

Leader's Guide

Questioning God: Is Science Incompatible with the Christian Faith?

Primary Scripture - John 1:1–3

Suggested Meeting Length - 45–60 minutes

Main Idea - Science and Christianity are not enemies. Science studies how God's physical creation works, while Christianity helps us understand who created it, why it exists, and what it means. In short, presupposing the Christian View of God and the World is the only view that makes Science intelligible.

Purpose of the Session - By the end of the discussion, participants should be able to: Explain the difference between science and scientism. Recognize naturalism as a philosophical belief rather than a scientific discovery. Understand why Christianity gives us the foundation for expecting an orderly and understandable universe. Discuss questions about science and faith with humility, grace, and confidence. See scientific discovery as a reason to worship God rather than reject him.

A Note to the Leader

This group may include skeptics, seekers, new believers, and mature Christians. Do not assume that everyone accepts the Bible or believes in God.

The purpose of this discussion is not to win an argument. It is to help participants recognize that science does not require atheism or naturalism. A person should study the physical world carefully presupposing that God created and sustains it.

You do not need to be a scientist or a trained theologian to lead this discussion. Keep bringing the group back to a few basic ideas: Science is a valuable way of studying the physical world. Science has limits because it is designed to answer certain kinds of questions. Scientism and naturalism are philosophical beliefs, not scientific discoveries. Christianity provides the foundation for the order and intelligibility that make science possible. All creation ultimately points to Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made. Many important scientific discoveries have been made by people who believed in God. Christians should be grateful for scientific knowledge, medical advances, technology, and the careful study of creation.

Before the Meeting

Read the following passages: John 1:1–5, Genesis 1:1–5, 26–27, Psalm 19:1–4, Psalm 33:6–9, Colossians 1:15–17, Romans 1:18–20

Consider these questions as you prepare: Have you ever felt that science and Christianity were in conflict? What scientific discovery causes you to marvel at creation? E.g., “Big Bang.” How would you explain the difference between science and scientism? How can you respond graciously to someone who believes science has disproved God?

Opening Golf Question-Begin with a relaxed question that everyone can answer:

“What is one piece of golf technology that has helped your game, and what can it never tell you?”

Possible answers might include: A rangefinder can measure distance but cannot tell you which club you will hit confidently. TrackMan can analyze a swing but cannot measure courage under pressure. A launch monitor can measure ball flight but cannot explain why someone loves golf. A GPS can show the shape of a hole but cannot make the decision for you. A scorecard records your score but cannot measure your honesty, friendships, or character.

After several responses, say something like: “Golf technology gives us valuable information, but it cannot answer every question. That does not make the information useless. It simply reminds us that different tools answer different kinds of questions.”

Read the Scripture - Ask someone to read John 1:1–3 aloud:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

Explain that “the Word” refers to Jesus Christ. John teaches that Jesus existed before creation, is fully God, and is the one through whom everything was created.

You may then ask: What claims does this passage make about Jesus? What does it mean that everything was made through him? How does this passage shape the way Christians view the natural world?

Premise 1: Science Is a Valuable Tool

Science is a disciplined way of studying the physical world. It helps us observe patterns, test ideas, measure results, and better understand how nature works.

TrackMan offers a helpful comparison. It gathers physical information about a golf shot. It can measure speed, angle, direction, spin, and distance. If used properly, that information can help a golfer understand and improve their swing.

Science does something similar on a much larger scale. It helps us study everything from tiny particles to distant galaxies.

Christians should applaud scientific investigation. If God created the universe, then studying creation should reveal more about its order, complexity, and beauty.

Discussion Questions: What are some ways science has improved our lives? Why might some Christians feel threatened by science? Why should Christians be willing to investigate the natural

world honestly? Can discovering how something works remove the need for a creator? Why or why not?

Leader's Emphasis - Knowing how something works is not the same as knowing why it exists.

A golf instructor may explain exactly how a golf club was designed, but that explanation does not prove that no designer was involved. In the same way, explaining a natural process does not settle the larger question of why the universe exists.

Premise 2: Science Cannot Answer Every Question

TrackMan can measure the physical details of a golf shot, but it cannot measure everything that matters. It cannot tell whether the golfer is honest. It cannot measure love, loyalty, courage, purpose, guilt, forgiveness, or hope. These realities are not imaginary simply because a machine cannot measure them. Science is designed primarily to study the physical world. It is not designed to answer every philosophical, moral, or spiritual question.

Ask the group: Can science determine whether lying is morally wrong? Can a laboratory experiment prove that people have dignity? Can a telescope tell us why beauty moves us? Can mathematics explain why we should love our neighbors? Can a medical test tell us whether our lives have eternal purpose?

Science may describe what happens in our brains or bodies during certain experiences, but a physical description does not fully explain their meaning.

Possible Discussion Questions: What important realities in life cannot be measured scientifically? Why do people sometimes assume that only measurable things are real? What happens when we ask science to answer questions it was not designed to answer? Where do people find answers to questions about meaning, morality, and purpose?

Leader's Emphasis – Be careful not to criticize science for having limits. Every area of study has limits.

A scorecard cannot explain a friendship. A yardage book cannot tell you whether to forgive someone. TrackMan cannot tell you whether cheating is wrong. These tools remain valuable, but they cannot answer every kind of question.

Premise 3: Science Is Not the Same as Scientism

This distinction is central to the devotional.

Science studies the physical world through observation, measurement, and testing.

Scientism is the belief that science is the only reliable path to knowledge. Scientism sounds scientific, but it is actually a philosophical claim. No scientific experiment can prove that scientific experiments are the only way to know anything.

We know many things without using a laboratory: We know certain truths through reason and logic. We know historical events through testimony and evidence. We know other people through relationships. We know moral truths through conscience and revelation. We know God because he has revealed himself through creation, Scripture, and ultimately Jesus Christ.

If someone says, “I only believe what science can prove,” you might gently ask, “Can science prove that statement?” It is “self-defeating.” i.e., the statement cannot pass its own test.

Discussion Questions: How would you explain scientism in your own words? Why is scientism a philosophical belief rather than a scientific conclusion? What are some things you know that cannot be demonstrated through a scientific experiment? Why is it important to separate science from scientism?

Possible Objection

“If something cannot be tested scientifically, why should I believe it?”

Suggested Response - Scientific testing is one important way of gaining knowledge, but it is not the only way.

You cannot scientifically prove that other minds exist, that all people have equal value, or that cruelty is morally wrong. You cannot place love, justice, or human dignity under a microscope. Yet we have good reasons to believe these things are real. Different questions require different kinds of evidence.

Premise 4: Naturalism Is Also a Belief

Naturalism is the belief that physical nature is all that exists. According to naturalism, there is no God, no spiritual reality, and no purpose beyond the physical universe.

However, science cannot prove naturalism. Science studies nature, so it naturally looks for physical explanations of physical events. That does not prove that physical nature is all that exists. Imagine someone using a metal detector on a golf course. The detector may find coins, ball markers, and other metal objects. But it would be unreasonable to conclude that grass, trees, golfers, and golf balls do not exist simply because the metal detector cannot detect them.

The limitation is in the tool, not in reality. In the same way, science can study the physical world without claiming that the physical world is all that exists.

Discussion Questions: What is the difference between studying nature and believing that nature is all that exists? Why can science neither prove nor disprove naturalism by itself? What assumptions do people bring with them when they study the universe? How might a Christian and a naturalist interpret the same scientific discovery differently?

Leader’s Emphasis

Both Christians and naturalists approach the evidence with beliefs about reality.

The Christian believes that God created and sustains the universe. The naturalist believes that nothing exists beyond nature. Scientific evidence is then interpreted within those larger beliefs.

This does not mean evidence is unimportant. It means that no one examines evidence without **basic beliefs** about what reality is.

Premise 5: Christianity Explains Why Science Works

Scientific investigation depends on several important assumptions: The universe is orderly. Nature behaves in consistent ways. Mathematical laws describe physical reality. Human reasoning is generally able to understand the world. Our senses and observations give us meaningful information. Truth is worth discovering.

In truth, Christianity provides the only foundation for these beliefs. The Bible teaches that the universe was created by a rational and faithful God. Creation is not ruled by chaos or by unpredictable gods fighting one another. It reflects the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of its Creator.

The Bible also teaches that human beings were made in God's image. Although sin affects every part of us, including our thinking, God has given us minds capable of reasoning, observing, and learning about his world. **This does not mean Christians understand everything. It means we have a reason to expect the universe to be orderly and understandable.**

Discussion Questions: Why do scientists expect experiments to produce consistent results? Why is mathematics so effective in describing the physical universe? Why should the human mind be capable of understanding nature? How does belief in a rational Creator help answer these questions?

Premise 6: Jesus Christ Is at the Center of Creation

John 1 does more than say that a god created the universe. It identifies Jesus Christ as the eternal Word through whom all things were made. Jesus is not simply a religious teacher who appeared late in history. He existed before creation. He was with God, and he was God.

Colossians 1:16–17 teaches the same truth: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Everything was created: By Christ-Through Christ-For Christ-Under the sustaining power of Christ. The universe is not an accident without purpose. Creation exists for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions: How does John 1 describe Jesus? What difference does it make to believe that everything was created through Christ? How should Christians respond to the beauty

and order of creation? If everything was created for Christ, what does that mean for the purpose of our lives?

The Gospel Connection

The God who created the world is also the God who entered his creation.

John 1:14 tells us: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Jesus Christ took on human nature and lived among us. The Creator entered the world he had made – As C.S. Lewis reasoned, “the author entered his own story.”

Humanity’s greatest problem is not a lack of scientific knowledge. Our greatest problem is sin. We have rejected God’s authority, ignored his truth, and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. Scientific progress cannot remove guilt, reconcile us to God, or give us eternal life. We need something science was never intended to provide: a Savior.

Jesus lived the obedient life we have failed to live. He died on the cross to bear the judgment deserved by sinners, and he rose from the dead in victory. Everyone who turns from sin and trusts in him receives forgiveness and eternal life. The Creator is not distant from us. He came to rescue us.

Discussion Questions: Why can scientific progress not solve humanity’s deepest problem? What does it mean that the Creator entered his creation? How does Jesus answer our need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God? How might the Christian gospel speak to someone searching for meaning and purpose?

Common Questions and Objections

“Hasn’t science disproved God?”

Science studies the physical world and its processes. God is not one more physical object within the universe to be measured in a laboratory. Science can explain many natural processes, but explaining a process does not prove that there is no Creator behind it.

The Christian claim is not that God fills temporary gaps in scientific knowledge. The Christian claim is that God created and sustains the entire universe, including the natural processes science investigates.

“Don’t Christians have to reject scientific evidence?”

No. Christians should follow evidence carefully and honestly. Christians may disagree about how certain scientific findings should be interpreted, especially when discussing the age of the earth or the development of living things. However, disagreement over interpretation is not the same as rejecting science. The Bible teaches that God is the author of creation and the author of Scripture. When both are understood correctly, they will not ultimately contradict each other.

“Is belief in God just faith without evidence?”

Christian faith is not a blind leap without reasons. Christians point to the existence and order of the universe, the reality of moral obligation, the historical evidence surrounding Jesus, the testimony of Scripture, and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Faith means trusting God on the basis of who he is and what he has revealed. It does not mean believing something irrationally.

“If God created everything, who created God?”

Everything that begins to exist requires a cause. God did not begin to exist.

The Christian understanding of God is that he is eternal, self-existent, and not dependent upon anything outside himself. God is not one more created object within the universe. He is the eternal Creator on whom everything else depends.

“Can a scientist be a Christian?”

Yes. And history is filled with many! Studying creation and trusting its Creator are not incompatible. A Christian scientist can investigate natural processes with the belief that the order being studied reflects the wisdom and faithfulness of God.

Personal Application - Ask participants to consider the following: Do I treat science as a valuable tool or as the only source of truth? Have I assumed that scientific explanations make God unnecessary? Does the order of creation lead me to worship God? Am I willing to admit the limits of my own knowledge? Can I discuss difficult questions without becoming defensive or disrespectful? Have I trusted Christ, the one through whom all things were made?

Returning to the Three Study Questions

1. What can TrackMan tell you about your golf swing, and what important things about you and your life can it never measure?

TrackMan can measure physical details such as speed, spin, distance, and direction. It cannot measure love, honesty, fear, courage, purpose, or a person's relationship with God. The point is not that TrackMan is defective. It is simply limited to the kind of information it was designed to collect.

2. What is the difference between science and scientism? Why is that difference important when discussing faith and science?

Science is a method for studying the physical world. Scientism is the philosophical belief that science is the only path to knowledge. The distinction matters because Christianity does not oppose the scientific study of nature. It rejects the unsupported claim that science is capable of answering every meaningful question.

3. How does the order and intelligibility of the universe point you toward the wisdom and power of its Creator?

The universe operates according to consistent patterns that human beings can observe, understand, and express mathematically. Christianity explains this order by teaching that a rational God created the universe and made human beings in his image. The order of creation reflects the wisdom of its Creator.

Closing Summary - You might close the discussion by saying:

“TrackMan can tell us a great deal about a golf shot, but it cannot tell us everything that matters. In the same way, science gives us remarkable knowledge about the physical universe, but it cannot answer every question about meaning, morality, purpose, or God.

“The real conflict is not between Christianity and science. It is between different beliefs about reality. Naturalism says that nature is all that exists. Christianity says that the universe was created through Jesus Christ and exists for his glory.

“Every scientific discovery gives us another opportunity to admire the order, beauty, and wisdom God placed within creation. Science can help us understand more about what God has made, but only God can tell us why we are here and how we can be reconciled to him.”