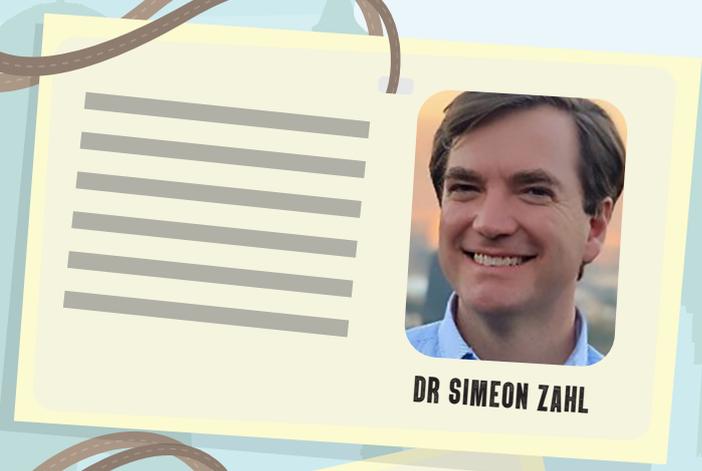


# BIG QUESTIONS BIG ANSWERS

## Vol.1 Investigating GOD



DR SIMEON ZAHL



DR CARISSA SHARP

Featuring psychologist Dr Carissa Sharp  
and theologian Dr Simeon Zahl



# Introduction

**In this section we are going to look at the idea of God.**

In RE, we usually look at what religions teach about God, and sometimes about why people do or don't believe.

This section is doing something a little different. We are exploring how people use different methods to investigate ideas. You are going to be an investigator, using the methods of psychology and theology. You will see that these two different approaches (let's call them *disciplines*) ask different kinds of questions, use different kinds of methods and come up with different kinds of answers.

This does not mean that they contradict or go against each other, but the type of question you ask affects the kind of answer you get.

Here is an introduction to the discipline of psychology, from our expert psychologist, Doctor Carissa Sharp.



DR CARISSA SHARP

## INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY

**Psychologists are interested in studying people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. That is, how and why do people think, feel and behave in the ways that they do?**

We can study this in many different ways. The easiest way is just to ask people, by using a tool such as a survey or questionnaire. However, this is not always the best way to get information on how people really think, because sometimes people will be unaware of their real thoughts or feelings. They might also want to answer in a particular way, either because that is what they think the researcher is trying to find, or because they want to be perceived in a more positive way (we call this 'social desirability bias'). For this reason, we also have other methods we can use – for example, we can expose people to a concept or situation and see how they react to it, or we can ask them to respond to something (for example, 'Does this word describe God, yes or no?') very quickly so that we get their immediate reaction.

So, what are psychologists investigating when they study religion? We are not looking at what you might call 'truths' about the world – instead, we're looking at how people think, feel and behave with regard to religion. For example, instead of asking whether God really exists or what God is really like, we're asking: *how* do people actually think about God, regardless of what their scripture or teachings say? This is important to do, because we find that religion affects many aspects of people's lives, such as their physical and mental health, how they cope with difficult situations and how they behave towards other people.



### Keywords

Here are some of the words you will find in this section. Come back and check if you can't remember what they mean:

Psychology

Theology

God

Authoritarian

Limitless

Mystical

Benevolent

Ineffable

Incarnate

Incarnation

Gospels

Divine

### Becoming investigators

For a few lessons, you are going to become investigators! You will look at some of the big ideas that are found in religions and other worldviews, including your own. There are different kinds of investigators – for this investigation you will be psychologists and theologians. You will find out something about the kinds of questions they ask and how they go about finding answers, following their methods.



# Being psychologists for a day

## PSYCHOLOGY – FEATURING DR CARISSA SHARP

**Psychology is about what goes on in people’s minds. All our experiences are processed in our minds. They are subjective – that means only we can see them. They include beliefs, emotions, hopes and intentions.**

How do we know what someone else is thinking? We ask them!

But ... do they always tell the truth? And do they always know what they think?

We set up experiments to try to find out what people really think.



### Step 1 Introducing Psychology: different ideas about God



We know stuff through thinking. But stuff in our heads is not the same as the thing itself.

For example, if I ask you to imagine an elephant ... go on! **Think of an elephant now ...**

You may have thought of an elephant with huge ears, or no tusks or a very long trunk. The idea in your mind does not make a difference to what elephants are like in the real world. Whatever you think in your mind does not change objects in the real world.

Now, let’s use the idea of God.

Remember that the idea in your mind about ‘God’ does not mean that there is a God in reality; if there is really a God, what you think about God will not affect what God is like.

What words do you think of when you hear the word ‘God’? **Write down at least three words on sticky notes to describe what ‘God’ is like.**

### Step 2: Different people’s ideas about God

I did some experiments with other psychologists to find out a little more about what people mean when they think about ‘God’. We gave lots of words to groups of people in surveys and asked whether those words described what they thought of as ‘God’. In the end we came up with 25 terms that fit into five categories that made sense to most people. That doesn’t mean that they necessarily believed that those words described God – sometimes they might think ‘God isn’t like this’ – but that the words made sense to them when thinking about God.



Here are the main words used by people in Dr Carissa’s survey to describe what God is like:

Boundless	Forgiving	Infinite	Cosmic	Incomprehensible	Universe	Tolerant
Commanding	Gracious	Limitless	Non-existent	Inconceivable	Unknown	Vast
Compassionate	Imaginary	Merciful	Energy	Not real	Strict	Unimaginable
Consciousness	Immense	Nature	Punishing	Stern	Unknowable	Wrathful



Can you sort these 28 words or phrases (we have added in three of our own) into groups? What groups have you used?

(You could print these cards out and cut them up to make it easier to move them around in different groups, or just write some of the main words down.)

# Being psychologists for a day



Here are our answers! We did a series of experiments on what people think about God, and we came up with five groups or categories that covered most people's ideas. We call this the LAMBI scale. Can you see why?

These are tricky terms, but here are some explanations. Can you match the key words in the boxes on the left below to the correct explanation on the right?



Limitless

This is the idea that God wants people to behave a certain way. God gives clear rules and is willing to punish people if they don't follow these rules.

Authoritarian

This is the idea that God goes beyond the universe and our imagination. There is no limit to God.

Mystical

This means that God is good and loving. It is from two Latin words, 'bene' (good) and 'volens' (willing).

Benevolent

This is the idea that God is not so much like a person as a *force or energy*. Some might say the universe itself is God.

Ineffable

This means that God cannot be talked about or described truly – God is beyond words or even thoughts.

1. Now, can you match the words from the table on page 2 to the LAMBI categories? There are five words for each category, plus three to do with whether God exists or not. Remember that people can believe that God does not actually exist, but still have an idea about what they mean by the word 'God'.
2. Compare your answers to the ones given by Dr Carissa and the psychologists. Can you see why they connected each set of five words to the categories? You can find the answers at the end of this section.
3. Now go back to your ideas – the words you collected earlier on sticky notes in step 1. Can they fit in with the LAMBI categories?
4. What do you think about these five categories and the words in them? What do they tell you about people's ideas of God? Is there anything surprising or puzzling? Are there any words that are new to you? Which of these ideas is close to the ideas of God you've studied in RE, and which are new?
5. Can you come up with a logo or symbol to represent each category? Label your symbol to show why you have chosen it.



# Being psychologists for a day

## Step 3: Being an investigator

Take the snowflake activity below and ask at least two other people to fill it in. Ask each person to do it in a different colour. You might be told to do this in school or to ask some people at home or around the school. The people you ask (your interviewees) can use it to say what they think 'God' is like. They have to put an X on each spoke – the more they agree with the description, the closer they put their X to the word. If they totally disagree that God is punishing or forgiving, they put their X in the centre.

If you prefer, you could use the LAMBI grid instead (see p. 5).

Remember that this is not asking people if they believe in God, but just asking them, 'When you think about the idea of "God", what words best describe God?'

Now you're going to be psychology investigators!

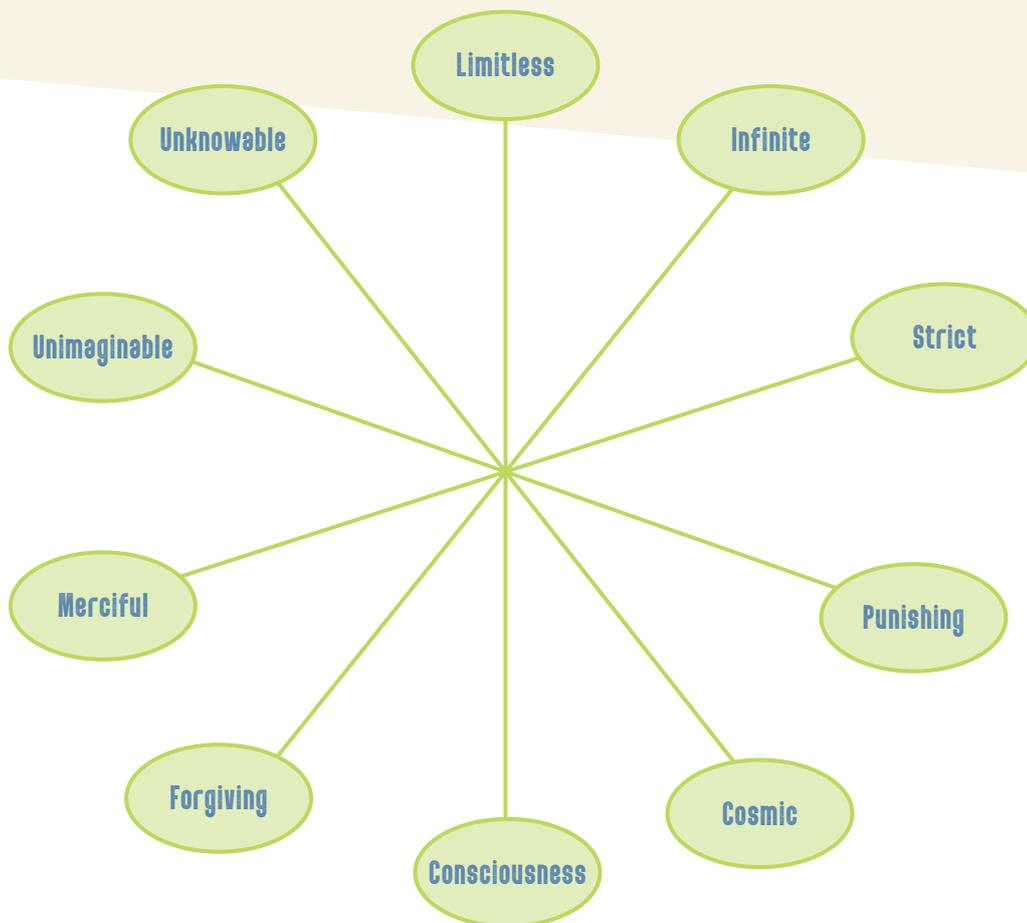


## PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH INTO WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT 'GOD'

### The LAMBI scale

There are many ways of thinking about God, a higher power or a divine life force, but some of God's characteristics may seem more relevant to some people than others. Using a wide range of the scale below, please rate how well each word describes God.

*Note that this is not asking you to say if you believe in God or not – just what you think when you use the word 'God'.*



### FILLING IN THE SNOWFLAKE

Put an X along the spoke to illustrate how far you agree with the word at the end, when you think about the idea of God – the nearer the centre, the less you agree; the nearer the outside edge, the more you agree.

Join up the Xs to make your unique snowflake shape.

# Being psychologists for a day

## PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH INTO WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT 'GOD'

### The LAMBI scale: an alternative way of recording ideas

There are many ways of thinking about God, a higher power or a divine life force, but some of God's characteristics may seem more relevant to some people than others. Using a wide range of the scale below, please rate how well each word describes God.

Note that this is not asking you to say if you believe in God or not – just what you think when you use the word 'God'.

	-2	-1	0	1	2
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Limitless					
Infinite					
Strict					
Punishing					
Cosmic					
Consciousness					
Forgiving					
Merciful					
Unimaginable					
Unknowable					



Now, collect the snowflakes/grids and compare the answers you got from your interviewees with someone else's. Which words do people agree with most and least? Can you think why?

We think that the LAMBI scale can be used to assess important individual differences in thinking about God. It shows that people do not always mean the same thing when they use the word 'God'. It also shows that people's ideas are not always the same as the main teachings from organised religions.



#### Do you agree? Why? Why not?

What difference do you think it would make if someone thought that God was benevolent, or authoritarian or ineffable? For example, is someone more likely to follow God's teachings (in the Bible, say) if they think God is loving or if God is angry?

# Being psychologists for a day



Dr Carissa and her colleagues wondered if someone's idea of God made a difference to how they behave. So, they asked about lots of ideas to do with people's attitudes and beliefs and matched them to their view of God.

Have a go yourself before you look at the bottom of the page. What do you think?

If someone thinks God is ...	... how might they behave?
<b>boundless and infinite</b> (Limitless)	
<b>strict and punishing</b> (Authoritarian)	
<b>cosmic energy</b> (Mystical)	
<b>forgiving and compassionate</b> (Benevolent)	
<b>unimaginable and unknowable</b> (Ineffable)	

Dr Carissa's research (and research from other psychologists) showed that:

If someone thinks God is ...	... they are <b>more likely</b> to:	They are <b>less likely</b> to:
<b>boundless and infinite</b> (Limitless)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enjoy religious diversity</li> <li>focus on individual spirituality rather than groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feel close to nature</li> <li>believe in reincarnation.</li> </ul>
<b>strict and punishing</b> (Authoritarian)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>see God as a personal being</li> <li>be committed to following God.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feel close to nature</li> <li>cheat!</li> </ul>
<b>cosmic energy</b> (Mystical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feel close to nature</li> <li>believe God is involved in human affairs</li> <li>believe in reincarnation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>see God as a personal being (more of a cosmic force).</li> </ul>
<b>forgiving and compassionate</b> (Benevolent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>see God as a personal being involved in people's lives</li> <li>be committed to following God</li> <li>believe that God supports them in their lives</li> <li>find their belief in God helps them to cope in tough times.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>believe in reincarnation.</li> </ul>
<b>unimaginable and unknowable</b> (Ineffable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ask lots of questions about God and spirituality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be certain about what God is like.</li> </ul>

- Which of these findings match your predictions?
- Why do you think people with these ideas of God think or behave in this way?
- Think about your own ideas of God's – whether you think a God exists or not. Do your ideas about 'God' make any difference to how you think or behave?

# Being psychologists for a day

## Step 4: Reliable; replicable; generalisable



When we do experiments in psychology, we have to ask some questions about our methods and findings.

1. Are the questions and answers *reliable*? For example, is it possible that people can misunderstand the questions or the words used? How can you be sure people are being honest in their answers?
2. Are the results *replicable*? Can you repeat the experiment with different groups of people and get a similar result?
3. Are they *generalisable*? Can you take the findings from this one group and then apply the results to other groups or situations?

In the research we did to check if LAMBI is a good measure of people's ideas of God, we asked 1,434 people, mostly Americans, with an average age of 36. We did this through an online survey. We asked if they believed in God at the start. If someone said, 'There definitely is no God', we did not get them to fill in the survey. Our findings therefore do not include atheists.

What do you think? Are the questions reliable? Are the results of your surveys similar? Do you think the results apply to all people who are not definite atheists?

## Step 5: Evaluation

Practise using the key terms, including the LAMBI categories, to help yourself to be able to recall and apply the terms correctly. Match the LAMBI words to the definitions; or take the words and write the definitions, then check them. Can you match them to the images you created in Step 2?



### Time to think more about your ideas about God.

- Fill in the snowflake on p. 4 or grid on p. 5 for yourself.
- Compare it with someone else's – what is similar? What is different?



**In your RE book write a paragraph describing your own ideas about God. Make sure you use some of the LAMBI terms in your writing.**

- Share your paragraph with someone else.
- How are they similar and different? Why do you think they are similar or different?
- Discuss where you think you have got your ideas from (your family, your friends, a place of worship or something else).

What have you learnt about people's ideas about God? Are they similar to or different from your own ideas about what 'God' is like? What was surprising or puzzling?

As a psychology investigator, what other questions would you like to ask people about their ideas, beliefs and emotions to do with God?

What did you think about being psychology investigators? What is good/interesting/challenging about the questions, methods and findings?

# Being psychologists for a day

## LAMBI – the answers

Here are the five categories of LAMBI and the words that link with them in Dr Carissa's experiments:

<b>Limitless</b>	Limitless	Vast	Boundless	Infinite	Immense
<b>Authoritarian</b>	Wrathful	Punishing	Strict	Stern	Commanding
<b>Mystical</b>	Nature	Energy	Cosmic	Consciousness	Universe
<b>Benevolent</b>	Forgiving	Compassionate	Gracious	Tolerant	Merciful
<b>Ineffable</b>	Unknowable	Unimaginable	Inconceivable	Incomprehensible	Unknown

The survey also included the following three terms, so that people could say if they don't think God exists.



**Non-existent**

**Imaginary**

**Not real**

# Being theologians for a day

## Step 6: Introducing theology



So, we've looked at one discipline, psychology, which explores what people think – the ideas they have in their minds. Now we are going to explore another discipline and see how it is different. Here is an introduction to theology, from our expert Christian theologian, Dr Simeon Zahl.



DR SIMEON ZAHL

## INTRODUCING THEOLOGY

Theology is all about talking about God. It does not usually focus on whether there is a God or not (theology often starts as if there is a God). It is not just what people think about God either – theology tries to say true and helpful things about the God we believe in, and about how to live today.

Theologians are interested in questions about what God is like and what God does. We think that knowing what God is like has an impact on how people should think and live too.

To find this out, theology needs to pay attention to the past. This is because we find most of our information about God in texts, or scriptures. We usually believe that these texts (such as the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas) are in some way inspired by God.

Theologians study their sacred texts and other sources of authority, to try to explain the answers to questions about what God is like, how people should live and what our relationship is with the Earth. We usually do this to help people who believe in God today.

As a Christian theologian, I believe that we find out most about God by looking at Jesus, as shown through the Bible and, in particular, the New Testament. We look at what the stories about Jesus meant to people at the time, and why they were written, as well as what they mean for people today. Key to this is the belief that Jesus shows Christians what God is like. Incarnation means that Jesus is God, 'in the flesh'. God is not just an idea or a theory. In Jesus, God is personal, interacting with human beings, involved in their lives.

For Christians, the character of God is revealed in the character of Jesus, so exploring his life and teaching is central to knowing more about what God is like.

People have been thinking about these questions for many centuries, so we often build on what thinkers from the past have said.

Perhaps you can see already that theology looks at religious texts to work out important beliefs about God and how to live.

Just to get you started, imagine that Dr Simeon is going to a conference and needs an identification badge, or a lanyard around his neck.

Design an identification badge: on one side list at least three bullet points showing some key things theologians do, using Dr Simeon's introduction above. On the other side, design a logo for theology. (There is a lanyard template on page 16.)

## Step 7: Doing some theology

You're going to look at some texts from the Bible. Some of them may be familiar – this is the kind of work you do in RE, and you have been doing a kind of theology: using texts to explore beliefs and ways of living.

The Gospels in the New Testament give accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. Christians in the past have read them and come to the conclusion that Jesus is God. Most Christians agree, although not all of them. (Some think that the stories of miracles and Jesus' resurrection were added by followers of Jesus after his death.) Most Christians around the world basically accept the Gospels as true pictures of what Jesus said and did.



Have a look at two or three of the texts on the following pages.

# Being theologians for a day

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY ASKS, 'IF THIS IS WHAT JESUS IS LIKE, WHAT IS GOD LIKE?'

These seven passages are from the Gospels in the New Testament, which tell the stories of Jesus' life. Theologians say that Jesus is God, and so they argue that if you look at Jesus, you see what God is like. So, for a Christian, from these stories about Jesus, what might a theologian say God is like?

### THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' TEACHING

**One of the first times Jesus taught in public was in a synagogue in Nazareth:**

Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read,

"The Lord's Spirit  
has come to me,  
because he has chosen me  
to tell the good news  
to the poor.  
The Lord has sent me  
to announce freedom  
for prisoners,  
to give sight to the blind,  
to free everyone  
who suffers,  
and to say, 'This is the year  
the Lord has chosen.'"

Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, "What you have just heard me read has come true today."

**Luke 4:16–21 (CEV)**

### JESUS AND THE PARALYSED MAN

One day when Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and experts in Moses' Teachings were present. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. Jesus had the power of the Lord to heal.

Some men brought a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They tried to take him into the house and put him in front of Jesus. But they could not find a way to get him into the house because of the crowd. So they went up on the roof. They made an

opening in the tiles and let the man down on his stretcher among the people. (They lowered him in front of Jesus.)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Sir, your sins are forgiven." The experts in Moses' Teachings and the Pharisees thought, "Who is this man? He's dishonouring God! Who besides God can forgive sins?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he said to them, "What are you thinking? Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Then he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

The man immediately stood up in front of them and picked up the stretcher he had been lying on. Praising God, he went home.

Everyone was amazed and praised God. They were filled with awe and said, "We've seen things today we can hardly believe!"

**Luke 5:17–39 (God's Word)**

### JESUS ADDRESSES HIS AUDIENCES

Jesus tells three stories back to back – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. Note who he is telling the stories to, and what they are up to:

By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story.

"Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbours, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' Count on it – there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue."

**Luke 15:1–7 (The Message)**

# Being theologians for a day

## JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

John's Gospel includes a long section where Jesus teaches his disciples. It is set in the hours before he is arrested and executed:

"As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other."

**John 15:9–17 (CEB)**

## JESUS WELCOMES CHILDREN

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: "Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these." After laying hands on them, he left.

**Matthew 19:13–15 (The Message)**

## JESUS IS EXECUTED ON THE CROSS

When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

**Luke 23:33–34 (CEB)**

## THE RESURRECTED JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES

Jesus died on Friday. On the Sunday morning, they find the tomb empty, and Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. Then he appears to the rest of the disciples:

It was still the first day of the week [i.e. Sunday]. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

**John 20:19–23 (CEB)**

1. **Imagine what an eyewitness would tell their friends and family when they returned home after this event. How would they describe what Jesus is like? Write down your ideas, explaining what you think is important to Jesus from these texts.**
2. **If Jesus really was teaching for three years, why have these events been chosen to be recorded and remembered? Give some reasons.**
3. **Have a look at page 12, which contains background information for your chosen texts. You need to look for reasons why these stories were included in the Gospels, out of all the things Jesus said and did.**





## IF JESUS IS LIKE THIS, WHAT IS GOD LIKE? SOME COMMENTS

Here are some comments that Christian theologians make to explain the background and some of the meanings of these texts.

### THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' TEACHING

The Prophet Isaiah wrote several hundred years before Jesus lived. This passage shows that God is interested in releasing people from suffering and oppression. Isaiah also says that God anoints his prophet to bring this freedom. For Gospel writer Luke, Jesus is also anointed by God. It shows Jesus' priorities: bringing good news to those who need it most.

**Luke 4:16–21 (CEV)**

### JESUS AND THE PARALYSED MAN

Jesus shows his compassion, taking time to address the needs of the paralysed man, even though he is already surrounded by a crowd of people.

He claims the authority to forgive sins. This causes problems among some of the religious experts there who believe only God can do that. But Jesus backs up his words with action – showing that he can also bring healing to the paralysed man.

**Luke 5:17–39 (God's Word)**

### JESUS ADDRESSES HIS AUDIENCES

Jesus tells three stories back to back – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. He has two audiences. One group includes the dodgy people 'of doubtful reputation' – people who are considered sinners and outcasts. The other group is made up of good people who follow God's teachings. But they are upset that Jesus does not seem to notice that he is mixing with sinners! Jesus' three stories have something to say to the 'sinners': God loves them and wants them to be saved. He also has something for the good people to learn too: they should be pleased, not critical, when God welcomes unlikely people to his party.

**Luke 15:1–7 (The Message)**

### JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

John's Gospel includes a long section where Jesus teaches his disciples. It is set in the hours before he is arrested and executed. It is quite different in style from the other three Gospels. Some theologians suggest this is because it was written later, and John had a chance to reflect on what Jesus' teachings meant.

Here Jesus points out that loving others is the key to following him – which will mean giving up your own needs for someone else, even to the extent of giving up your life for others. Jesus was just about to go and do just that by dying on the cross.

**John 15:9–17 (CEB)**

### JESUS WELCOMES CHILDREN

This passage suggests that anyone can come to Jesus, no matter how young. No one is insignificant for Jesus.

**Matthew 19:13–15 (The Message)**

### JESUS IS EXECUTED ON THE CROSS

Even while suffering the agony of the cross, Jesus forgives those who execute him. Christians see Jesus' death as the ultimate sign of God's love for people – Jesus sacrifices his life to save others.

**Luke 23:33–34 (CEB)**

### THE RESURRECTED JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

For most Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of their belief in Jesus as God. They see that this shows that Jesus is Lord of life and death – that sin and death could not defeat him, that he rose to new life and opens the way for others to do so too.

**John 20:19–23 (CEB)**

# Being theologians for a day

4. Now think again about the eyewitnesses at the events in the stories. Who would have been in the audience? How would the event affect them? Would it help, or challenge or comfort them? Why do you think this?
5. Create two speech/thought bubbles (or fill in the speech bubbles on page 14); one for an eyewitness of the events in one of the texts you have looked at and one for someone who hears about it years later from a gospel writer.
6. Remember what Dr Simeon said about how Christian theologians believe in Jesus as God. The word 'incarnation' is key here – the belief that Jesus is God 'in the flesh' (the word 'incarnation' is based on the Latin word 'carne', meaning 'flesh' – think of *carnivore*). From what you have read so far, what do you think these texts show about what God is like? Here are a few words Christians might use. What evidence is there in the stories of Jesus to illustrate that God is like this?



Powerful	Loving	Kind	Welcoming	Compassionate
Challenging	Forgiving	Patient	Good	Guiding
Concerned (with the poor, outcasts and sinners)			Miracle-worker	

## Dr Simeon says:

Theologians try to think things through very carefully. We want to make sure our understanding of the Bible, Jesus and God makes sense, drawing on all the evidence in the Bible, alongside our experience as Christians through the centuries.

We also want to help Christians to lead lives that are loving and fulfilling. We look at Jesus closely to see how best to do this.



You can see that Christian theology explores what Christians believe, rather than what someone who is not a Christian believes about Christianity. We don't know what you believe, so how do you respond to this way of finding answers to questions about God? Where do your ideas come from?

# What did the audience think? Eyewitness accounts and gospel readers



Now think again about the eyewitnesses at the events in the stories from the Bible that we have studied.

Fill in the speech bubble for an eyewitness to the events in one of the texts that we have read. What was it like for them? Were they being helped, challenged or comforted?

**My focus event is**

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Fill in the speech bubble for someone who the gospel writers were writing about the event for – this was a few years after the events have happened. Imagine the gospel writer was describing the events to this person as they wrote them down.

What was it like for the listener hearing the gospel writer talk (or the reader reading) about the events? Was the listener/reader being helped, challenged or comforted?

# Being psychologists and theologians

## Step 8: Comparing theology and psychology

Go back to the LAMBI words from the psychology investigation.

How many of the words from that experiment do you think apply to Jesus? List the words and say where the evidence is for this, or highlight and label a copy of the texts. How many might apply to a Christian idea of God? Which terms do not apply? Give two reasons why.

Earlier on you created an identification badge/lanyard summarising Dr Simeon's discipline of theology. Go back and check if you want to add or amend anything there. Now create one for Dr Carissa, so you can compare the two disciplines. Alternatively you could make two lanyards for yourself as you have joined their research team (there is a lanyard template on page 16).

Think about the difference between the psychology research (*finding out what people think*) and the theology research (*proposing what God is actually like, based on the idea that the Bible is somehow inspired by God and therefore a reliable source of truth*). Which method do you like, and why? How might using both methods help people to understand ideas of God held by themselves and others, whether they are Christians or not?

**Sum up what you have learnt through this unit:**

- What has been new and surprising?
- What has made you think?
- What questions do you have?



# Being psychologists and theologians

