

# CHAPTER 9: How Can I Know God?

## Discovering the Stumbling Block Along the Path to Faith

Reference: *Surprised by Faith*, pages 131-148 (fourth edition); pages 119-132 (third edition)

### Getting Focused

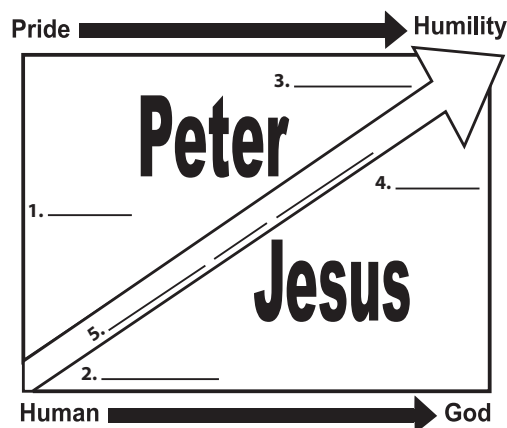
- What is the greatest deterrent that keeps people from faith and a relationship with God?
- What two key questions must everyone ask and honestly answer along their path to faith?
- What is the principle of “spiritual brokenness”?

We have discovered evidence which can satisfy the mind concerning the certainty of the object of faith, Jesus Christ. Yet there is a powerful factor which may make us reluctant to take the next step along the path to faith. In fact, it is often the primary reason that some people find Christianity hard, and never come to know God or experience the life-transforming dimension of faith. Honestly answering two key questions can lead to a biblical principle called “spiritual brokenness”—which is often the antidote to this menacing stumbling block. This is the discovery we will make in this chapter.

### Making the Discovery

The fisherman Peter, before he became a disciple of Jesus, illustrated an important spiritual principle (Luke 5:1-8). This principle keeps many people from knowing God in personal relationship.

1. Peter thought he knew more about fishing than Jesus did. He was a fishing “\_\_\_\_\_” —thinking he would not catch any fish even though Jesus told him to.
2. Peter referred to Jesus as “\_\_\_\_\_” —a title of respect (like rabbi) but not recognizing Him as God.
3. After catching two boat loads of fish, Peter was repentant toward Jesus and referred to himself as a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Peter also now referred to Jesus as the “\_\_\_\_\_” (Greek “kurios,” meaning supreme one, over all) recognizing Him as God.



5. In this incident with Jesus, Peter went from pride to humility—a change that must occur on our \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is what keeps many people from faith in Jesus Christ. Pride is thinking of ourselves as better than others; self-sufficient and independent from God and others; not humble. Pride is the chief cause of misery and alienation in the world. Wars, divorce and other maladies of life can often be traced to the competitiveness of an uncontrolled ego. Pride is also the greatest deterrent that keeps us from a relationship with God. A refusal to say “I’m sorry” to God about our sins and reluctance to renounce our independent self-sufficiency keep us from knowing God.

## DISCOVERY #9

**“Ah-ha!”** Pride keeps more people from faith and forgiveness in Jesus Christ than any other factor!

7. Spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ is necessary on our path to faith. Spiritual brokenness is the change in one's personal perception from a self-sufficient and conceited "pro" to a humble "sinner" repentant before God; a conviction that results from the work of God's Spirit. The Bible makes it clear that the path to Christian faith involves recognizing our pride of self-sufficiency and acknowledging our sinful nature that separates us from a holy God.
8. When spiritual brokenness occurs in our life, our perspective also changes. We no longer view Jesus as just a human teacher of good morals; rather we make a \_\_\_\_\_ of faith to follow Him as the Lord of our life.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ demonstrated this principle of "spiritual brokenness." When tempted by his disciples to build loyalty to himself, he declared his purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. His crowning words were: "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30).
10. \_\_\_\_\_ also demonstrated this spiritual principle. Moses started as a man of great status, having been raised in the palace as the adopted son of Pharaoh. However, before God used him to lead the Israelites from captivity, Moses had to experience his own brokenness. For killing an Egyptian he became a hunted man for forty years as he herded sheep in the desert. Through that experience he was humbled—and then used greatly by God.

## Application and Reflection

1. **The Bible says** that sin, often manifested as pride and independence from God, is universal and separates the entire human race from a relationship with a holy God.
 

*...for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one" ...for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* (Romans 3:9-10; 22-23).

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling* (Proverbs 16:18).

*"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate"* (Proverbs 8:13).
2. **The Bible says** that God calls humility good and that it pleases Him when we walk humbly with Him.
 

*He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8).

Discover and write down what each of these additional Bible passages teaches about the spiritual principle of pride versus humility.

- Mark 7:21-23
- 1 John 2:16
- James 4:6
- 1 Peter 5:6

3. **The Bible says** that God promises if we seek Him in humility and forsake sin, He will hear us, forgive us, and restore what sin had destroyed.
 

*"...and [if] my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

If you have not said to God, "I'm sorry for my sin," and trusted Jesus as your Savior, then search your heart to honestly determine if pride might be the reason. Record your thoughts.

How can God, who according to the Bible is all-powerful and all-good, allow evil to triumph in such events as the Holocaust, World Trade Center attacks, or a tsunami? What is your answer to this question? (The discussion below will help.)

The three events identified above are just three of the many atrocities which have been witnessed in history. Car accidents, murder, AIDS and genocide, all can be found by scanning one day's news. "Why?" is the most-frequently asked question. In fact, when the pollster George Barna asked Americans, "If you could ask God one question and knew He would give you an answer, what would you ask?"—the top response (17%) was, "Why is there so much pain and suffering?" The answer to this question is found at two levels of human experience.

The first level is the intellectual. C.S. Lewis expressed the underlying logic in this area: "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both" (The Problem of Pain [New York: Macmillan, 1962], p. 26). Some go even further than Lewis to suggest that the Christian God does not exist at all, and cite all the evil in the world as evidence.

The answer to this difficult question is found in the subject of human free will. The fact that God is all-powerful does not mean He can do anything, particularly things that would be a self-contradiction. For example, God cannot create colorless color or a round square. Likewise, God cannot create people to have genuine freedom and yet have no potential for sin—of choosing evil. Creating people with free will opens the door to the possibility of overwhelming pain in the world—people choosing evil over God.

Could God have created a world without human freedom? Yes, if He had stopped after the animals and plants there would have been no hate or suffering. But the ultimate value in the universe would also be missing—love. Without choice there can be no love, only coercion. God knows that the value of love in both the temporal and eternal realms far exceeds the downside of suffering for a time. C.S. Lewis referred to pain as the megaphone of God. He meant that it is often the way God gets our attention, awakens us out of our stupor of independence from Him, and calls us into relationship with Him. Besides, for those who love God, He promises that He is bringing good into our lives, such as character development, even in the midst of our suffering (Romans 8:28). The bottom line here is that God's perspective for us is eternal, "*not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

The second level of the problem of evil is personal. We suffer, and we want to know whether God cares. Yes, He said that He loves us so much that He came Himself to die on the cross so we can have a new quality of life here and forever (John 3:16). We suffer, and we want to know whether God understands. Yes, He said that He has experienced all our pain and temptation as well, so that He desires to provide grace and mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16). We suffer, and we want to feel His touch and silent, comforting presence. Yes, He promised never to leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6) and that He would give rest to all who are weary and heavy-laden (Matthew 11:28-29).

Finally, we wonder if there is an ultimate solution to pain and suffering. Yes, Jesus said the day is coming when those who believe in Him will be placed on a new heaven and earth where "*there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain...*" (Revelation 21:4).

Therefore, though everything around us may not be making sense and there are still unanswered questions, we have to ask honestly whether anyone besides Christians has an answer to the problem of evil at all, much less an answer with such a wonderful future and hope.

## Looking Ahead

As you review the diagram on page 124 (fourth edition) or page 113 (third edition) in *Surprised by Faith*, how have you answered the question at the top? If you are below the line in unbelief or doubt and have not said to God, "I'm sorry for my sin," and trusted Jesus as your Savior, search your heart to honestly determine if pride might be the reason. In the next chapter, an opportunity will be provided to say "yes" and to take the next step of crossing over the line to faith.

**Answers to "Fill in the Blanks":** 1. pro; 2. master; 3. sinner; 4. Lord; 5. path to faith; (Illustration: 1. The Pro; 2. Master; 3. Sinner; 4. The Lord; 5. Path to Faith); 6. Pride; 7. brokenness; 8. commitment; 9. John the Baptist; 10. Moses