this songwriter, you get a window into the kind of confusion that plagues him. Psalm 10 opens with this heart cry: *"Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"* And this is not an isolated incident. Jeremiah. Job. Jonah. All of them experience God's distance. Heaven's silence. Divine disappointments. The prophet Isaiah even makes this observation: *"Truly you are a God who hides Himself"* (Isaiah 45:15). What they all articulate in their own raw way is what theologians refer to as *Deus Absconditus*. That the God of the Bible seems to hide, which for those who believe in Him leads to all kinds of difficult questions, and often opens up huge rifts of doubt about God's goodness.

For those who don't believe in God, however, God's hiddenness raises a different problem. They argue that the kind of evidence we're given for God simply isn't good enough. If God really wanted us to know Him, He could do a better job of making himself known. If He really wanted us to believe in Him, He could make his existence more believable. Could not an omnipotent God spell His name in the stars for all to see? Could He not stamp "Made by God" on every atom? Or why wouldn't God just appear to us all personally?

This is the problem of God's hiddenness for many people of faith and none. They believe God's hiddenness means He doesn't care or that He isn't there.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

What expectations have you had that God seems to have failed?

Where have you experienced God's hiddenness? How has it affected you?

Which are you more tempted to believe: God isn't there or He doesn't care?

SOME REASONS WHY A HIDDEN GOD IS THERE

For those who are inclined to believe that God isn't there, you are not alone. One of the figurehead atheists of the 20th century was a British intellectual by the name of Bertrand Russell. In one interview with the journalist Leo Rosten, Bertrand Russell was asked, "*What if you're wrong about atheism? What will you say to God on judgment day?*" Russell's answer was quintessentially British: "*Sir, why did you not give me better evidence?*"¹

Perhaps you resonate with Russell's response. The evidence you have for God's existence you simply don't find compelling. But I do wonder whether, if Russell was aware of the case for God as it now stands in the 21st century, whether he wouldn't himself change his mind. Because even in the 50 years since this interview took place, the academic landscape has changed significantly.

Take Russell's own field with the hallowed halls of philosophers. A century ago Nietzsche announced that God is dead in philosophy. Secular universities around the world were filled with naturalistic philosophers, and the case for God was thought to be abandoned. But in a relatively recent paper, the award winning atheist philosopher, Quentin Smith, bemoans the revolution in analytic philosophy sparked by Christians like Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. Since the late 1960's he traces the explosion of theistic philosophers in philosophy departments around the world, and admits their rigour of argumentation, as they revive old arguments and develop new ones, is the reason the case for God is on the rise. He concludes that God is not dead in academia, but is alive and well in the academic stronghold of philosophy.²

Or take the realm of scientific discovery. A century ago it was popularly believed that our universe was eternal. Bertrand Russell considered it a brute fact. And one reason why a cosmic beginning was so strongly resisted by secular intellectuals was because to admit that the universe had an absolute beginning allowed a divine foot in the door. It sounds too much like the claim of the ancient Hebrews, who went against every other major religious account, when they wrote, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth" (Genesis 1:1). But subsequent predictions, models and discoveries, from Einstein to Lemaitre to Hubble, led to a scientific revolution around the middle of the last century. A new consensus began to emerge, arguing that our universe came into existence out of nothing at a finite point in the past. And this effect of the virgin birth of our universe, this contingency, requires an explanation. So too did the subsequent discovery of the highly improbable and exquisite fine-

¹ Leo Rosten, "Bertrand Russell and God: A Memoir," *The Saturday Review* (Feb 23, 1974), 26.

² Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4/2 (2001), 3-4.

tuning of the original conditions of our universe to allow for intelligent life. This data is what leads many agnostic and atheistic scientists to at least tip the hat and admit that the universe "appears" designed, or that our existence may even be as a complex simulation. That we really are in the matrix, so to speak.

Or take what we know of our own nature through the social sciences. Study after study shows a strong correlation between religious devotion and wellbeing, especially in places where Christianity is culturally dominant. In discussing this data on Sam Harris' podcast, the atheist economist, philosopher, and physicist, Robin Hanson, said, "*Religious people are just better off on pretty much all our standard metrics. They live longer, they earn more, their marriages stay longer, they have less crime. They're healthier. Everything goes better for religious people on average. That's a real puzzle if you think they're just all making a big mistake.*"³ The Christian story, Christian community, just fits the contours of our souliness in a way that leads to human flourishing.

Or finally, take the gospels in the New Testament. A century ago, the German school of liberal theology owned the New Testament field, and it was popularly believed that the gospel sources were largely legendary material, and not reliable. That thesis is now significantly weaker. Why? Because a mountain of new data from the relevant fields supports the eyewitness status of much of the testimony on the gospels. The people who told these stories had to have been there to know the fleshy details that permeate the accounts. And these witnesses appear to be of sound mind and honest character, and had a lot to lose by every meaningful measure if they falsely reported what they saw. Their willingness to suffer for their testimony, with no historical hint of anyone recanting, at the very least substantiates their genuine belief about what they saw. And the alternative hypotheses to explain things like the resurrection of Jesus just can't account for all of the reliably deduced historical facts.

Could it actually be that despite our expectations as to how God *should* reveal Himself, that in some way, He has made Himself obvious? For it seems to me that the invisible God has become visible in Jesus of Nazareth, and has borne witness to His existence in the heavens, humanity, and history.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Which of these evidences for God's existence do you find most/least compelling? Why?

How much research have you done into the case for God and Christianity?
What sources have you explored?

³ <https://samharris.org/podcasts/119-hidden-motives/> (dated March 12, 2018)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GOD HIDING?

To explore this topic around why God hides we need to think for a moment about what we mean when we say God is hidden. From beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a story of God's presence and absence. But God is often present and absent in different senses of the word. And in his helpful book on this subject, *When God Isn't There*, David Bowden distinguishes between four types of God's presence.⁴

1) General Presence. God's omnipresence permeates all creation so there is nowhere God is not (Jeremiah 23:24; Psalm 139:7-10; Proverbs 15:3).

2) Visible Presence. God specially reveals Himself to people through their physical senses (Exodus 34:4-7; Numbers 14:14; Isaiah 6:1-8; Acts 9:3-6).

3) Relational Presence. God comes to dwell by the Holy Spirit in those who believe in Jesus (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:16).

4) Actual Presence. God's unmediated presence where people are exposed to God's glory (Exodus 33:18-20; John 1:18; 1 Corinthians 13:12).

What I hope you'll see as we walk through the Bible is that the kind of God's presence we desire is not the kind of God's presence we require. That God's hiddenness isn't a sign that He doesn't love us. The opposite is true. God hides precisely *because* He loves us. God's presence and God's absence are intentional acts of a God who is so big and so good that only He knows when and how we need to experience His presence. So in search of answers as to why God hides, let's explore just three biblical scenes:

Garden of Eden in Genesis.

Gethsemane and Golgotha in the Gospels.

Garden City in Revelation.



GARDEN OF EDEN

The Bible begins with a powerful friendship between God and humans. We were *created for* good. Just like those who say they experience God in nature, our first parents Adam and Eve were said to have walked with God in Eden's garden. We were made *for* God's presence. For intimacy. To talk with God face to face. And this shaped the very contours of our soul.

⁴ David Bowden, *When God Isn't There* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 32.

But something happened to fracture this picture of friendship. The biblical authors use the word *sin* or *evil*. And this flows from the twisting of our freedom, where rather than using it to treasure God and trust His moral boundaries to serve our good, instead we traded our friendship with God for an illicit pleasure. Genesis 3 describes this moment of *The Fall*. Where human beings fell from their high calling as God's image bearers and crashed into the moral reality of God's universe, whereby we became broken. And where once humans could be completely open before God and each other without feeling shame, now the Christian story describes that we were the first to hide behind fig leaves and ferns.



Humanity started hiding long before God ever felt hidden.

And in reaction to human sin, God absconds. Where once He walked with us in the cool of the evening, now no more. And the profound feeling we all have that something has been lost is testament to the reality of the Bible's story. You don't feel the loss of something you never had, or something for which you were never innately designed.

But why did God abscond? Why did God hide? And the complex answer according to the Bible is twofold: punishment and protection. Separation from God's light and life and love is part of sin's penalty. And it's a penalty that ultimately leads to death. But God hiding is as much an act of protection, mercy, and hope, as it is one of punishment. Why?

Think of God's holiness like the sun. A ball of raw energy. Anything that isn't already *like* the sun and tries to approach is destroyed. Compounds like steel or wood are melted and consumed. Which is precisely why the Bible speaks of God as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), or as living in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16); where no one can look upon God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). No one can, in their sinful state, stand in God's actual presence without being killed by the raw power of His holiness.

Heaven would be as Hell for anyone who stands before God without first becoming a New Creation.

And so God absconds. The earth experiences the absence of His *actual* presence. And He did this, God hides, to make it possible for us to come close to Him again. The Apostle Peter tells us that God staves off His return in glory

until such a time as all those who will come to believe in Him stand forgiven and changed (2 Peter 3:9). And so from Genesis alone we get something of a window into our experience of God's absence or divine hiddenness.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Does the concept of different kinds of God's presence help?

Have you ever experienced the desire for God's actual presence like in Eden?

What do you think about the Bible's description of us hiding from God?

Does the idea of God's holiness change how you think about hiddenness?



GETHSEMANE & GOLGOTHA

For centuries God had kept humanity at arms' length, with hotspots of His presence reserved for mountain tops and temples. Then Jesus came. He was the promise of God's actual presence once again being with us, but he came veiled. And even Jesus was subject to dark nights of the soul.

In Gethsemane's garden, Jesus prayed to avoid the agony of the cross. He was overcome with the terrifying weight of what He was about to experience—as so many of us so often feel in life—yet His prayer seemed to bounce off the sky. Instead of being delivered from excruciating death, Jesus endured divine distance at His most painful moment. On the cross He cries out: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mark 15:34).

Think about that for a moment. God knows what it is to question God.

Here we see again that divine silence has nothing to do with God not *loving* us. Rather the opposite is true. God the Father loves Jesus the Son in a way we cannot comprehend, and yet He seemingly abandons Him from our earthly perspective. Until Easter Sunday. Where what looks like defeat, what looks like things not playing out as they should, is reversed at the resurrection. And from there we learn that things are unfolding precisely as God has planned, giving us a glimpse into why God remained silent and hidden.

God hides to achieve some greater good through the distance and through the darkness.

Through Jesus' death, God would purchase atonement for whosoever believes. Through Jesus' resurrection, God would offer eternal life to whosoever believes.

God uses a dark night of the soul to bring about a brighter dawn.

Furthermore, through Gethsemane's garden and Golgotha, we learn that we are not alone in our sufferings. We follow a good and true and chief shepherd who has Himself gone through a dark night of the soul; through the very valley of death. He knows our confusion. He knows what it is to sense God's distance. And because He is the perfect display of God's love and goodness, we can trust Him when we can't see clearly God's reasons for ourselves.

Moreover, because of Jesus' death, we can be filled with God's *relational* presence. No more tents or temples. No more walls. God can come to dwell *within us* now by the Holy Spirit. We can become a new creation, and be like little wifi hotspots of Heaven on Earth. But even this doesn't chase away all the shadows of Genesis 3. God is still partially hidden. As one biblical author puts it, we still only see through a glass dimly, longing to see God face to face.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

How does God becoming obvious in Jesus speak to your questions?

Have you ever thought about Jesus experiencing God's hiddenness?

Would you agree/disagree that God is big enough to have "greater good" reasons for leaving prayers seemingly unanswered or remaining hidden?

Have you ever experienced God's relational presence?



GARDEN CITY

The final few chapters of the Bible describe Jesus' return and the beginning of forever. And the incredible scene is pictured as taking place in two locations: a divine court room and a celestial chapel. As a final judgment and as a wedding.

The question: *which will define you?*

You see at the judgment, all those who hold onto their fig leaves and ferns, all those who cling to their evil rather than to Jesus, are exiled from God's new heavens and new earth. The headline is that since God is finally coming close again, making all things new in his wake, the glory of his *actual* presence will do away with anything sinful.

The end of God's hiddenness spells the end of evil.

But for those who have stepped into the light and come clean with their evil, for Christians who have been forgiven and made a new creation through Jesus, God's coming heralds a great celebration. The once glorious marriage between a man and a woman becomes now the obsolete trailer for the new feature film: the eternal marriage of Jesus to the Church. And what makes the new heavens and new earth paradise in the Christian story is not merely the abundance of physical pleasures as in other religious traditions. Rather what makes God's future world a paradise is this new intimacy of being face to face with our Creator, and experiencing the divine presence for which we were designed. Here the finite will be flooded by the infinite, so that every atom of our resurrection bodies will be overflowing with God's goodness as a chalice would with the sea. What a remarkable hope for what is to come.

And if the future is Jesus coming back for a bride made ready, then that image helps to describe our current interval. Right now is not face to face, but looking forward. Right now is not the wedding, but the engagement period. And as any engaged couple will know, this period is one marked out by *longing*. Where the closer we draw relationally, the more we desire unmediated presence. Our experience of God's hiddenness is driven by what God is intending to do in this specific period of time.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Do God's evangelistic purposes help make sense of his hiddenness?

Have you ever thought about what it would take for God to get rid of evil?

How does the metaphor of eternal marriage between God and humanity speak to your imagination?

Why might the engagement metaphor be helpful to make sense of God's hiddenness now?

SOME REASONS WHY A HIDDEN GOD DOES CARE

The Bible gives us the 30,000 foot overview of God's presence and absence in the Christian story. And whilst this view doesn't clarify every mystery surrounding God's hiddenness, it does begin to offer perspective. From this vantage point it is up to the theologians and philosophers to extrapolate some plausible reasons why an all powerful and perfectly loving God may not be as real to us as we would want Him to be. What follows are just some of the reasons such a God might have for remaining hidden.

#1 GOD HIDES BECAUSE HUMANITY HID FIRST.

Have you ever considered the possibility that if God doesn't seem real to you, then you may not actually *want Him* to be real? This point may seem counterintuitive considering you are reading this book, but the biblical story hints at the idea of our fig leaves and ferns as a key reason for God's hiddenness. That *we* are hiding from God. That we don't want there to be a God. When Jesus was speaking of God making known the light of His reality to Nicodemus, He spoke about the possibility that people prefer darkness (John 3:19). The Apostle Paul of Tarsus went so far as to say that God's existence is made obvious through God's creation and our conscience, but that we tend to suppress this truth (Romans 1:18-20).

By studying human decision making moral psychologists have discovered that human nature is far more complex than we tend to think. Rather than being primarily driven by our conscious reason, our beliefs tend to be more shaped by our unconscious desires. We all possess deeply motivated reasoning, and various secular thinkers, from Aldous Huxley to Thomas Nagel, have come to realise that the source of their disbelief in God has little to do with a rational investigation of the available evidence, and much to do with their own desire for there not to be a God. Could it be that evil, what the Bible calls sin, has so numbed your spiritual sense and shaped your imagination that you see God as an obstacle to happiness rather than as its source? Perhaps the problem isn't so much with the amount of evidence as it is with our willingness to receive it?

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Could you be hiding metaphorically behind fig leaves and ferns?

How do we deal with the challenge of motivated reasoning when it comes to questions around belief in God and the evidence?

Do you *want* God to exist? Why/why not?

#2 GOD HIDES BECAUSE HE DESIRES MORE THAN MERE BELIEF

What kind of relationship does God want with you? It would be easy to make everyone believe that God exists. But simply believing THAT God exists does nothing to engender the right response that He wants: deep and meaningful relationship. After all, even the demons believe THAT God exists, but it hardens them towards Him; it doesn't soften them. So God has chosen a kind of way of revealing Himself that serves His goal.

Blaise Pascal, the 17th Century scientist and philosopher, says it this way: *“It was not, then, right that He should appear in a manner manifestly divine, and completely capable of convincing all men; but it was also not right that He should come in so hidden a manner that He could not be known by those who should sincerely seek Him. He has willed to make Himself... appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart. He so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him, and not to those who seek Him not.”*⁵

God has no interest proving His existence to people who don't want Him to exist, circumventing their freedom to disbelieve, and hardening them towards His love. In fact, if the principle of epistemic proportionality holds, then that would just result in them facing a greater judgment for having greater knowledge of God's reality and rejecting Him anyway.

But God is interested in making us better lovers. And so, since seeking out the other is a huge part of the disposition of love, God is committed to making us better lovers. Which is why He has ordered the universe as a cosmic game of hide and seek. And God promises that to those who seek with all their heart, that He will be found. He doesn't say how long. Days. Weeks. Years. Decades. But there is something in the seeking itself that God is doing. God is building in us an eternal hunger and a discipline of seeking so that we will never fall into the relational trap of selfishly taking God, or any person, for granted.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

What do you think about Blaise Pascal's quote?

Do you know of anyone who is hardened towards God, even if they think that He exists??

How might God's chosen manner of revealing Himself serve His relational goals? Is there a parallel in human relationships of making someone seek?

⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London, Penguin: 1995), 430.

#3 GOD HIDES BECAUSE HE WANTS YOU TO BECOME A HEAVENLY RATHER THAN A HELLISH BEING

Have you ever considered the possibility that God's hiddenness is intentional to help you become the kind of person He wants you to become? Whilst this may sound like a convenient copout, consider what would happen if God were to act like Jim Carrey in the film *Bruce Almighty* where he just answered "Yes to All" the prayers or immediate desires of everyone on the planet. Instantly we recognise that this wouldn't actually be *good* for everyone, in the same way allowing my 4 year old son to set the menu for the day's meals isn't going to be *good* for him. So what if the kind of God's presence we get is the kind of God's presence we most *require*, even if it is not the kind of God's presence we most desire? Because God isn't committed to our momentary happiness. However He is committed to making us ready to enjoy His presence as our eternal happiness, and to getting us ready to fulfil our eternal vocation.

What is your eternal vocation, you might ask? According to the Christian story you are destined to steward all of creation as gardeners and governors of God's new Heavens and Earth. We are to rule and reign with Jesus. And if we pause to consider what makes for a great statesperson or a worthy ruler, surely it has to do with the crafting of certain virtues, and the acquiring of certain skills, and the mastering of certain fields of knowledge. In short, Christians are called to become *like* Jesus, as far as finite beings can reflect infinite love, wisdom, discipline, and knowledge. That process is what God is committed to in this so called engagement period. God is committed to making your eternal self reality.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, said that life must be interpreted backwards in order to be lived forwards.⁶ Knowing God's endgame, then, changes the calculus for how we think about God's hiddenness. All of a sudden, like the New Testament teaching on trials being a furnace that can serve to refine us (1 Peter 1:6), the dark nights of the soul (unanswered prayers, and divine silence) could all be part of my training. Certainly the gift of retrospect offers at least some windows into how hard things in our past can be coopted towards good ends. But that it is retrospect and not foresight means in any moment where we wish God were more obvious, or acted differently, that we are not in a position to know what is best for us.

If I am honest, the problem with me, as I suspect is true of others, is not that I want too much for myself, but too little. As C.S. Lewis described in his famed *Weight of Glory* sermon, my appetites aren't big enough. I am far too easily pleased. Losing sight of God's vision, I quickly succumb to the temptation to trade the enduring value of eternal glory for a cheap earthly substitute. But God loves us more than we love ourselves, and so is committed to the long game.

⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, Vol 4 (1843), 164.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

How does God's endgame shape your perspective on why God might choose to remain hidden or silent at times in your life?

Can you remember any times where you wanted God to act in a certain way, but now with retrospect can see why He chose to remain silent?

What is the hardest part of this section for you to accept personally?

#4 GOD HIDES FOR GOOD REASONS THAT WE JUST DON'T KNOW

Just because you don't know why God hides doesn't mean that there are no good reasons for a loving God to hide. As with almost all of the deepest questions asked of God in the Bible, it comes down to a question of trust.

There is no question that if God exists then there is a big difference between Him as Creator and us as His creation. We are but a shadow of his infinitude, ourselves fallen and finite. Which means that even though we think we know what a good God would or should do, if we have God's perspective and could look through the corridors of time, again the calculus could shift. We simply aren't in a position to know whether God has good reasons for hiding. This is what philosophers call sceptical theism.

The purpose of looking at what the Bible says about God's hiddenness and exploring some plausible reasons a loving God could have for hiding is to see whether you know enough to be able to trust God for what you don't know. Trust should never be asked of us in a vacuum. Which is why the story of Jesus' own experience of divine hiddenness is such a powerful muse. The God in whom I believe is not immune to the confusion of a dark night of the soul, but has passed through it into an eternal dawn. His death and resurrection is what proves to me the goodness of God and His love for me, along with His power to turn what looks like a defeat into something else entirely. The cross is why I trust that a hidden God does care.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

How do you respond to the idea that God could have reasons for being hidden that you are simply unaware of?

Are you inclined to be able to trust God even when you can't right now make sense of His hiddenness? Why/why not?

Does God's willingness to experience a dark night of the soul help you trust?

WHAT CAN I DO IN A DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL?

Beyond the theological and philosophical dimensions of God's hiddenness, the Bible is far more interested in the personal and pastoral dimension of helping you navigate your experience of dark nights of the soul. There is no prescriptive command as to how you should feel. If anything the lament poems and songs in the Bible give validation and dignity to a wide range of our reactions. But what counsel might the Bible offer in how to make it through these disorienting experiences of God's hiddenness, disappointment, and unanswered prayer?

What I think God invites us to do is best captured in Psalm 22. Here King David, a flawed man well acquainted with divine silence, pens a song that is quoted by Jesus as He hung on the cross at Calvary. And the song moves us through three major reactions:

Protest. God invites us to express our protest, not bury it. When we crash up against disappointment or experience the absence of God's presence; when we feel abandoned; we are welcome to express the full gamut of our raw emotion. God's people are everywhere to lament the evil and the brokenness in the world. Doubts are never asked to be pushed down, but rather let out. Those who give up protesting this world have made themselves at home in a fallen creation.

Perspective. Over the course of this Psalm David keeps jumping back and forward between what he is experiencing now as a sense of God's absence, and then the past where God's people have been witness to amazing acts of God in history. Like with the whole of the Christian story, he zooms out to get perspective. He anchors his beliefs about God's character to what was revealed about Him in the light of Scripture, not on the basis of the darkness of this present moment. With this perspective he has confidence that God will do in the future precisely what is for our ultimate good and for God's glory.

Praise. The best way to remedy doubts of the heart is to turn from worry to worship. Where we cannot answer the why questions now, we need to be reminded of the bigness and goodness of the God who can. As a discipline praise helps us to take the focus off the bigness of our problem and instead to reflect and remind ourselves of the one who stands sovereign over all.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

What has been your reaction in the past when you have come up against disappointments with God or a sense of God's hiddenness?

What do you make of David's response in Psalm 22? Can focusing on God's character give you confidence that He will do right in the end?

PSALM 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honour him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

THE BIGNESS OF GOD

Daddy took me to the clinic,
I was eighteen young months old.
"He'll need two shots, one in each arm."
Is what my Daddy was told.

Since I was such a little guy,
Daddy held me on his lap;
But while I looked in my Daddy's eyes,
I felt a painful stab.

I winced in pain, eyes filled with tears;
I was frightened, shocked, dismayed.
Why'd he let them inflict that pain?
I felt confused, betrayed.

Before today I knew his love,
His protection from all fears.
But he wiped my eyes, and it was then,
That I saw my Daddy's tears.

Did I know my Daddy loved me?
Though he never intervened?
I didn't quite understand it,
But into his chest I leaned.

In his strong arms I felt comfort;
The tears I cried now dry.
I still love and trust my Daddy,
Despite the question, "Why?"

Daddy softly whispered in my ear,
As my head began to nod:
"When it seems there are no answers,
Lean into an all-wise God."

Will you lean into God's bigness,
In the midst of suffering and pain?
Do you believe He has your good at heart,
And brings sunshine as well as rain?

RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCE LIST

PODCASTS ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

- 1) Dan Paterson @ Liberti Church (<https://subspla.sh/vqc6z5b>)
- 2) Vince & Jo Vitale @ RZIM Ask Away Podcast (<https://www.rzim.org/listen/ask-away/ask-away-classic-are-you-there-god-are-you-good-god>)
- 3) Christian & Atheist @ Unbelievable Podcast (<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Why-is-God-hidden-Justin-Schieber-and-Blake-Giunta>)

BLOGS ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

- 1) Belief Map (<https://beliefmap.org/god-exists/divine-hiddenness>)
- 2) Popular Level (<https://strangenotions.com/where-is-god-the-problem-of-divine-hiddenness/>)

POPULAR LEVEL BOOKS ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

When God Isn't There by David Bowden

Where is God when it Hurts by Phillip Yancey

ACADEMIC LEVEL BOOKS ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

The Hiddenness of God by Michael Rea

Providence and the Problem of God by Richard Swinburne

Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief by Adam Green and Eleanor Stump (eds)



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