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Lesson 4

“How do I know God is real?”

(Understanding Divine Revelation)



Opening Prayer

As I begin to understand your story and how I fit into it, there are times when I'm struggling with what to do now. How do you want me to respond and live out my faith in my family, my school, and with my friends? I'm still learning to believe, but I'm now starting to see that you have a plan for me. So, even though I sometimes may feel a bit scared or unsure about what it all means, please help me to be open to you and how you want me to live. Amen.

Dive In: A God Who Wants to Be Known

Imagine that someone has offered you a month-long, all-expenses-paid trip to ... your dream destination! Your passport is ready, your bag has been packed, your parents have said "yes." All you have to do is get on that plane and go. Would you? Right now?

It would be risky, being out on your own. Maybe you're afraid of planes. Maybe you'll eat something bad and get sick. Maybe you'll get lost. Maybe something will happen to someone in your family while you're gone. Do you risk it? It's up to you.

Love is the same way. Allowing ourselves to love and be loved, as we were created to be, is risky. And yet, each of us longs for the kind of love that allows us to be completely open and honest. There is such freedom in that kind of closeness.

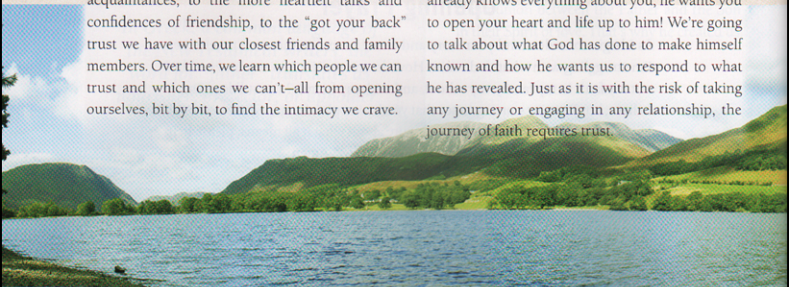
Every human relationship involves different levels of intimacy—from the less intimate chats with acquaintances, to the more heartfelt talks and confidences of friendship, to the "got your back" trust we have with our closest friends and family members. Over time, we learn which people we can trust and which ones we can't—all from opening ourselves, bit by bit, to find the intimacy we crave.

Sometimes, that trust may be misplaced. A friend may break a confidence; the guy (or girl) you've had a crush on may break your heart. Even family members let us down sometimes (though they usually come through for us if we give them a chance).

Trust in God is never misplaced. God wants intimacy with us. Maybe you never thought of God as a lover or a friend, but he thinks of himself that way. He is referred to as "the Bridegroom" in Scripture¹ and told his apostles, "You are my friends" (John 15:14).

The Native American warrior and Catholic convert, Joseph Chiwatenhwa, once said about God, "Now I begin to see that the reason you made us is because you want to share your love. Nothing attracts you as much as your people."

Yes, God wants you to know him! And though he already knows everything about you, he wants you to open your heart and life up to him! We're going to talk about what God has done to make himself known and how he wants us to respond to what he has revealed. Just as it is with the risk of taking any journey or engaging in any relationship, the journey of faith requires trust.





Segment 1: Evidence for God

1. Chris compares the probability of the universe forming out of nothing to the probability of a print shop explosion resulting in a _____.
A) novel C) movie script
B) dictionary D) newspaper
2. The fullness of divine revelation is found in _____.

Segment 2: Scripture and Tradition

1. Both Sacred _____ and Sacred Scripture form the deposit of faith, God's revelation to us.
2. The Gospels, the four books in the Bible that tell us about the life of Jesus, are Matthew, Mark, _____, and _____.
3. The Bible is a collection of _____ books.
A) 12 B) 76 C) 52 D) 73

Segment 3: Our Response to God

1. We respond to divine revelation with the gift of _____.
2. **T or F?** Faith is a one-time decision.



TO THE HEART with

Natalie was raised Catholic. Her mom had spent tens of thousands of dollars sending her to Catholic school. But she thought of the Faith as nothing but an oppressive list of rules. There must be "something more" to life. Something deeper. Something **SACRED**. She went to college and looked outside of the Faith for that "something."

"I entered the college party scene, but it left me empty," she remembers. "I took classes about world cultures, astronomy, and philosophy. I sought advice from renowned educators who had studied other religions. I tried meditation and eastern religions, hoping to 'break through' to a 'higher reality.' I found only disillusionment."

Eventually, she gave up faith altogether. She called her mom from college and said, "Mom, I'm an

atheist." But her mom never stopped praying for her. (Beware the power of praying moms and grandmas!)

Natalie's faith returned at a most unexpected moment. She wasn't at church. She wasn't on a retreat. She was on a beach in Hawaii at 2 AM. Here is how she described the moment.

There I was, sitting beneath a palm tree on a rocky point. I looked out and saw perfectly shaped waves, sea green in the moon's glowing light. The sky was full of stars, with scattered meteors shooting across. It was natural perfection. And, as if from some unknown place inside, my mind uttered the words, "Thank you."

I caught myself. Who was I talking to? I had rejected the notion of a God, so who was I talking to? But as I gazed again at the scene before me, something inside me melted.

*It was all too beautiful to account for itself. **Someone** had painted it! And despite my prior convictions, I began to believe again.*

A few months later, at the prodding of her family, Natalie decided to go on a retreat weekend. She felt out of place. She wanted to be away from everyone and went outside, but she couldn't stop crying. Wherever she went, she sensed Jesus standing in front of her with open arms.

She went to World Youth Day and, hearing the voice of John Paul II, she realized, "That's my shepherd, and I'm falling in love with Jesus and his Church again." But even as she said it, she knew it wasn't really "again," but for the first time.

Natalie's journey back to Jesus began with the natural world "evangelizing" her. I had the awesome blessing of marrying her five years later.

Chris Stefanick

“It was natural perfection.”

Find It!

What Augustinian priest and scientist is known as the "Father of Modern Genetics"?

Gregor Mendel

Hero of the Week



Born:

1225

Died:

March 7, 1274

Memorial:

January 28

Patron Saint of:

- universities
- students

St. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was the kid who always got picked last in gym class.

He was big and slow, and he never said much—always lost in his thoughts. His classmates used to call him “that dumb ox.” His teachers, though, had a different view. His mentor, St. Albert the Great, once said, “One day the bellow of that dumb ox will be heard around the world.”

What Aquinas lacked in speed, he made up for in intelligence. At the age of five, he asked, “What is God?” His teacher was stumped ... so Thomas decided to become a theologian to find out. He was confident that the **EXISTENCE OF GOD** could be proven. In fact, he came up with five such proofs.

Thomas decided he wanted to become a Dominican priest. His family hated the idea. They had different career goals for Thomas. His brothers kidnapped and imprisoned him in a room with a prostitute to test his resolve. Aquinas picked up a burning stick from the fireplace and chased the woman away, then burned a cross on the door of his cell. He knew what he wanted—and he knew it wasn't to be found in the pleasures and riches of this world. He wanted truth ... plain and simple.

Aquinas spent his entire life trying to understand the mysteries of God, not in order to prove how smart he was, but out of a desire to *know God* and to make him known to others. He wrote some of the most important theological

works ever written, more than 50,000 pages of text over a period of more than twenty-five years, keeping four scribes scribbling busily the entire time! And yet his greatest work, the *Summa Theologica*, remained unfinished at his death. Seeing God's glory in a mystical vision, Aquinas said, “All I have written is like so much straw compared to what I have seen.” After that vision, he spent the rest of his days focused on the simplest truths—teaching the Faith to children.

Toward the end of Aquinas' life, his confessor, Brother Reginald, witnessed the philosopher in a chapel, face down before a great crucifix. He heard Jesus speak to Aquinas from the cross, saying, “Thomas, you have written well of me. What will you have for your reward?”

Aquinas replied, “Only yourself, Lord.”

It was the most perfect summary of his life's work. Declared a **DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH** in 1567 by Pope Pius V, the life story of St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that God does not want even the most intellectually gifted of us merely to *understand* him. He wants us to love him ... and to let him love us.

St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us, that we will have the humility to ask God for the faith to believe even when we cannot understand.

Challenge of the Week

- ☐ **Read from one of the Gospels** for three minutes every day. Take two minutes afterward to think about what you read. Write about it in the space below.
- ☐ **Choose a prayer space at home for a daily conversation with God.** Make sure a Bible is handy for your use along with any images or items (natural or man-made) that help you focus your mind on God. Write about it in the space below.
- ☐ **Practice your listening skills.** Meet with a close friend or family member. For a full five minutes, listen attentively, asking questions as needed. In the space below, write about something you learned about that person and how it affected your relationship.

✝ Closing Prayer

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned ... from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

—2 Timothy 3:14-15

Lord Jesus, you reveal yourself to us in so many ways: through the inspired words of the Bible, the teachings of the Church, the beauty of nature, and in the quiet of our own hearts. Give us the grace to respond enthusiastically to the many ways you invite us to come closer to you, and inspire us to shine as lights in a dark world. Amen.

Taking It Home

Wrap-Up

"The probability of life originating from an accident is comparable to the probability of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a print shop."

—Edwin Conklin²

(Princeton biologist and associate of Albert Einstein)

Think about it. A single strand of your DNA is more complex than a dictionary. While scientific theories all attempt to explain some aspect of Creation, from evolution to the Big Bang, believing the universe came into being without some intelligent "oversight" just doesn't make sense. If we see a book, we know there is an author. If we see a painting, we know there is a painter. And when we see an ordered universe, we know there was an ultimate "beginning" ... a Creator.

For next week's "Review Game," be sure to read over the following ...

1. **Watch It!** questions (page 27)
2. **Wrap-Up**
3. **"What's That Word?"**
4. **Memory Verse**

Don't forget to do your **Challenge of the Week** (page 31)

This is why all the philosophers of antiquity (some of the greatest minds that ever lived) believed in God and why most relativists, and even many self-proclaimed atheists, believe in God. In fact, less than three percent of people in the world describe themselves as atheists!*

In this lesson, we've talked about some of the ways God reveals himself through creation and through **NATURAL REASON**. These things are the starting points for something called "divine revelation," or how God reveals himself more intimately to the human race. The greatest divine revelation, of course, is Jesus Christ.

* Only 2.32 percent of the world's population is atheist, according to *The World Factbook* (January 19, 2011).

"What's That Word?"

FAITH

Faith refers to the gift that allows us to believe in God and what he has told us. As the Bible tells us, "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, NAB). For example, we have faith that our friend will not let us down or betray us when we are not present.

Grace builds on a different kind of faith—the theological virtue that was infused in us at **BAPTISM**. Through the gift of faith, God grants us the ability to accept as true all he has revealed to us in Christ that we receive in the Church. "The Faith," or "the Catholic Faith," refers to the fullness of God's revelation that has been entrusted to the Church and which the Church faithfully hands on to each generation of believers in its doctrine, life, and worship. The living teaching office (the **MAGISTERIUM**) alone, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, authentically interprets the Word of God that comes to us in Scripture and **TRADITION**. Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium are so closely connected that one cannot stand without the other two (see *Dei Verbum* 7, 8, 10).

On an individual level, the gift of faith must be exercised in virtue to grow strong and sustain us in difficult times. We pray for the gift of faith so that we will be able to believe, and we exercise and strengthen our faith when we try to understand what God has revealed and to live accordingly.

NATURAL REASON

Natural reason refers to the human power to think or figure something out, as opposed to "revelation," which is what we know because God has told us. We can know things by natural reason and by revelation. Using our reason, we are able to figure out that there must be a Creator of the world or that stealing from someone is unjust. There are some things we are not able to figure out by reason alone. We would not have known that God is a Trinity unless he had told us, unless it had been revealed.

REVELATION

God *reveals* himself to us, and what he reveals of himself is called *revelation*.

The authors of the Bible took this word from the Hebrew wedding **RITUAL** where it literally meant "unveiling." It is God's deepest desire to "unveil" himself to us and invite us to a new and wonderful life with him, a life characterized by a deep and lasting relationship more intimate than the one shared by a newly married couple.

The Church has carefully preserved and taught God's *revelation*, and we can find what God has revealed of himself in the Bible and in Sacred Tradition.

Memory Verse:



"Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock ..."

—Matthew 7:24

SACRED TRADITION

Jesus entrusted the “handing on” (*traditio* in Latin) of the gospel message to his apostles, whom he commissioned to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). The Church, then, is founded upon the authority Christ gave to his apostles to teach the truths he gave them to hand on.

Jesus taught his apostles many things. Some of what Jesus taught was written down under the **INSPIRATION** of the Holy Spirit and comes to us in the form of the Bible (**SACRED SCRIPTURE**). Some of what he taught them was “handed on” through their teaching; we refer to these teachings as “Sacred Tradition.” We have many “traditions” in the Church, just as we have “traditions” in our families and schools. However, Sacred Tradition refers to the handing on of the gospel and the teaching of Jesus in the Holy Spirit by the Church in her doctrine, life, and worship.³

Did You Know?

According to tradition, St. Helena discovered the true Cross of Christ in the fourth century. Enshrined in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, it was recaptured by Muslim forces in the seventh century. However, fragments have been restored, and the “Adoration of the Cross” is observed each Good Friday in Jerusalem.⁴

Any questions?

Are Catholics the only ones who know God? Is everyone else flat-out wrong?

God made the human heart for himself, and he reveals himself to everyone through creation and in the circumstances of life. Because of that, other religions have beautiful and true glimpses of who God is and how we should live our lives, and the Church “rejects nothing that is true and holy in [other] religions.”⁵ But the FULLNESS of truth about God can only be found in Christ and in his Church. God became one of us to tell us in person who he is! So, while other faiths may provide glimpses of God, Jesus alone reveals the whole picture.

What’s more important, the Church or the Bible?

They’re *both* important! The two can’t be pitted against each other. The Church Jesus founded (the “pillar and foundation of truth,” 1 Timothy 3:15, NAB) authoritatively teaches us that the Bible is the Word of God. At the Council of Hippo (AD 393), the Catholic bishops declared that the seventy-three books of “the Bible” are the words of God himself in the words of men.⁶ Catholics have been reading from those seventy-three books ever since. Every time the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed, life-transforming grace is given, for “the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).