

Series: DON'T CHECK YOUR BRAIN AT THE DOOR! - April 23, 2006

DUSTING FOR FINGERPRINTS
Psalm 19:1-4

I. INTRO

A. In that last 15-20 years, people in our culture have gone through a huge shift in how they view the spiritual realm. I noticed this when *Time* magazine began featuring cover story after cover story on prayer, angels, Jesus, Jesus the internet, healing. I had never seen that before. Suddenly, in North America, it became cool to have a spiritual dimension to your life

- In a recent poll of Canadians done by Maclean's magazine, 82% considered themselves to be somewhat or very spiritual. Even a marketplace consultant by the name of Lance Secretan tells corporations and businesses; in his book **Reclaiming Higher Ground**, to pay attention to the spiritual dimension of their employees!

1. Believe it or not, people **used** to believe that science, knowledge and progress were going to lead us eventually to an ideal world. I don't meet too many people who believe that anymore.

-These days, smart people are looking around and realizing the damage we've done by focusing on making money and ignoring our souls. We've begun to understand how the retrace in life is turning us into rats. How our busyness is slowly killing what we most want—love, meaning and wholeness. Underlying all of this is this vague guilt we feel with all we have in a world where half the population lives on less than two dollars a day.

2. In our hearts we think, "There **has** to be more than this." So, are people turning to God for answers? We-e-ell...that's an interesting question. People are turning **inward**, but not necessarily toward God. The word spiritual has traditionally meant, ***having to do with God and the spiritual dimension of life.*** That's been redefined to mean ***polishing up the inner part of your life.***

-One of the interesting trends is the rejection of organized religion. People have gotten every disillusioned with the pettiness, the dead, boring, meaningless ritual and the hypocrisy they've seen. They've thought, "This isn't life-changing! If I'm going to find spirituality, I'm going to have to look somewhere else."

B. Now, throw into this mix a new super-popular, super-best-selling book, soon to hit the big screens. Anyone know what book I'm talking about? It's ***The Da Vinci Code***. Even though it's in the form of a novel, it **sounds** like Dan Brown, the author, has done his homework—and it fits the skepticism people have about Christianity.

-And the book seems to make a number of credible claims that would imply, for most readers, "Most of what the church has told you is either just wrong—or twisted." Brown says at the very beginning of the book: ***All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.***

-According to him, it was a well-known fact that Jesus wasn't really God—just a great man.

And to promote a male-dominated church, there has been a conspiracy to hide the fact that Jesus wanted Mary Magdalene to lead the church; that he was, in fact, married to her. They moved to France and had a daughter named Sarah.

1. Now, I'm not going to get into the details of his claims right now—but there are a lot of people who read something like this and immediately believe it because it sounds true and credible.
2. It makes you ask yourself, “What’s real...and what’s **not** real.” Some people say, “It’s doesn’t **matter** what’s real. It’s **their** truth—and that makes it true for them.”
3. The question I want to ask is—does it make any difference **what** you believe, as long as you sincerely believe? My guess is that if you would interview the average person on the street, they would tell you that **spiritual** reality is a highly individual thing; that the test on spiritual truth is, “does it work for **you?**”
4. So. What I want to do over these next weeks is poke around a little in the foundation of what we believe at the core. I think this could help us all in a wide variety of ways. First, it may help some of you were are really new to church and just starting your spiritual search. You’ll get a chance to look at the basic building blocks of what it means to trust God in a life-transforming way. And it will either make sense, or it won’t.
 - a. Some of you who have read **The Da Vinci Code** or will see the movie will be faced with some questions about what you believe—and it will help you have a sense of whether you’re on solid footing—or not.
 - b. For those of you who have a time and reality-tested belief in Jesus Christ and the truthfulness of the Bible, it will help you be able to tell people you love what you believe and why.
 - c. And for those of you who are already experts in this stuff—well, how about if I sit down and **you** come up and teach, how’s that?
 - d. Q & A is going to be a part of everything we do over these next weeks, so, if you have a question, write it down. If I can’t answer it—I’ll **find** the answer. If I can’t **find** the answer, I’ll fake it!
5. In this first installment, I want to go **way** back and talk about the existence of God, okay? I just want you to know that I can’t perfectly prove this morning that God exists--any more than scientists can prove the age of the planet or anything on it. But I believe the evidence shows that, **beyond a reasonable doubt**, He is, in fact, alive and well--and has revealed Himself to human beings.

II. LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE

The heavens tell of the glory of God.

The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world (Psalm 19:1-4 NLT).

- A. Anyone here who’s a CSI fan? I like to watch stuff like that—including the real life version, **Cold Case Files** on A&E. It’s pretty hot these days. By the way, in case you’re wondering, CSI stands for Crime Scene Investigation. A team comes in and looks for fingerprints, DNA—any clues they can find on *whodunit*. In most cases there **are** no eye-witnesses. But when a forensics teams gets done, a jury is

convinced, **beyond a reasonable doubt**, that the person who committed the crime has left a huge trail of tell-tale evidence behind that shouts, **I DID THIS!**

-This passage is saying, “You don’t even need a forensics team to convict God of being God—beyond a reasonable doubt. **His fingerprints are everywhere! Just open your eyes! Turn your face upward—and look at the sky on any given night!**”

1. Now, that Psalm was written close to 3000 years ago. We’re a **lot** more sophisticated in our world. We’ve got telescopes that can see millions of light years into space. Back then no one knew anything about cells, amoebas, or molecules. We’re in the process of unwinding strands of DNA. Is that bold statement still true?

-I believe it is. And, I think, for good reason. In fact, with all the evidence I’ve looked at, I think it takes more faith to be an atheist or agnostic than it does to believe in God. And I’ll tell you why. When I look at—and understand the incredible sophistication of this universe, particularly—**life**, I think, “To believe that all this just happened—as some kind of accident—is absurd.”

-Talk to any person who has investigated any part of what we see in depth, and you will find in them a kind of awe at the intelligence, beauty, intricacy and purpose of what they see.

There’s this sense that when something is so sophisticatedly designed, there **must** be a designer.

a. Think about it for a minute. You’re taking a walk in the woods—somewhere up in the bush. And laying right in your path is a Blackberry—this combination of buttons, wiring, chips—a gazillion tiny parts.

-What would be your most **natural** reaction? Would you say, “Hey, it **could** have just happened. An explosion underground smelted metal, petroleum products and silicon sand together—with sophisticated computing patterns—and this popped out. “Just because it **looks** designed and perfectly put together for a purpose doesn’t mean that someone made it.”

b. Reasonable people tend to believe that when some something shows up that shows extremely intelligent, intricate design—there is an extremely intelligent **Designer** behind it.

2. So, what are the scientific leaders in our culture saying about designer fingerprints? Well, some continue along the same old path that it all **just happened**. But there is a growing movement in the scientific world of people who believe it couldn’t have just happened. Scientists and astronomers used to believe that our planet was a common, second rate planet among billions in the Universe.

-They **now** know that it appears to have been strategically placed and finely tuned, not just to support life, but to allow observers to **scientifically observe the rest of space**.

Sir Fred Hoyle—well-known astronomer and scientist, whom one author describes as an “uncertain atheist” says that **random chance** would need a time period 300 times the age of the earth to create a single protein molecule under perfect conditions. And then all you have is a protein molecule—not a sophisticated living, breathing, thinking reproducing being. Before his death in 2001, Hoyle said, “A common sense interpretation of the facts suggest that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology.”

3. If you ever meet a professor or scientist who still believes this all happened, ask them this question: “How can **nothing** produce **something**? And if this happened by chance, why can’t we, with all our intelligence and equipment do the same thing? If everything we see came from exploding gases, or an infinitely dense molecule—where did **that** come from? There **is** no answer.
-I’ll get a little deeper into this when we talk about the whole concept of evolution next week, but you need to know that new scientific research—far from **disproving** a Creator—is making a Creator the only logical explanation for brilliance of what we are seeing. This evidence is **so** powerful that in 2004, a well-known atheist philosopher, Dr. Anthony Flew, turned the educational community upside down by revealing that he was **compelled** to believe in a Creator God—simply based on the scientific evidence for a Designer!
4. Friends, I’m telling you, some people can look at the magnificence of this universe and say, **it just happened!**
I need to confess—I don’t have enough faith to believe that. Not with the fingerprints of an unbelievably intelligent Designer on everything!

B. A second argument for the existence of God is illustrated by this bayonet. As you know, these were made to kill people. There is this built in moral code in us—and you can find it anywhere you find people—that it is **wrong** to do certain things. Like kill. Where does that come from?

-One of the things investigators look for at a crime scene, besides fingerprints, is DNA. The last twenty years have totally revolutionized investigations. When a person’s DNA is at a crime scene, it’s like they left a calling card with their picture on it. A single strand of DNA in the follicle of one my hairs holds the equivalent of a 1000 volume library of encyclopedias—with all the information on how I’ve been put together. And that DNA is found in **every** cell of every living thing.

1. I believe that God left His DNA in our hearts—in our conscience—and it’s found everywhere you find human beings. The original record of our creation says this: ***Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27 NIV).***

-Now, this is the question that comes up for people who say, “There is no God—we just happened.”

"Okay, assuming that this all happened by chance; that life really is a result of survival of the fittest. That the point of existence is simply to **survive, reproduce, mutate to a higher level**. How do you account for this moral DNA—that in every single people group on this planet there are certain things that appear universally right to do; and things that are universally wrong.

- a. If you were to examine every culture that exists, you would find that truth-telling is valued over deception; kindness is valued over violence, and loyalty is valued over treachery. Now, if we are simply grown-up germs--how do you account for this? Did it just happen by sheer chance? See, if life really **does** only amount to how far you can make it down the food chain—moral qualities like these would just be extra baggage.

- b. Folks, if there is no God, then we really **are** no better than single-celled organisms—we're just more developed. Now, there are people who would say that the lives of humans are not more important than those of whales, pets, horses and rare birds, but I have never met a person who would carry that to it's logical conclusion and say that we are no better than tape-worms and cockroaches.
-If we really are just glorified protein molecules that got struck by lightening, then there is absolutely no justification for **any** guidelines on right and wrong.
- c. Some atheistic philosophers will argue that our built-in moral code is just a cultural thing.
Let's say that's true. Some cultures invite their neighbors over to eat; some cultures **eat** their neighbors. Which system if right? If there really is no moral DNA, then the logical conclusion is—**it doesn't matter!** .
- d. Take this a step further. In this kind of system, Auschwitz is really no worse than Sick Kids Hospital. If there really is no purpose to life--if we just happened--why **not** experiment on humans and eliminate the defective ones? Hitler simply took the philosophy of the **survival of the fittest** to its natural conclusion.

-If this all just happened by chance, then there IS no set standard for what ought to happen, what ought not to happen. Nothing is evil—it's only inconvenient.

2. Friends, this is a **huge** barrier for people who do not believe there is a God. Atheistic philosophers like Bertrand Russell have admitted that they cannot consistently live what they say they believe out to the fringes of life—that there is absolutely no purpose or meaning to life. That **how** you live, how you treat others—makes absolutely no difference. Know why? Because there **is** meaning in life, and there **is** a God who holds us accountable for injustice and cruelty.

This is the bottom line question: If this universal sense of right and wrong that keeps our world from dissolving into chaos **didn't** come from a Supreme Being who created us, then exactly **where** did it come from?

- C. Let me mention one final form of evidence that has to be accounted for when a person does not believe in the existence of God. It's illustrated by these two books that represent hundreds of others: **Giant Steps** and **By Their Blood**. These are the stories of real people who have died for no other reason than claiming to have experienced the power of a God who transformed their lives.

-Some atheistic scientists get quite arrogant on this issue. A 19th century politician named Robert Green Ingersoll pretty much sums it up: "For ages, a deadly conflict has been waged between a few brave men and women of thought and genius upon the one side and the great ignorant religious mass on the other."

1. Now, this is the question. If you were to do a mass IQ test involving millions of people, would you find that, on average, people who believe in God are less intelligent and more naïve than those who **don't**? I don't think so.

2. Truth is that there are millions of intelligent, honest, rational, educated people in this world who claim to have directly experienced the Presence of God in some way in their lives. They have talked with Him, been guided by Him in making wise decisions, and have found hope, comfort and peace from Him in the middle of horrible circumstances. They would testify, under oath, that it was only **His** power that helped them overcome destructive habits and brokenness. They have a deep sense of forgiveness and freedom from the past.

-This is the question: ***Are all these people nuts? Or, worse--are they all lying? Are they all wrong? People who are a few bricks short of a full load?***

Atheists will say, "Yeah, religion, belief in God is a placebo. A crutch for weak people!" Really? You mean, like for the disciples of Jesus, most of who were tortured to death for their eye-witness accounts of the resurrection? Like, for the estimated 85 **million** people who laid down their lives for their faith in the last century under the communist regimes in China and the USSR?

-Now, I'm not saying that some people don't have mental illnesses where they think they're Jesus Christ or God Himself. I'm not saying that there haven't been people who haven't deliberately led others astray into weirdness. I'm just saying that hundreds of millions of trustworthy, honest, reliable, non-marijuana smoking people would be willing to take a polygraph test on the authenticity of their personal experience of God. Presidents, statesmen, scientists, philosophers--some of the best the world has seen.

3. Now, does this evidence stand totally on its own? Of course not. But in looking at God's fingerprints all over creation—and His DNA in our hearts—along with the trustworthy witnesses and examples of millions of people like Isaac Newton, C.S. Lewis, Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King, Jr., the weight of it all is very significant.

So, let me wrap up this part.

*Look around you at everything that exists—from the intricacy of the DNA in your cells to the intricate balance of the entire universe.

Then and ask yourself, "Is it reasonable to think this just happened—***poof!*** Appeared out of nothing—or does it look like it was caused by Someone unchanging, eternal, all-powerful?"

*Does it really make sense to believe that there is absolutely no meaning in life—and that the morals of a Paul Bernardo or Hitler are no better or worse than those of a Mother Theresa—because there ***is*** no real right or wrong? Does that make sense?

*Finally, does it make sense to believe that the billions of people who claim to have experienced the power, presence, peace, and direct intervention of God are on the ***opium of the masses***, as Karl Marx put it? Deceived?

III. BE HONEST AND CONSISTENT

- A. Now, why is it that good, smart people can look at all of life in its intricacy—and stand in awe of it—and still come to the conclusion that ***it just happened?*** Romans 1:18-20 makes a very interesting statement:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been CLEARLY seen, being UNDERSTOOD from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

1. What's this saying? That all people who don't see God or believe in God are just plain wicked people? Not at all.
What it's saying is that people who don't acknowledge God are not seeing what ***is*** with a full perspective. For some reason, some people believe that to be scientific, intellectual—you have to see the world ***only*** through scientific eyes and reject the existence of the spiritual world.
-In his book, ***Can A Smart Person Believe in God?*** Michael Guillen talks about IQ—intelligence quotient, and SQ, spiritual quotient. He says that people who look at the world only with one perspective are ***Cyclops***. Michael has a triple Ph.D. in math, physics and chemistry, taught at Harvard, and served as the ABC News science correspondent. He says IQ eyes alone give an incomplete picture of what ***is***. He knows, because that's how he once saw the world. The other side of that is that people who scoff at science from a totally Spiritual Quotient perspective also end up with a skewed view of reality. God has given us both—and to see life properly, you need both.
2. You need to understand that a person's decision to not believe in the existence of God often has very little to do with science.
 - a. Several weeks ago, I read the perspective of a well-known Toronto columnist. He doesn't believe in God because of the suffering some people close to him have experienced. The suffering and evil in the world have caused some people to just put on their science eyes because the existence of God seems inconsistent with suffering.
 - b. Some people choose not to believe in God because of someone they know who claims to be a hypocrite. And some people don't believe in God because it's inconsistent with their lifestyle. I once had a person tell me that they argued for years against the existence of God—not because that's what they really believed, but because they knew if they ever admitted He ***did*** exist, they would have to change the way they lived.

-Sometimes people get put off by the verse in that says, ***The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God' (Psalm 14:1 NIV)***. If you read on, what you realize is that this is talking about a person who uses and abuses others in evil ways thinking, "So, who exactly is going to ***stop*** me?" Get it? It's ***ethically convenient*** to believe there is no God and no accountability.

- B. Let me mention another group of people who may struggle with believing in the existence of God--and need to just be honest with the evidence. You may be one.
1. Sometimes people have a professor in university or an author they deeply admire who says that belief in God is for sub-intelligent, naïve people who need a crutch.

There are people who, in essence **check their brain at the door** as a form of intellectual laziness. Let me illustrate this with a current example. Even a little investigation would show any intelligent person that the main theory of Dan Brown's novel, **The Da Vinci Code**, which claims to be historically accurate, is based on fake documentation from a French con artist by the name of Plantard who, under oath, admitted he had made it all up.

-And that's just the main story line. He casually dismisses huge areas of history that scholars and archaeologists have spent their whole lives studying—without even a single footnote. He makes blatantly false statements—not just one or two, but dozens—and then says, "Trust me. This is all fact!" And the **tragedy** is that there are people who will read this book or see the movie and swallow the whole conspiracy theory--hook line and sinker and never check **once** to find out if it's true. Why would we be so irresponsible with our souls? We don't do that with our bodies, or our investments or our children.

2. No matter who you believe and follow—whether it's Jesus of Nazareth, or Stephen Hawking, you have to do your homework and be honest with the truth. **Don't check your brain at the door! Don't ever let someone else do your thinking for you!** There is **so** much at stake! If you're going to trust someone our world calls an expert, you need to know that every person on this planet, no matter how many degrees they have or books they've written is a human being--a human being with flaws, blind spots, prejudices, pride and limited knowledge.
- C. Whoever makes atheism their theory of choice needs to understand that the **natural conclusion** is a dark, hopeless, purposeless existence. If there is no God—their is no reason for life—and there is no reason to live.
1. The concept of **sheer chance** basically means that as amazing and beautiful and awesome as life is—as the universe is—it is absolutely meaningless. It really doesn't make any difference what happens here.
Therefore, it doesn't really make any difference what we do. And one day everything will simply blip into cosmic gas.
 2. Now, you tell me: If the universe is the product of blind chance; if human beings are just accidents of nature; mutations; grown up germs--and everything ultimately leads to death; if we have been vomited up into a purposeless universe to live a purposeless life and then get erased like writing on a chalk board--what is left except total despair? Why do anything for anyone? Why even think? What difference does **anything** make?
 3. The irony is that people who don't believe in the existence of God--scientists, philosophers or teachers--continue to live as if life has meaning, when the only **God** gives life meaning.

-The most powerful truth in the world is that **life does have meaning!** There is a God who is involved in the lives of humans. There **is** an afterlife. What we do for others **does** make a difference, because there is a God who punishes evil and rewards good. And the universe will not blip into gas. There is coming a time where there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

IV. NOTHING TO LOSE; EVERYTHING TO GAIN

- A. I personally believe that the evidence for the existence of God is overwhelming--irrefutable. And I've looked at the evidence. I've seen debates. In fact, I have a tape of one in my office between a well-known atheist and William Lane Craig--an apologist for the Christian faith.

-What I found so interesting in this debate was that the person arguing for the atheistic position either did not or could not refute the evidence for God's existence. If you listen to it, his argument is a series of put-downs on the authority of the Bible, the failures of Christ-followers, and the evidence for who Christ is. Why? Because it is impossible to prove that God does not exist--and there's tons of evidence to suggest that He does.

- B. But, let's say, for the purpose of argument, that the playing field is absolutely even. Believing or not believing in God is simply a matter of choice--the evidence doesn't push you either way. If you choose to believe in God, you have everything to gain, and nothing to lose. If He does exist, and you stake your life on Him, then you have life, meaning, purpose, and happiness--that's been the experience of hundreds of millions who have. If for some reason, five minutes after you die, it's clear that He doesn't exist, you've lost nothing.

-Let's say you go the other way. In the face of everything we see—externally, in the unbelievable design of this world, and internally, in the moral compass we all have--you choose **not** to believe in God. If you're right about that--you've gained absolutely nothing in life--because, without God, there **is** nothing to gain. Life doesn't make any difference. But, if at the end you find out that He **does**, in fact exist and you have rejected Him--you have everything to lose. Think about it!

-In these next weeks, we're going to be talking about a number of issues surrounding life—and God. This is my final request: **Please don't check your brain at the door!**