

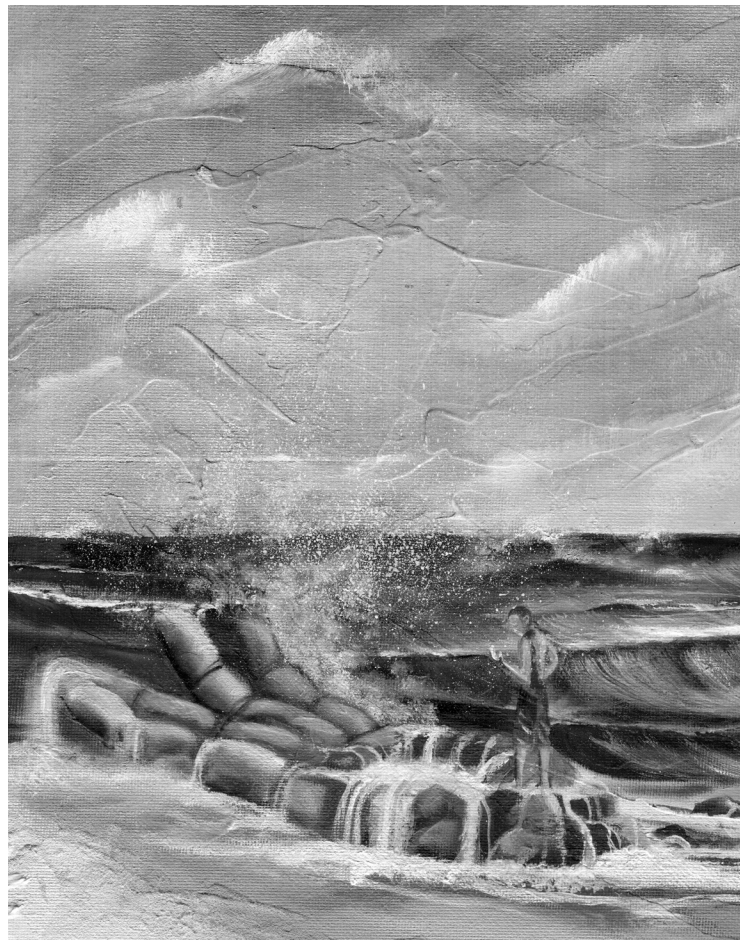


WHO ARE YOU?

LESSON 1: The Big Questions

INTRODUCTION

Who Are You? explores the big questions that we have about life: **Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?** We all look for answers to these questions. We search for them in many places. The Bible offers answers to those questions. It also offers hope for a new and better life. And it tells us that the first step toward discovering that life is knowing God.



Artwork by Nickolas H., Crossroads student

Lesson Focus:

God wants us to know Him.

Humans, by nature, have a desire to find purpose for their lives. They are looking for direction. They are looking for meaning. They want to know why they are here. They want to know who they are supposed to be.

We can't find answers to these questions by buying more, doing more, or learning more. Knowledge, possessions, and experiences do not make us feel whole. The richest people in the world keep trying to earn more money because it does not satisfy them. The smartest people in the world admit there is so much that they do not know or understand.

When we search for meaning, we are often limited by our past experiences. We think about who we want to be based on ideas about ourselves that may not be true. This may cause us to miss out on the real meaning of life. This course has been created to help you think about these things in a different way.

1. What are some of the ways you've seen people look for meaning and purpose in the past?

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2. How do people look for meaning and purpose inside prison or jail?

We're All Looking for the Same Thing

We all want to know the answers to the three big questions in life:
Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

In his book *An Anchor for the Soul*, Ray Pritchard said it this way:

It is the same in every country and every culture. On the surface we are very different in our appearance, background, language, and customs. But dig a little deeper and you discover that basically, we are all the same. . . . Everywhere we are the same—with the same longings, regrets, dreams, and hopes; with the same need to love and be loved; with the same desire to be remembered after we die.¹

Everyone you'll ever meet has the same desire to know the answers to these big questions.

3. What are some things you think everyone might have in common?



Notes/Questions

The Three Big Questions

Our answers to the three big questions reveal what we think about ourselves. We often respond to the question “Who are you?” by sharing facts about ourselves: what our job is, whether we are married or divorced or single, our favorite hobbies, etc. We might answer the question “Why are you here?” by telling people about our past or about events that led to our current situation. We may respond to the question “Where are you going?” by mentioning a jail or prison sentence, a place we will go after we are released, or nowhere at all.

4. How would you answer the three big questions? Take a few minutes to think about the questions below before you answer them.
 - a. Who am I?

1. Ray Pritchard, *An Anchor for the Soul*, 19

b. Why am I here?

c. Where am I going?

Our answers to these questions can also have a deeper meaning. They can reflect who we want to be. They can reveal who we really are when no one is looking. They can define our purpose—why we are alive or here on the earth.

5. Which of the big questions seems most important for you to answer right now? Why?

When you ask people these questions, you find out two things. We all think that asking these questions is important. We also think there is something more to life.

A King's Answer

King Solomon* was one of the richest and most powerful kings of Israel.* He is believed to be the writer of Ecclesiastes,* one of the wisdom books in the Bible. In Ecclesiastes, he wrote about where he looked for answers to the big questions. He tried relationships. He tried parties. He tried wealth and power. He tried everything there was to try. None of those things answered the questions for him. He still felt empty. It was all meaningless. Solomon reported what he found in three short words: "I hated life" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

6. What do you think Solomon meant when he said he "hated life"?

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 7.



Notes/Questions

Solomon was tired of trying to find things that would give his life meaning. What can you do when you've truly tried it all, but you have not found any answers? This is the way Solomon felt.

7. Have you ever felt that way? What brought you to that point?

Solomon felt empty, even though he had tried almost everything in his search for meaning. He decided that there had to be something more to life: knowing God and following Him (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

8. How would you describe yourself when it comes to knowing God? Are you skeptical? Are you a believer? Are you still trying to find the truth?

- I'm searching for answers
- I believe in God
- I used to believe in God
- I feel lost and confused

- I have a lot of doubts
- I'm skeptical about God
- I'm not sure about religion
- Other:

Knowing God

Like Solomon, most of us long for something more from life. We want to be loved. We want our life to have meaning and purpose. And, like Solomon, we have the same sense that there must be a God of some kind who made us.

There is a phrase that describes that longing inside us for something more: a "God-shaped hole."* Theologians* like St. Augustine, C.S. Lewis, and G.K. Chesterton all wrote about this "hole" in each of us. It is not a literal hole. The "God-shaped hole" is a longing for a perfect connection to God.

That longing drives us to seek meaning outside ourselves. It makes us feel like things will never get any better. It makes us afraid that we will never be good enough. It makes us feel abandoned, forgotten, and alone.

God is the answer to that longing inside us. The longing causes us to keep looking for more until we come home to Him. St. Augustine said it this way: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you" (*The Confessions*).

God created us to have a relationship with Him. He designed us to want to know Him. We will not find true happiness and contentment* until we find Him. God fills the "hole" in us.



Notes/Questions

9. Have you ever felt a longing for something that was missing from your life? If so, what did you do to try to fulfill that longing? Did it work?

The whole Bible shows us that God wants us to know Him—in a sense, that is the theme of the Bible. God loves us, we rebel against Him, and He comes to our rescue. The God of the Bible is interested in our lives and cares deeply about us. God cares deeply about *you*.

10. What do you think of the idea of a God who cares deeply about you? Do you believe it?

In the Beginning

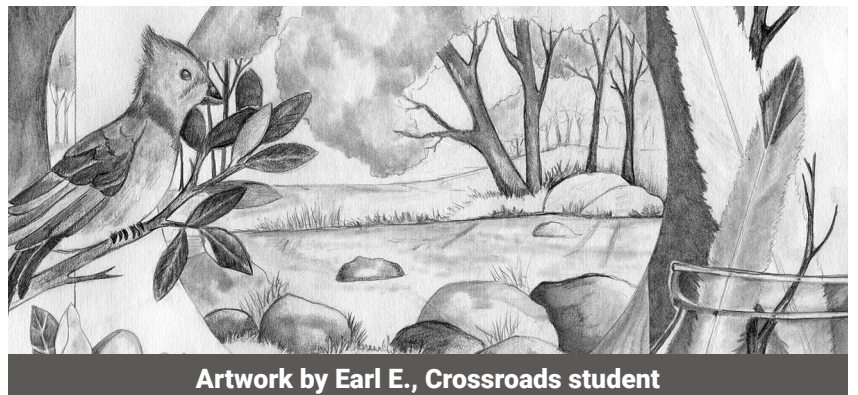
The very first story in the Bible about God and humanity tells us that God created a perfect world. God created humans “in his own image . . . male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We are made in God’s image, which means there is something in us that reflects who God is. We are designed to know God and take care of the world in which God placed us.

But something went terribly wrong.

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was a perfect place. The garden provided shelter, food, and a purpose for them.

They knew God and they knew who God created them to be. God made just one thing off-limits. He told them not to eat the fruit of one specific tree: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

A serpent deceived Eve, who ate some of the fruit and then offered some to Adam. Even though Adam had not been deceived, he ate the fruit anyway. This was the “fall” of humankind. It was through this one simple act, this deliberate choice, that sin* entered the world.



Sin is anything we say, do, plan, think, or imagine that does not meet God’s standard of perfection. It is something we do that we know is wrong. After we’ve done it, that voice

in the back of our heads asks, “Why did I do that?” Adam and Eve sinned. They did what God asked them not to do. Then they experienced guilt and fear. They sinned against God—and they *knew* they sinned.

The Bible tells us that, in their shame,* they tried to cover themselves and they hid from God. They were terrified of God’s reaction.

Then the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking in the garden. It was during the coolest time of the day. They hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called out to the man. "Where are you?" he asked. (Genesis 3:8–9)

You might think that God would have destroyed Adam and Eve and started over. But He didn't.

God went looking for them.

He simply walked through the garden and called out to them. God knew where they were. God knew what they had done. But He came with a question, not an accusation. "Where are you?"

11. How would you expect God to have reacted when Adam and Eve did the one thing He asked them not to do?

12. Based on what you have read, how did God show His love to Adam and Eve despite what they did?



What Happens Next

God looked for Adam and Eve. He wanted them to talk to Him. He still wanted a relationship with them.

However, there were consequences for what Adam and Eve did. Eve felt pain when having children. Her relationship with Adam was damaged. Adam had to work hard to find food. Both of them experienced death. We have inherited all of those things. We still feel those consequences today. Sin is now in the world.

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we do not know God the way we should. We continually do things we know we should not do. We see the pain, death, and violence in the world—some of it that we create ourselves—and we feel powerless to fight it. We feel the result of other people's sins when they hurt us. We commit sins in response. We hurt others. We hurt ourselves. But God tells us things do not need to stay that way. We are sinners, but God is still looking for each of us. The Bible tells us:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)

He knows what has happened to us. He knows what we have done. But despite all of that, He still sent His Son, Jesus, to the earth to die for our sins so that we may have a relationship with Him. He still loves us. He still asks each of us, "Where are you?"

13. Read John 3:16–17 again. What do these verses say about God?

14. According to John 3:16–17, how does God feel about you?

Action Step

Memorizing Bible verses is a spiritual discipline that will help you grow in your walk with Jesus. Choose a few of the verses in this lesson and begin making a list of memory verses that are meaningful to you. As you memorize the verses, you will find that the Word of God will guide and encourage you as you go through each day.

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to you. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. You will see an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears in the lesson.

Contentment — A feeling of being happy and satisfied. In the Bible, it is a supernatural peace that comes from knowing and obeying God.

Ecclesiastes — A book in the Bible. It was likely written by Solomon (see **"Solomon"**).

God-Shaped Hole — A concept talked about by theologians (see **"theologian"**). It is a sense that you lack something meaningful in your life. It refers to a deep longing for God.

Israel — The name of the kingdom that God established for His people. It was located approximately where the nation of Israel is located today in the Middle East region of Asia.

Shame — A result of sin (see **"sin"**); closely related to guilt. It is an awareness that we will never live up to God's expectations.

Sin — An action, thought, or spoken word that goes against God's divine plan. When we commit sins, we do things that are wrong and break God's laws. Sins are the things that we do—or fail to do—that make us less than perfect. Sins keep us from growing closer to Jesus.

Solomon — A king of Israel (see **"Israel"**). He was the most powerful king in the Bible. He had great riches. God gave him the gift of wisdom.

Theologian — Someone who studies who God is. They study the Bible, the nature of God, and other elements of Christianity. Theologians often write books about God and faith.

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Use this space for **prayer requests, questions for the mentor who will review this lesson, or comments.**
You can also use this space to **write a poem or draw.**

Do you need a Bible? Crossroads provides free NIV Bibles to students who need them (if allowed by their facility). Mark this box if you would like us to send you one.

If your address has changed, please mark this box and write your *new* address below.

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