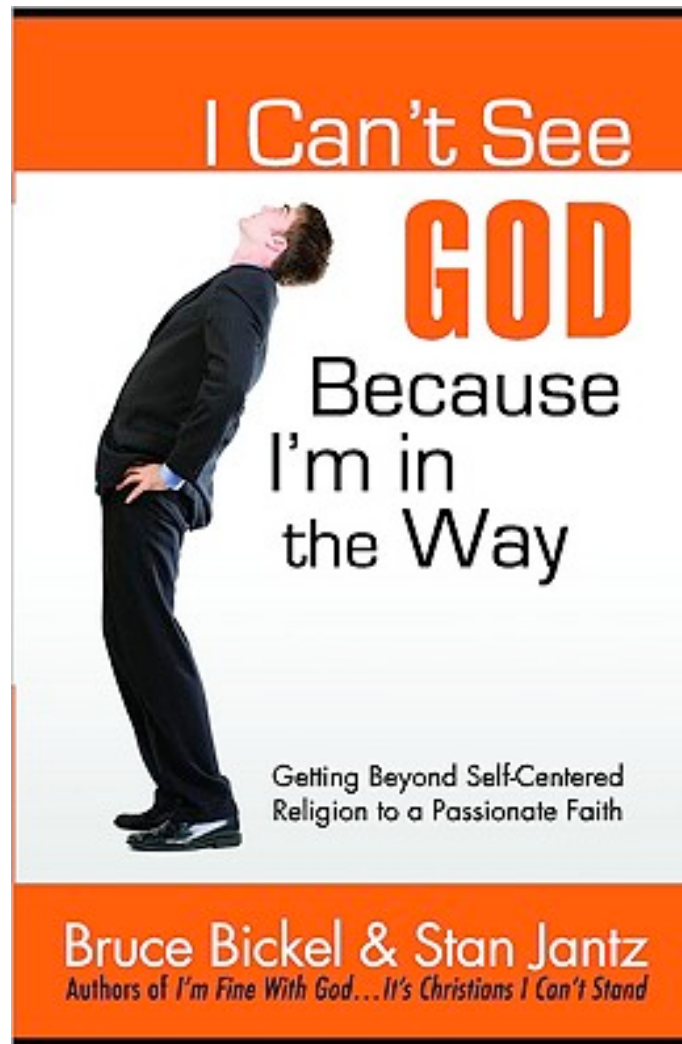


I CAN'T SEE GOD...BECAUSE I'M IN THE WAY

Questions for Discussion and Reflection



Introduction

1. Have you ever lost your passion for Christ? What happened? How did you get it back? If you aren't currently passionate for Christ, how badly do you want to be?
2. Describe what it means to live a life of "religiosity." Why is it so easy to fall into this pattern? What did Jesus have to say about this kind of life?
3. According to the authors, what is the "great shameful secret" of the Christian life? Do you agree or disagree with their conclusion? Why or why not?
4. What are the limitations of a faith that has "me" at the center?

Chapter 1

I Can't See God...

Because I Don't Know What He Looks Like

1. What can we learn about recommitting ourselves to God from the lives of King David and the apostle Peter? As best as you can (you may have to do a little research), summarize a major event in each of their lives where David and Peter had to engage in a "spiritual do-over."
2. What is at the heart of the advice Moses gave to the Israelites at the verge of their spiritual do-over? What is the *substance* of his advice? Why does this advice convey a lot of freedom?
3. Read Matthew 13:44. What does this brief parable tell you about what it means to love God with everything you have? Why are so many Christians reluctant to give up everything for God? What are they afraid of? What are they missing?
4. List some false notions non-Christians have of God. Now list some false notions that Christians have. What are the similarities and differences between these two lists?
5. Which of the various images of Jesus listed by the authors on pages 24 and 25 do you identify with most often? Explain. Why do the images of a "holy" and a "suffering" Jesus tend to make us uncomfortable?
6. Why is God so intolerant of sin? Why does this perception of God upset so many people, Christians and non-Christians alike? What labels do people tend to put on God as a result of this perception? Are these labels fair? Why or why not?
7. What happens in our faith journey when we continue to make God into the god we want rather than revering him for the God he is? How do we get out of this counterproductive mindset?
8. Many people incorrectly believe that God saves us because we are good. What is the true reason God saves us?
9. Reflect on this statement: Our lifestyle and attitude shouldn't be governed by rules, but should be the outgrowth of our relationship with Christ.

Chapter 2

I Can't See God...

Because I Don't Want to Annoy Him with My Prayers

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being best), how would you rate your prayer life? How does this make you feel about yourself? How does it make you feel about God?
2. Explain why the five characteristics about God on page 37 might lead you to believe that your prayers don't have much of an effect on God. Explain why these same characteristics about God might lead you to believe that your prayers have a great effect on God.
3. What is the *single point* in the two parables Jesus told in Luke 11:5-8 and Luke 18:2-5. In what ways do these parables affirm and endorse the fact that God wants us to be relentless and persistent in our prayers?
4. What is the effect of asking God to do his will if there hasn't been any persistent intercession? How does this effect compare to the promise of James 5:16?
5. What are the three elements about prayer taught in James 5:16? What are the two prerequisites for prayer that work? Describe a time in your life when these two prerequisites characterized something you were praying about. What was the result?
6. Why is it important that your prayers are *authentic* and *intimate*? Describe what that means.
7. Name at least three misconceptions of the "theology of prayer" the authors list on pages 44 and 45.
8. How does *pretense* get in the way of our prayers? Give an example of a pretentious prayer. What did Jesus say about these kinds of prayers?
9. Explain how praying is the path to peace in our hearts and minds.

Chapter 3

I Can't See God...

Because the Abundant Life Seems Like a Myth

1. Why do you think people are so obsessed with finding meaning and purpose in their lives? How active are you in your pursuit of meaning and purpose? How are you doing in your journey?
2. What do the authors mean by the "self-centeredness of existentialism"? Why does this run contrary to God's desires and plans for us? Is it possible for our desires and plans to match God's desires and plans for us? How and when?
3. Read John 10:10. Now list all of the various descriptions the authors list for the kind of life Jesus promises to those who are saved through him. Do any of these resonate with you more than the others? Explain?
4. What is the paradox of the Christian life? In your opinion, what percentage of Christians are experiencing this paradox right now? Be prepared to defend your number!
5. On pages 56 and 57, the authors list three choices for living in response to the paradox of the Christian life. Have you ever found yourself living with one or more of these choices? What kind of life did you have? Have you come to the point in your life when you are ready to say, "Enough is enough"? What's your next step?
6. What's the end result of "going through the motions" in your Christian life? Why is it so easy to stay in this mode even though the results are so unsatisfactory?
7. What three things happened to Samson after his capture? Explain how these conditions illustrate the life many Christians are living.
8. What is the difference between the *indwelling* and the *filling* of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Ephesians 5:18)? How do we live a life that's filled with the Holy Spirit?
9. What is God's standard of motivation for living the Christian life? How does this motivation keep us faithful to God? What else happens when we live this way?

Chapter 4

I Can't See God...

Because the Bible Seems Irrelevant and Needs More About Me

1. List three reasons why we should be reading the Bible to discover more about God rather than reading it to know more about ourselves. Give three benefits to growing in our knowledge of God.
2. On page 72 the authors say this about today's culture: "We no longer recognize a single prevailing, controlling, authoritative voice (such as God or the Bible) that frames our theological and moral viewpoints as a society. Instead, individuals choose their own standards and framework for moral and theological issues." What do you think are the principle reasons why people today tend to distrust authority? Are there any benefits to this lack of trust? What are the downsides?
3. What is the "metanarrative" of the Bible? At the core of this story, what is God's plan?
4. Describe your own personal method of Bible study. What do you like about your approach? What don't you like?
5. Reflect on each phrase of 2 Timothy 3:16 that describes the benefits of Scripture in our lives:
 - Inspired by God
 - Useful to teach us what is true
 - Makes us realize what is wrong with our lives
 - Corrects us when we are wrong
 - Teaches us to do what is right
 - Prepares and equips us to do every good work
6. What kind of reader does the Bible invite? How does the Holy Spirit help you read and understand Scripture? What is the prerequisite for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives in this way? (Hint: see Ephesians 5:18.)

Chapter 5

I Can't See God...

Because I'm Too Concerned with Being Happy

1. What is your definition of happiness? Why do you think, as Dr. Moreland asserts, that our culture is so obsessed with happiness? That being the case, why are we becoming unhappier as individuals?
2. Compare the definition of contemporary happiness with the definition of classical happiness. Give an example of someone you know who fits the definition of contemporary happiness. Now do the same with classical happiness. (No names please. Just general descriptions!)
3. Read the passage containing the Beatitudes on page 91 (or look them up in your own Bible). Next to each quality Jesus gives to characterize people who are "happy," describe what that quality means. For example, what does it mean to be "poor in spirit"?
 - The poor in spirit
 - Those who mourn
 - The meek
 - Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
 - The merciful
 - The pure in heart
 - The peacemakers
 - Those who are persecuted because of righteousness
 - Those who are insulted, persecuted and slandered because of Christ
4. What if Christ's admonition for his followers to "deny yourself and take up your cross" really were the motto for Christianity? What if Christians actually took this seriously? What effect would they have in the culture around them? Compare this with the effect Christians are having now.
5. List the benefits of taking up your cross in advance of God's kingdom in your own network of family, friends, and business relationships.
6. Have you ever had, or do you currently have, a spiritual mentor? Are you part of an accountability group? If so, what difference has it made in your life? If not, what steps could you take to find a mentor or join an accountability group?

Chapter 6

I Can't See God...

Because I Missed the First 37 Years of Eternity

1. If you are a Christian, when did you first make a decision to follow Christ? Describe the circumstances leading up to your decision. How did your life change? Briefly describe your faith journey from that time to the present?
2. Explain what the authors mean when they say, "We Christians are supposed to be a bit cross-eyed." Why is it important for a Christian to be both past- and future-focused when it comes to faith in Christ?
3. According to Scripture, what is the "hope of your faith"? Is this your hope, or is there something else about your relationship with Jesus that is more important to you? Explain.
4. What happens to your life in the present when you focus exclusively on your future life in Christ in heaven? What happens when you focus exclusively on the present?
5. Explain the phrase "eternity starts now." If you really take this to heart, how should your life change—starting now?
6. According to the authors, what is the reward of our salvation? Is this a new concept to you? How does knowing this change the way you relate to God?
7. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is being an active disciple essential to your faith? Why or why not?

Chapter 7

I Can't See God...

Because My Christianity Is Incognito

1. Early in this chapter, the authors write: "Within our generation, Christians have gone from being admired by the culture to being marginalized." Can you think of a time in history—or do you personally remember a time—when Christians were admired? What were the circumstances? Are Christians doing anything today that is worthy of admiration?
2. The authors contend that Christians tend to respond to public criticism in one of three ways: become *invisible*, become *isolated*, and become *insolent*. Do you think any of these responses are pleasing to God? Are there any that you think offend him? Explain.
3. Why do some Christians have an "us-against-them" mentality? Why do the authors equate this approach with a type of twenty-first century Pharisaism?
4. Summarize the biblical mandate for cultural engagement. Give three reasons why Christians haven't been more faithful to this mandate.
5. Of the three role models God gives us in the Old Testament—Daniel, Nehemiah, and Joseph—which one do you most identify with? What did all of them have in common?
6. Explain how the biblical mandate for cultural engagement is directly related to the Great Commission.
7. In what practical ways can you raise the cross "at the center of the marketplace"? What tips to the authors give?
8. What are the "directives" of 1 Peter 3:15-16? When will people in the culture be attracted to our faith?

Chapter 8

I Can't See God...

Because I'm Hung Up on Finding His Will for My Life

1. How is it possible to be so obsessed with finding God's will that we overlook God? What is it about human nature that drives us to want to know what's going to happen in our lives? When is this a positive quality? When is it negative?
2. What is God's will for you in each of these areas? (For extra credit, support your answers with Scripture.)
 - Character
 - Attitude
 - Relationship
3. What are the three overriding components of God's general will for you? How are you doing in each of these areas?
4. What do the authors mean when they say, "God's will is much more macro than most of us think"?
5. The authors use three metaphors—a tightrope, a maze, a bean under a cup—to illustrate concepts of God's will that miss the mark. Have you ever been caught up in any of these? For example, have you ever felt like you were walking a tightrope as you tried to discern God's will? How did that work for you?
6. If God's will is more about guidance than guessing, what are some "tools" that are available to help guide you into God's will?
7. Explain the concept of God's will being a circle rather than a dot. What freedom do you have when you understand God's will in this way?
8. As Christians, we often view ourselves as "children" of God. While this is certainly true, what value is there to relating to God as an adult, especially when it comes to knowing and doing God's will?
9. Reflect on this statement: "Instead of contemplating how God's will fits in our lives, we need to ask how we can fit into God's will for the world."

Chapter 9

I Can't See God...

Because I've Lost the Equilibrium of Renewal and Service

1. Read the Scripture passages on page 152. Do you identify more with Paul or with James? What is your view of the role that works play in salvation?
2. Explain what the author means when he says he is "intellectually" convinced of the "faith alone" tenant of Christianity, but is "emotionally" drawn to the importance of good works and deeds. Do you identify with this? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever heard the expression, "Some people are so earthly minded that they are no earthly good"? In your experience, what kinds of people tend to make that statement? What kinds of people are generally the object of the statement?
4. Why did Jesus commend Mary for what she did for him? (Read both passages cited in the chapter: Luke 10:38-42 and John 12:1-3.)
5. What was Martha's "distraction"? What did Jesus want for her to realize? In what ways are we all like Martha?
6. How do we keep "equilibrium" in our worship of God? What are the biggest threats to this place of balance?
7. Explain what it means to inhale and exhale spiritually. When is our spiritual health in jeopardy?

Chapter 10

I Can't See God...

Because I Don't Like His Other Children Very Much

1. Do you have more Christian or more non-Christian friends? Do you relate to them in different ways? How so?
2. You were born into a worldwide spiritual family when you became a Christian. If one of your non-Christian friends asked you to describe this family, what characteristics would you use?
3. In what sense is the command Jesus gave his disciples in John 13:31-35 new? In what sense is it not new? How did Jesus modify the original commandment? What does this modification do to the meaning of "love"?
4. Read John 13:34-35. How is the love Christians are to have for each other different from the love they are to have for their neighbor?
5. Give at least two examples of how the love that Christians show to each other can bring people to Christ. Give one example of how the lack of love can prevent people from considering Christ.
6. List three qualities of the love Jesus has for you. In what practical ways can you begin to love other Christians with this same kind of love?
7. Read John 17:20-21. What kind of unity, harmony, and oneness do Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit share with one another? How is it possible for God's children to have this same kind of intimacy with one another? Have you ever seen this in a group of Christians? What was that like?
8. If the local church is the best place for Christians to demonstrate love and unity, why are so many people discouraged by their church experience? What can you do to change this?

Chapter 11

I Can't See God...

Because I Like My Life Just the Way It Is

1. How satisfied are you with your life right now? Like the author in this chapter, are you a little afraid that if you ask God to give you a more abundant life, your physical circumstances might change? How do you think they would change?
2. How does the abundant life of a new believer differ from the abundant life of a mature believer? What do they have in common? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your abundant life right now?
3. How does a Christian slip into spiritual complacency? What are the dangers of staying in this condition?
4. What is the primary means God uses to bring us out of spiritual complacency? Has God ever used this means to bring you closer to him? Describe what happened.
5. What are three ways God uses suffering to bring us closer to him? Can you identify with any of these? How did your experience change you?
6. Suffering is a problem for a lot of people (including many Christians) in terms of their view of God. It clouds their perception of him. What role does faith play in helping us to have a clear view of God in the midst of suffering?
7. What do you think of this statement: "The prospect of suffering is not appealing, but a mediocre Christian life should be even more repulsive to us." How does this change your view of God and the abundant life he promised?