



## ***Theme: It's Ok to Ask***

### ***"Can the Head and the Heart Go Hand in Hand?"***

#### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

***<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.***

– Psalm 19:1

**Monday, January 8** – Read **Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**. Genesis told two creation stories. Neither was meant to be “scientific” in the way we think of science today. The words we find in the first book of our Bible in many ways drew on the culture and literary traditions of the authors. Chapter 1 needs to be read considering creation accounts from Mesopotamia (the ancient Middle and Near East) more than a thousand years before the time of Jesus. For example, they saw the sky as a dome with waters above and below it. Then in Genesis 7:11, we read that it rained because, “all the springs of the deep sea erupted, and the windows in the skies opened.” Genesis echoed pre-scientific ideas but taught timeless spiritual truths using poetic words that are meant to make the reader feel something about their own identity.




Many ancient Mesopotamian cultures pictured violence between rival “gods,” with earth created from the body of the loser. Genesis 1’s poetic writing (likely used in Hebrew worship at times) was a striking contrast. It’s helpful to remember that while Genesis 1 raises many unanswered questions about how God created, it provides many answers to questions about who did the creating. How did Genesis 1 assert the goodness of Israel’s one God?




In the ancient Near East, many saw the sun, moon, stars, and other parts of nature as gods. Some scholars believe “lights” in Genesis 1:14, 16 was to avoid naming the “moon” and “sun” others worshiped. Genesis said God created nature and ruled over it. We still face tornados, drought, earthquakes, and storms. How can trusting that God made these forces help you deal with fear and count on God’s love being stronger in the end than any natural force?

**Prayer:** *God of creation, Genesis said you were there before anything else existed. You set it all in motion. Thank you for still creating, for being the God of new beginnings and fresh starts in my life, and in this New Year. Amen.*


**Tuesday, January 9** – Read **Genesis 2:4-25**. In Genesis 1:1-2:3, God created humans last. In today's reading God made a human first, then put a garden and animal life around him. Two creation stories—two nearly opposite orders of creation. Neither creation story was meant to be used as a science or history text. They were archetypal stories, told by different people (note the different styles) and/or editors for a spiritual purpose, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both Creation accounts affirm that one good God created everything. Genesis 1 and 2 both point us toward God's goodness in creating the earth, humanity, animals, and the heavens.


 Both creation stories made vital spiritual claims, such as that humans were made in God's image, and that God made certain portions of time holy. Could the scientific method possibly prove or disprove claims like this? Many scientists believe science and faith are not mutually exclusive. What part of creation brings you a sense of sacred wonder? What scientific truth causes you to marvel at its principles?

 Have teachers, parents, friends, or just general voices in our culture ever told you that faith and science cannot co-exist? Have you felt (or do you feel) the need to choose one over the other? Could it be believing the head and heart are incompatible, is due to misunderstanding the function and limits of science, faith, or both?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, give us faith to know that God is the creator of all that is, while at the same time helping us to honor the beauty of science. Thank you for the world you have created for us to enjoy. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 10** – Read **Psalms 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-20**. A basic question is if nature's beauty is more likely to have happened by accident or on purpose. The psalmist and the apostle Paul came down on the side of purpose, God's purpose. Owen Gingerich, Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at Harvard, agreed in his book *God's Universe*, where he wrote, "Rather than believe that the universe is simply meaningless, a macabre joke, I would prefer to accept a universe created with intention and purpose by a loving God...the elements are just right, the environment is fit for life, and slowly life forms have populated the earth."

 The tools of science, going back to Copernicus and Galileo and forward to the Hubble telescope and even more powerful instruments, have expanded and altered the way we understand our universe. For example, we would no longer describe the sun's activity in the way Psalm 19:6 did. Does our increased knowledge of the universe lessen or deepen your appreciation and reverence for the Creator's work?

 What natural places or encounters have most strongly given you a sense of God's wisdom behind the beauty or purpose you observe? Last year we saw a near total solar eclipse, and the year before that a conjunction of planets in the night sky. Do you ever find that even the silent beauty of the heavens "speaks" to you as it did to the psalmist? How does what you see in creation around you strengthen (or challenge) your faith in a Creator?

**Prayer:** *Lord of creation, thank you for the falling snow, the beauty of music, or the awe I feel as a baby's tiny fingers grasp mine. Touch my heart with wonder at the good in this world you made. Amen.*

**Thursday, January 11** – Read **John 20:24-31** and **Hebrews 1:1-3**. The disciple Thomas spent three years with Jesus yet struggled to believe. How could a good God have let evil people crucify Jesus? Surely executed people didn't rise from the dead, did they? His struggle was like the struggle of many human minds and hearts. But if Jesus lived, died and rose again, for which there is actually more credible eyewitness testimony than to William Shakespeare's life, then there is a God.



Paul saw Jesus' resurrection as so central that he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:17-19, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others." The resurrection led the writer of Hebrews to say Jesus was the single greatest revelation of God. What most helps or hinders your faith in the truth of Jesus' resurrection?



In John 14:9, Jesus told Phillip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." To what extent is your picture of God shaped by what you know about Jesus? Why not commit to read from the gospels each day in 2024, to deepen your knowledge of Jesus and sense the inner truth of his story for yourself?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, after you really died on the cross, your divine creativity took the worst we could do, and brought from it the best gift I could ever receive. I thank you and trust you. Amen.*

**Friday, January 12** – Read **Hebrews 11:1-6**. Cosmologists and physicists today wrestle with ideas like "dark energy" and "dark matter"—unseen, largely unexplained forces that nevertheless leave unmistakable signs of their existence. Faith deals with unseen forces such as love, trust and steadfast divine grace, forces that also leave definite signs of their existence in our lives. Faith and science are not enemies, but disciplines that speak to different realms of experience. Both can add a richness and depth to our lives.



No one alive today ever knew Abraham Lincoln or Socrates personally—yet we accept the testimony of those who did. Are you willing to be open to the unseen reality of God—to accept eyewitness testimony about Jesus, the evidence of lives today changed for the good, or the unseen but not unfelt tug in your heart to turn to the God who made you and loves you? How can you value all that science can teach us about our universe without limiting the scope of your knowledge to only that which scientific methods can see?



What are some of the most beautiful sights you've seen, or deepest loving relationships you've had? Could you "prove" their beauty or love to another person? Scholar Leon Morris noted in his commentary on Hebrews, "There are realities for which we have no material evidence, though they are not less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist." What are one or two nonphysical realities that make your life better?

**Prayer:** *Lord God, you gave me a mind that can analyze, but also a heart that can marvel at truths bigger than my analytical powers. Teach me how science and faith, both my head and my heart, can be allies in my search to know and love you. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 13** – Read **1 Corinthians 1:20-31**. In his book, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*, Donald Miller tells the story of when a friend said to him, "There is this part of me that wants to believe... I feel as though I need to believe... But it is all so completely stupid." Believing in something we cannot see or measure empirically can feel "stupid," because human wisdom wouldn't invent a God like the God of the Bible. God in Jesus

many times reversed the values of our broken world. God has revealed himself to us, broken into our ordinary lives in challenging, at times disruptive ways. Like the people of Corinth as Paul preached the unexpected truth of Christ crucified in their city, we have to choose to open our hearts to God's offer of "righteousness, holiness and redemption."



In what ways has the "foolishness of God" changed your world and you for the better? At Summit Church we often tell you that don't have to check your brain at the door; it's okay to ask tough questions, and faith runs deeper than a few pious sayings. What are some of the toughest faith questions you've had to face? In what ways have you seen the "foolishness" that Paul, and followers of Jesus through the centuries, preached about bring about good results in people you care about and in your own life?

**Prayer:** *Awesome, Lord God, surround me with your love and light as I sing you my praises and ask my questions. Show me truths, even some that run deeper than just explanations, trusting that my head and my heart can go hand in hand. Amen.*