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Introduction

This study guide is designed to accompany the ‘Test of Faith’ course. It will help you to follow the discussion, take notes if you like, and will provide some background reading and follow-up materials.

The challenge that has been put forward so many times recently is that God is a delusion and science has removed the need for faith in anything. But there are many practising scientists who have a sincere Christian faith, even at the highest levels of academia. They have all been trained to think and test ideas to the limit. If their faith and their science are both genuine searches for truth, we need to hear from them. All of us can share their experience of awe when they find out more about God’s creation through science. These scientists also help us to explore a number of issues that affect our own lives.

The book ***Test of Faith: Spiritual Journeys with Scientists*** tells the stories of ten of the scientists interviewed for the documentary – their personal discovery of faith and how that has affected their work.

Christians hold different views on some of these issues. We’re not expecting everyone to agree with all that the scientists and theologians say in the documentary. These are complex issues, and in the course material we have often laid out several different views that Christians take on a particular topic so that you can discuss them openly.

This material is very much an introduction to science and Christianity. It may well provoke some questions that you didn’t know that you had and open up some new areas of interest. The course includes many different questions and points for discussion. They cannot *all* be covered in each session, but there are plenty of good books, articles and mp3s available to follow up topics that you did not cover in the course sessions or take things further, some of which are recommended in the ‘Taking it Further’ lists for each session. There are also extra resources tailored specifically for the course on **www.testoffaith.com**.

Session 1: Beyond Reason?

Science, Faith and the Universe

Preparation for Participants (*optional*):

Why bother thinking about science and faith?

Ask two or three friends, family members or colleagues if they can think of a situation where science and religion (or beliefs) affect each other. What issues or questions arise?

For example, what about:

- In medicine? (Religious beliefs often affect ethical decisions.)
- In education? (Children sometimes ask questions like ‘Who made human beings, God or evolution?’)
- In politics? (E.g., the Archbishop of Canterbury is campaigning on climate change.)

or

When you watch TV, listen to the radio, or read the paper, keep an eye out for stories that mention both science and faith. What issues or questions arise? What effect do these issues have on society?

Glossary

atheist	Someone who believes that no gods exist.
cosmologist	Someone who scientifically studies the origin, development and overall shape and nature of the universe.
fine-tuning (the Anthropic Principle)	The idea that the physical constants of the universe are set at the precise values necessary for the existence of biological life.
God of the gaps	An argument which says that when we can't explain something in nature scientifically, that is proof that God exists.
metaphysic	Any particular way of interpreting the world.
multiverse theory	The idea that there are multiple universes. Some people use this to argue that if there are many universes, it's not so surprising that one of them is 'fine-tuned' for life.

Discussion Topics



How Do People See the World?

Dr Ard Louis said that the debate between science and religion is really about how we decide whether something is true or false: is science the only reliable way of finding things out about the world, or does religion have something valuable to contribute as well?

Q1: With this in mind, what views have you heard from scientists (either in the media or that you have met personally) on the questions, ‘Does God exist?’ and ‘How does God interact with the universe?’

There’s a difference between scientific evidence and the interpretation of that evidence. It is possible for people of any religion or none to come up with the same results when they run the same experiment – but how do you interpret that evidence? Obviously some interpretations will be more reliable than others. The truth of a particular interpretation can be tested with more experiments.

Q2: Which of the views above (scientism/atheistic materialism, deism or Christianity) do you think could fit with the evidence the scientists have described about the universe in the documentary?



The Big Bang

In this chapter of the DVD the narrator asks the question, 'Hasn't the Big Bang done away with the need for a Creator?'

Q1: What do you think? Do you think God could have created through the Big Bang?

God of the gaps?

“ If you say, well, science answers this much about the way the universe is, but science doesn't answer this aspect of the universe's characteristics, and then to invoke God and to **allow God to reside in that gap in our knowledge, that's dangerous** because when a clever scientist comes along that gap will be filled by a deeper and richer scientific understanding. So then, where you posit that God is allowed to reside, gets smaller and smaller and smaller, and this is a practice known as **God of the gaps**, and it's dangerous.

Professor Katherine Blundell

Read Colossians 1:15–17 and Hebrews 1:3a.

Q2: Where do we see God at work? What do these passages say about this idea of not putting 'God in the gaps'?

Prayer and Miracles

'God of the gaps' raises the question: 'Do scientists, even if they are Christians, believe that God cannot, or will not, work miracles?' Not at all. Here is why:

“ While some biblical miracles, such as ... the plague of locusts in Egypt, do not directly contradict the laws of nature, other miracles are obviously supernatural. So does science challenge our belief in miracles? ...

Christians believe that God, not natural laws, govern nature. God typically works through natural laws to sustain the regular patterns of our world, but nature is not locked into those patterns.

Deborah and Loren Haarsma, *Origins*
(Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2007), p. 41.

“ **I believe God can choose to step out of his regular pattern and do something different at times**, but it would be for a reason relating to an answer to prayer, or something about God's desire to interact spiritually with his people. So I see miracles of healing, miracles in human history, or miracles in the Bible that God used to establish his chosen people and develop a relationship with them. It seems less likely that God would do miracles in natural history that we couldn't discover until modern science.

Deborah Haarsma, *Test of Faith: Spiritual Journeys with Scientists*, page 97

Q3: How would you define a 'miracle'?

Q4: How does this match your own experience or knowledge of the Bible?

But are these scientists filling the gap with science instead of God? Is this 'science of the gaps'?

There are always unanswered questions in science. Christians working in science are aware that there could be a 'supernatural' explanation for something being the way it is, but the early scientists – who believed in a Creator God – believed that they should investigate creation, and they found answers to their questions. Rather than mourning the apparent loss of mystery in creation, they rejoiced that they understood God's creation a