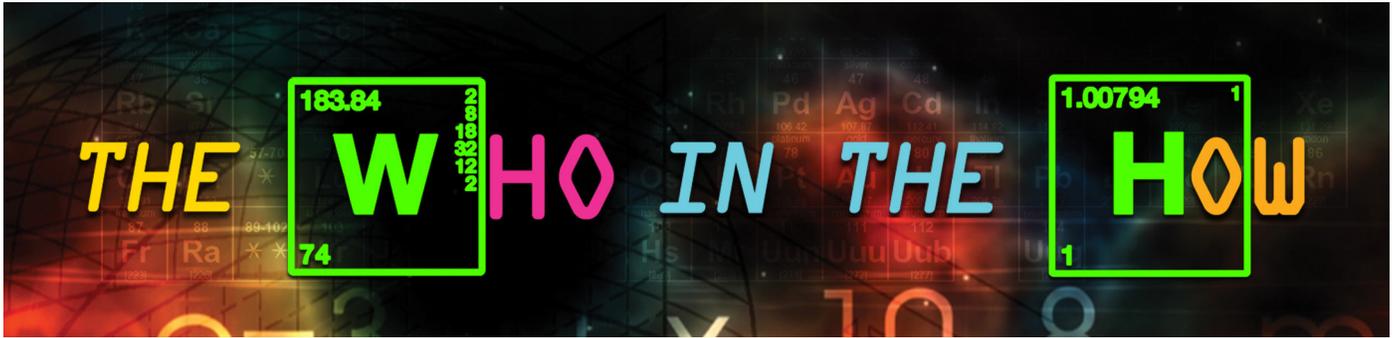


THE WHO IN THE HOW



WE'RE TEACHING THIS

Science is fascinating. Even if it isn't your favorite subject in school, you have to admit it's pretty interesting stuff. Believe it or not, some of the things you're learning right now in middle school science class are things people have been debating for decades. And, if you're a Christian, sometimes those debates can make it seem as though what you learn about science and what you believe about God are completely different things. It's almost as if they're on totally different teams! Kind of like there's a God Team and a Science Team and eventually you're just going to have to pick a side. That's a pretty scary thought, right? But what

if you didn't have to actually choose between faith and science? What if the two actually go hand in hand? The truth is, believing something we learn in science class doesn't mean we have to question our faith in God. In fact, science can actually point us back to God. And that's exactly what this series is all about! We'll take a look at some of the big questions about God and science and see just how well the two actually go together. When we remember to include the Who—God—behind the how—science—we'll see that not only is science not the opposite of faith, it can actually be a catalyst to strengthen it.

THINK ABOUT THIS

By Carey Nieuwhof

So your kid comes up to you and asks, "Dad, how do we know there's a God?" And you...freeze. You say something like, "Because I believe there's a God," or "We just know," or "Because there is," or "Because the Bible says God exists."

Then your kid does what every kid does: he asks you another question. A tough one. Like *Why?* The little-kid routine of asking *why* seventeen times in a row can really expose how little you know as an adult.

Then, in your mind, you fast-forward a few years into middle school when your kid is suddenly asking about dinosaurs, the Big Bang, and Confucius, and you start to have a nervous breakdown. So, how do you respond?

Here are five principles that have helped me navigate faith and questions not only from my kids but also from my experience as a pastor of a local church:

1. DON'T ASSUME CURIOSITY IS SKEPTICISM.

One of the impulses every Christian parent feels is that questions automatically lead to disbelief. No, they don't. Not automatically. Actually, great questions can lead to deeper belief. But it's just way too easy to assume that curiosity is skepticism. Curiosity is not skepticism. It's curiosity.

2. DON'T DISMISS THE QUESTION WITH TRITE ANSWERS.

One of the worst things you can do is answer any faith

question with a simplistic answer like, *“Well, we just have to believe,”* or *“Because it’s true.”* I’ve done that before. Not helpful. Your twelve-year-old suspects two things when you answer that way:

- Christianity doesn’t stand up to questions or advanced thinking.
- There are actually no answers to his question.

Both are mistakes.

3. DON’T OVER-ANSWER THE QUESTION.

An equally bad response is to show up the next day with a dozen theology textbooks and a scheduled Skype interview with one of the world’s foremost Old Testament professors. That’s a bit of overkill for your middle schooler. So, what should you do? Answer the question at the level the questioner is asking it.

Your daughter may just want to know that you believe, and an honest, *“You know honey, there are a lot of reasons to believe in God—I’ve experienced Him myself, personally...and that’s one of the reasons I believe,”* might be a great response.

Your daughter might just say, *“Thanks.”* Or she might ask another question, which you could then answer. In the teen years, you might do a Bible or book study together.

Don’t under-answer a question, or over-answer it.

4. DON’T ASSUME ANSWERS WILL SATISFY THE QUESTIONER.

I have a seminary degree. And a law degree. I can research things half-decently. And I’m an okay preacher.

I’ve done sermons where I have researched my head off and preached my heart out on the subject of why a good God allows bad things to happen, only to have someone ask me a few days later *“So . . . why do you think God allows bad things to happen?”*

In those moments, I want to scream. But those moments teach me something. Often, people aren’t actually looking for an intellectual answer. Instead, their question is coming out of their personal story. So, flip the conversation. Question the questioner, as Ravi Zacharias says. Ask them why they ask.

The person asking the question might tell you his wife is sick and they can’t find a cure. Or your third-grader son might say, *“I want to know why that one kid in our class gets picked on all the time.”* Then go have a conversation about that.

5. MAKE YOUR HOME A GREAT PLACE TO RAISE DOUBTS.

Remember that your kids will eventually have doubts. Why? Because you do. Because I do. Because we all do. Faith is not the absence of doubts. It’s the presence of belief in the midst of doubt.

In her research, Dr. Kara Powell has discovered that the biggest reason kids who grew up in the church lose their faith as adults is not *doubt*. It’s *unexpressed* doubt.

If you make your home a place where questions aren’t welcome, your kids are going to take their questions elsewhere. And where will they take them? Probably to a place that won’t give them the answers you’re hoping for.

So, decide ahead of time as a parent that you won’t freak out when your kid questions you and questions God. Or your teenager tells you that Christianity isn’t different than any other religion. Thank them for the question. Explore it with them. Ask them questions. And reach out to a wider circle of influence that can help them process what they’re going through.

Make your home a safe place where doubts can be expressed. You just might foster belief as a result.

**Connect to a wider community of parents at
www.theparentcue.org.**

TRY THIS

It’s okay if you’re not in the habit of having conversations with your middle schooler about their faith questions. You don’t need to deep-dive into the waters of doubt on your first attempt. Instead, start small.

1. ASK. Start, maybe, by asking what they talked about at

church this week...without asking, *“So what did you talk about at church today?”* Here are a few other ways to start that conversation.

- *“I heard you’re talking about science in church! Can you tell me about it?”*

- “What’s one thing you heard taught at church this week that you’d never heard before?”
- “Tell me one thing you talked about during small group this week.”

If you think you’re ready to dig a little deeper, here are a few more questions you can try.

- “On a scale of 1-10, how important is your faith to you?”
- “If you could ask God one question and know you’d get an answer, what would you ask?”
- “I’ve been thinking. What do you think is the hardest part about following Jesus?”

2. LISTEN. Practice active listening to let your middle schooler know you value what they have to say. Put down your phone and make eye contact. Resist the urge to plan your next response (or your shopping list). Be present.

3. RESPOND. No matter how your middle schooler has answered your question, keep the conversation going. Share your own experiences, questions, and doubts. And if what they say surprises you, freak out on the inside but stay calm on the outside.

Remember, your middle schooler doesn’t need a parent who has all the answers, but they do need a safe place to ask their questions. The way you invite conversation, respond to their questions, and react to their doubts today may determine whether or not they’ll share with you their even bigger questions tomorrow, or next month, or next year. So this week, ask one more question, listen just a little more closely, and try having a conversation instead of an answer.