Teachable Books: Free Downloadable Discussion Guides from Cokesbury

Can You Believe In God and Evolution?

by Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett

Discussion Guide

Can You Believe In God and Evolution? – A Guide For the Perplexed, by Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett (Abingdon Press, copyright 2005), contains a thoughtful and lively discussion of the current culture war over evolution. It tackles a wide variety of questions concerning faith and science and provides a solid understanding of the issues and positions involved. The book offers a way to integrate science with faith and encourages the idea that science can become a divine vocation. The authors place themselves in a middle position, subscribing both to Christian faith while embracing the value of the Darwinian model of evolution for scientific research and classroom teaching.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

Is There a Battle in Our Classrooms and Congregations?

This chapter looks at the crisis in the classroom and in the congregation and gives an overview of the book and the beliefs of the authors.

1. Share why you selected this book to read and what you hope to gain from it.

2. Why is evolution such a hot topic?

3. How are students and teachers impacted by this debate?

4. Do you believe this issue is a crisis or becoming one? Explain your reasoning.

5. Do you believe science can draw people away from belief in God?

6. If you were a student in college, how would you handle this issue?

7. Discuss the concerns the authors make in this chapter.
8. Discuss how a “map” can help navigate this controversy.

9. How has this chapter helped or challenged you?

10. As you complete this first chapter, do you agree or disagree with the authors? Explain your reasoning.

Activities

AS A GROUP: Ask each group member to draw their own version of the map as suggested by the authors to become more familiar with the topics involved.

AT HOME: Reflect on your own position. Write down some questions you have as you begin this journey.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for both science and religion. We need them both in our lives. Help us to carefully examine all the issues involved with open minds as we seek answers to our questions. Amen.
Chapter 2

**What Did Charles Darwin Actually Say?**

*This chapter looks at Darwin’s model of evolution and what he wrote about religious belief in his book, Origin of Species.*

1. Prior to reading this chapter, what did you know about Charles Darwin?
2. Give a summary of what Darwin did say about religious belief.
3. What did you learn from this chapter about what Darwin thought?
4. Give a brief summary of Darwin’s theory.
5. Explain what natural selection is and how it differs from artificial selection.
6. What is Neo-Darwinian Synthesis?
7. What was the reaction to Origin of Species in 1859?
8. What does it mean that the Darwinian evolution is an explanatory model based on observation?
9. What two things influenced a change in Darwin’s own belief system, according to the authors?
10. What new insights about Charles Darwin and what he said did you find in this chapter?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Divide into two groups and create two lists. One list will include what Darwin said. The other list will include what he did not say. Compare and discuss.

AT HOME: Research the book, Origin of Species on the Internet.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this discussion and for answering some questions about Darwin and what he actually said. Help us to seek the truth and look to you for answers. Amen.

Chapter 3

**Only a Theory? What Do Research Scientists Actually Do?**

*This chapter covers the origins of science and details the workings of scientists & researchers. It also examines the use of models in science.*

1. Why is it important to know what research scientists actually do?
2. Discuss the early beginnings of science.
3. How did Rene Descartes impact science?
4. What is the Cartesian split?
5. What does it mean that Darwinism is a child of substance dualism?
6. List the stages or steps of scientific method.
7. Explain the difference between a theory and a law.
8. How is Darwinian evolution different from other sciences?
9. Explain what it means that science gives us models, not the whole truth.
10. What new insight did you gain from this chapter or this discussion?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Examine newspapers and magazines for news stories relating to the battle over God and evolution.

AT HOME: Use your local library or the Internet to learn more about the some of the pioneers of science mentioned in this chapter.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the work of scientists and for the good that has resulted from their work. Guide them as they search for cures to diseases. Amen.
Chapter 4
Can We Believe in God and Evolution?

This chapter shows why science and religion have much to say to each other.

1. Discuss the difference between science and philosophy. Why do they get confused?
2. Review the three points of scientific method.
3. Give an example of making a philosophical, but not a scientific choice.
4. Define atheism and an atheistic materialist.
5. Explain the importance of this question: What step in the scientific method requires the scientist to declare God does not exist?
6. Explain how scientists arrive at their own religious and philosophical positions.
7. Give some examples of atheistic materialists and their views.
8. What do the authors say about science being compatible with a religious viewpoint?
9. What does Beatrice Bruteau say about why a Christian contemplative needs to understand science?
10. What did you learn about believing in God and evolution from reading this chapter?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Give each person a card or piece of paper and ask them to write down three things they believe, but cannot prove. Share and discuss the written statements.

AT HOME: Reflect on what you believe about God.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the freedom to have and voice our own opinions. Help us to continue to seek the truth and really listen to the opinions of others. Amen.
Chapter 5

Does Evolution Corrupt Our Values?

This chapter goes back in history to search for answers to the above question.

1. Briefly explain why Christian creationists believe that the concept of evolution corrupts our values.

2. What’s the connection between Spencer, Galton and Huxley?

3. Explain how and why Darwin’s science exploded with social and theological shrapnel.

4. Explain Social Darwinism as proposed by Herbert Spencer.

5. Why was Darwin’s book readily received by English society?

6. Discuss the impact of Galton’s eugenic proposals.

7. How was Hitler influenced by Darwin, Spencer and Galton?

8. How did Thomas Huxley view the Darwinian evolution?

9. Give a summary of how the views of Spencer, Galton and Huxley came together.

10. Discuss the author’s views in the last paragraph in this chapter. What major points do they make?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Create a list of ten ways that values get corrupted.

AT HOME: Reflect on your own values and what they are based upon.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the gift of values. It is often difficult to know right from wrong. Give us your guidance and help us to faithfully follow Christ. Amen.
Chapter 6

What Do Sociobiologists and Evolutionary Psychologists Say?

This chapter offers reactions to Wilson’s sociobiological model and looks at evolutionary psychology.

1. What did Edward Wilson add to the neo-Darwinist synthesis?
2. Why did Gould and others object to Wilson’s socialbiological model?
4. Discuss the connection between prairie dogs and kin selection.
5. Give a brief summary of evolutionary psychology.
6. How is human behavior a product of our genes?
7. List some of the questions raised about genes by the authors in this chapter.
8. What is the Christian perspective of this issue, according to the authors?
9. Name the criticism of coherence given in the final paragraph.
10. How did this chapter help you better understand the issues involved in this debate?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Select a statement or topic of special interest found in this chapter and discuss it as a group.

AT HOME: Search the Internet for more about this topic.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this discussion and for the opinions shared by group members. Help us to have open minds as we continue to look at the issues involved. Amen.

Chapter 7
**What do the Creationists believe?**

*This chapter gives an overview of the people who believe in creationism and looks at teachings of scientific creationists.*

1. How are Christ and the Gospel viewed by creationists?
2. What do creationists find objectionable about the Darwinian model?
3. List the six teachings of creationists.
4. Name the two levels that creationists based their objections to Darwin’s principle of natural selection.
5. What do creationists believe about the creation of the cosmos?
6. Explain the significance of the word “kind” to creationists.
7. Why do creationists believe there was no common descent?
8. Discuss what creationists believe about the world’s geology.
9. List the reasons why creationists say the earth is less than 10,000 years old.
10. Briefly discuss definitions and differences between scientific, biblical and progressive creationism.

**Activities**

AS A GROUP: Divide the group in half and debate the age of the earth using information from this chapter.

AT HOME: Reflect on what common views about Christ and the Gospel that you share with Creationists.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for giving us more information about creationists and what they believe. Help us to respect differences of opinion wherever we may encounter them. Amen.
Is Creationism Just Fundamentalism?

This chapter examines the differences between creationism and fundamentalism and looks at the “Five Fundamentals.”

1. How are creationism and fundamentalism different?
2. What similarities are shared by creationists and fundamentalists?
3. How do creationists justify their claims?
4. How does the Institute for Creation Research (IRC) distinguish between biblical and scientific creationism?
5. Discuss the origin of the fundamentalism movement.
7. What fact or issue surprised you in this chapter and why?
8. Discuss the main point or issue that is so relevant to the present controversy, according to the authors.
9. Why can’t today’s creationism be reduced to yesterday’s fundamentalism?
10. Share how this chapter has helped you separate creationism and fundamentalism.

Activities

AS A GROUP: Select one of the five fundamentals listed in this chapter and have each group member give their opinion about it.

AT HOME: Reflect on your own fundamentals of your faith.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the faith of our ancestors. Help us to continue to hold fast to our faith and to pass it along to future generations. Amen.

Chapter 9
What Does Intelligent Design Teach?

This chapter looks at the various aspects of Intelligent Design.

1. Give some examples of design in nature.
2. Discuss Darwin’s explanation for design in nature.
3. Why did Darwin’s explanation and model have a completely physical basis?
4. What is meant by the word “design” and how does it differ from purpose?
5. How did observations by St. Thomas Aquinas and William Paley get distorted in meaning?
6. Name the modern day proponents of intelligent design and give a summary of what they believe.
7. Why is intelligent design “bad science” according to the authors?
8. Explain the strategy of “teaching the controversy” and give your opinion about it.
9. Why is intelligent design so attractive?
10. Why do the authors believe that science is not the real problem?

Activities

AS A GROUP: As a group, create a list of the problems you have with the idea of intelligent design.

AT HOME: Open your eyes this week and observe examples of design in nature.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this look at the idea of intelligent design. Help us to continue to seek answers as our faith continues to grow. Amen.
Chapter 10

What are the Theistic Evolutionists, and Why are They so Silent?

This chapter people who have made peace between their faith commitments and the Darwinian model of evolution.

2. What is a theistic evolutionist and what do they believe?
3. What did Benjamin Warfield believe and why is he important?
4. Discuss the position of Teihard.
5. Why are theistic evolutionists criticized by creationists?
6. Why don’t theistic evolutionists play any role in this controversy? List the three main reasons.
7. Discuss the pros and cons for sharing your opinion on this or any other issue.
8. How do you think the authors view theistic evolutionists and why?
9. How did this chapter help you better understand the issues involved in this controversy?
10. Give a brief summary of this chapter and your own opinion of theistic evolutionists.

Activities

AS A GROUP: Go over the Clergy Letter Project sentence by sentence and see how it differs from the position of creationists.

AT HOME: Reflect upon why you voice some views and keep silent on others.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this look at the beliefs of theistic evolutionists. Help us to have the courage to speak out in faith on issues that are important to us. Amen.
Chapter 11
What Stake Do Christians, Jews, and Muslims Have in Anti-Darwinism?

This chapter compares religious views on Darwinism and Anti-Darwinism.

1. Why are today’s evolution wars being primarily fought in North America?
2. Discuss why concern is growing on how the Bible is interpreted.
3. Discuss the tradition of unmediated Bible reading.
4. List some Christian faiths that practice a mediated method of Bible reading.
5. Discuss the court strategies of fundamentalists since the 1920s.
6. How do Roman Catholics treat Darwinian evolution?
7. Why is the subject of evolution not a problem for eastern Orthodox Christians?
8. Give a summary of how liberal Protestants feel about this issue.
9. What stake does Judaism have in the evolution controversy?
10. How does contemporary Islam feel about Darwinism versus Anti-Darwinism?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Select one of the religious communities profiled in this chapter and list what you like and dislike about their view on Darwinism.

AT HOME: Select a religious faith you know little about and use the Internet to learn more about them.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this discussion and the sharing that has taken place. Bring us to a better understanding of the faith of others. Amen.
Chapter 12

What Can We Teach Our Children in Our Churches and Schools?

This chapter provides five positions of the authors on this question.

1. Explain how and why science can be a Christian vocation.
2. What position do the authors take about science in schools? Do you agree?
3. Explain what is meant by measuring the quality of science by its fertility.
4. Why do the authors support teaching evolutionary theory and laboratory practice in schools?
5. Why is faith at stake in this debate, according to the authors?
6. Discuss what the authors say about the balance of “old” religion and “new” science.
7. Why is science important to the future of our nation and world?
8. List the traits of a healthy science curriculum.
9. Do you agree with the author’s comments on Roman Catholic Schools? Explain.
10. How did this discussion help you?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Create a list of rights related to teaching science in schools.

AT HOME: This week get the view of a student about what they believe.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you that our children can learn more about you and about your creation. Help us to help them gain the tools they need to grow in scientific wisdom and in faith. Amen.
Chapter 13
How Do Marty and Ted Connect God and Evolution?

*This chapter provides the author’s version of theistic evolution.*

1. Do most of your friends share the same views on evolution? Explain.
2. List some reasons why the authors accept the Darwinian interpretation of nature.
3. Where do the authors find purpose? Do you agree with them?
4. God gave the world a future in two senses, according to the authors. Explain this.
5. What kind of God do the authors believe in?
6. What statements made by the authors in this chapter do you find especially strong and powerful?
7. In what ways do the authors affirm the best of science in thinking?
8. How does the biblical book of Revelation fit in with the author’s beliefs?
9. Discuss how you connect God and evolution.
10. What new insights did you gain from this chapter and this discussion?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Using the statements by the authors in this chapter, write a top ten list of what they believe.

AT HOME: Write a top ten list of what you believe about God and evolution.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for accepting us just as we are. Help us to accept and love others, just as you love us. Amen.
Chapter 14

How Should We Interpret the Creation Story in Genesis?

This chapter examines the book of Genesis and what it says about creation.

1. List some of the fears by the parties involved in this debate.
11. How do creationists view the book of Genesis?
12. List some questions that the book of Genesis does not really seem to answer.
13. Discuss the three problems the authors see with the creationist interpretation of Genesis.
14. Discuss ways to constructively get involved and share your opinion on this on-going debate.
15. What’s the connection between Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Revelation 21:1-4, according to the authors.
16. Give a summary of how the authors interpret the creation story.
18. Share your own opinion of the creation story as found in Genesis.
19. How has this book and series of discussions helped you better understand the issues involved?

Activities

AS A GROUP: Have a graduation party complete with diplomas and refreshments.

AT HOME: Reflect on this experience and what you have learned.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for this small group of ours and the sharing that has taken place. Bless the members of this group and be with us as we go our separate ways. Amen.