



It's Time to Have the “God Talk”!

By Jim Myers

America has changed dramatically since the coronavirus arrived. Not only are we living with a very dangerous health threat, we are facing very serious economic challenges. No one has ever faced a “double black swan event” like this before. A “black swan” is “*a major challenge that was completely unexpected.*” Historically, during difficult and uncertain times, people suddenly turn their attention to God or spirituality. It also does something else; it gets everyone focused on finding out what caused this bad thing to happen. At the top of list in religious circles is **Satan**, often followed by “**the Jews**,” “**the rich**,” etc. *Conspiracy theories sprout weeds.* I have been seeing all of these things on social media and in other places. People who never used to talk about God are bringing God (and things like those above) into their conversations – **a lot of innocent people often get blamed or hurt** – so, *that’s one reason to have a “God Talk” now!*

You probably know that “**God**” plays a major role in many political conflicts, not just in religious conflicts. “**God**” and “**religion**” are two very big “**elephants in the room**” that a lot of people try to avoid talking about. Other elephants in the room are “**politics**,” “**minority rights**,” and “**religious rights of the majority**.” These elephants have been clashing since *US Constitution* was first adopted. If we don’t have a “*God Talk*” now, history will just keep repeating itself -- *people will keep on arguing and ignoring the elephants in the room.* Having a successful and mutually beneficial “*God Talk*” requires much more than just sitting down and talking. It requires participants to prepare themselves by being aware of the following facts.

1. **Talking about God is different from talking about other things.**

The difference between talking about God and talking about other things is this -- *God is not an object like other objects in the universe, open to observation.* That takes the discussion out of the realm of science because science is based on making accurate observations. At the heart of many discussions about God is the answer to one question – *Do you believe in God?* The reason that question is asked in the first place is because people “*cannot see God with their eyes.*” Below are comments by astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson:

“Science follows evidence. When strong evidence supports an idea, **the concept of belief, when invoked the way religious people use it, is unnecessary.** In other words, *established science is not an ensemble of beliefs, **it’s a system of ideas supported by verifiable evidence.*** . . . You do not ask if I “believe in” the sunrise. Or if I “believe” the sky is blue. Or if I “believe” Earth has a Moon. These are non-controversial truths (**observable facts**) about the physical world for which the word “believe” has no place . . . **The notion that all belief systems are equal is evidence for rampant scientific illiteracy in the nation.**

“Neither I, nor anyone I know, have any intent in feeding Christians to the lions, only in keeping religion out of the science classroom. By the way, there is no tradition of scientists knocking down the door of Sunday School telling the preachers what to teach. Scientists don’t picket outside of churches or shoot people who enter them. Scientists have no tradition of heckling preachers during sermons. And, by the way nearly half of all scientists (in the West) are religious and pray to a personal god.

“You also “accuse” me of being religious — that I follow the religion of science and humanism. Actually I am **agnostic** – “a term coined by the nineteenth-century naturalist Thomas Henry Huxley in reference to **a person who claims neither faith in, nor disbelief in, God.**” Today, it references **a person who allows the possibility of a God, but remains skeptical.** But I guess I do not know how you are invoking the word.

“Allow me to find a definition because I hate arguing semantics. I would rather argue ideas. Here is one from Webster’s: “**Religion** (noun): *the belief in and worship of a super-human controlling power, esp. a personal God or gods.*” Based on that definition, if you think I am religious, then I’m not sure you know what science is or how and why it works, and which has found success precisely because of **its empirical approach to nature** rather than a spiritual one.

“As for education, I think there ought to be a class in public schools on religion. **It occupies an undeniably significant role in civilization.** Commensurate with my earlier interest in diversity, the religion class should cover all the world’s faith-based philosophies and belief systems. I think, historically, such a class was omitted because **religions themselves are not fans of tolerating other religions.** And so religious exposure was left to Saturday or Sunday and as a family affair.”

2. Experiencing the world leads to an “Awareness of God.”

Science does not have any observable facts about “**God**” at this time. The lack of facts is not

“*proof*” that God does not exist. The possibility remains open that as scientific knowledge and technologies advance, the situation could change. However, there is some very strong factual evidence that is often ignored in discussions by scientists – for billions of people over the course of recorded history “God has been part of their lives and their conversations.” Thus, by abductive inference, we may conclude, “from our experience of the universe and of ourselves, that ‘God is.’” Let me share my personal experience with you.



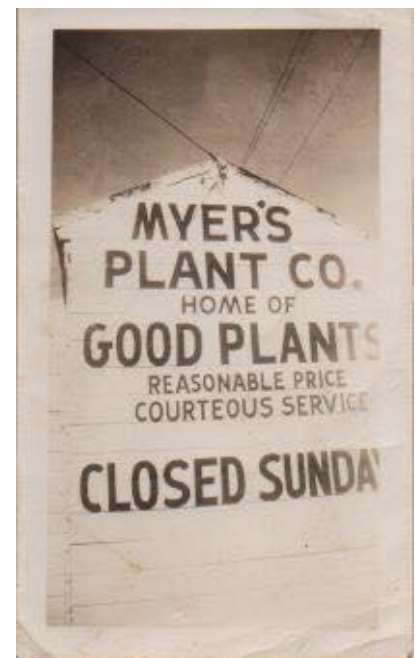
James Henry Myers

From my earliest memories, God has been part of my life. The church was called “the house of God” and the preacher was called “a man of God.” This is a picture of my grandfather, and the book in his left hand is a Bible, which contains “the Words of God.” The father of his wife, my grandmother, was a cotton farmer and a preacher. “God” was part of our family gatherings, and both of my grandmothers, never missed a chance to remind me that they would die someday, but we would all be together again someday in Heaven with God.

There was the matter of one little theological disagreement that I wouldn’t be aware of until I became an ordained minister. Grandmother Myers always stressed that “when people die they go straight to Heaven to be with God.” But Grandmother Ward said that when people die “they stay in the grave until Jesus returns” – and then they go to Heaven to be with God.

Grandmother Myers was a Baptist and Grandmother Ward was a Seventh Day Adventist. Of course, Baptist went to church on Sunday and Adventists went to church on Saturday. I was never aware of that difference in my childhood, but we never went to see Grandmother Ward on Saturday. “God” was an important subject in both of their homes, but I rarely saw my two grandmothers together.

My dad owned a plant nursery and loved what he did every day – *grow plants*. We had greenhouses, lathe houses and fields on three sides of our house – the street was on the west side. On the south side was the “*big greenhouse*” and on the west end of that greenhouse was the sign picture here. Today I wonder what Grandmother Ward thought when she saw the words “Closed Sunday” at her daughter’s house!



God was part of my community life in many other ways:

- Every time I went to my elementary school, I saw “**the house of God**” – it was located across the street.
- Every day at school we said the *Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America* – “. . . one nation “**under God** . . .”
- Every day at school we said the *Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the State of Texas* – “. . . one state **under God** . . .”
- Every day at school we said, “*The Lord’s Prayer*” to “**Our Father Who art in Heaven** . . .”
- Every sports event opened with the pledge of allegiance to *Flag of the United States of America* – “one nation **under God** . . .”

We experienced God indirectly, though not immediately and directly, through life experiences like those above.

*We could no more “**not feel God**” than we could “**not feel fear**.”*

When I was growing up **God was part of “my reality” – and that is fact!** Back then, if you told me “**God does not exist**,” or “**what I believed about God was wrong**” – *it would have been like someone telling me the sun and moon did not exist. A person like that must be crazy!*

3. Create a safe environment so everyone can tell their own story.

Creating *safe environments* begins by acknowledging the value of human lives. Regardless of our beliefs, we are all able “to believe” because we are humans and experience life in a way that is unique to humans. We acknowledge that our life experiences are where we acquired our beliefs and agree to follow the guidelines below:

- *Remember the value of our collective humanity and the role good relationships play.*
- *Remember to be kind and remember everyone has problems and struggles.*
- *Remember to humanize rather than demonize “the other.”*
- *Remember that if you and another person had experienced life differently, you both would be different people.*
- *Remember to be a good listener and hear the whole story first.*

- Remember to tell your actual story and resist changing it to support your beliefs.
- Agree to make your belief system and reality large enough to include all of the facts, open enough to be questioned and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.

I am including two accounts that may help guide you through the experiences that result from the elephants in the room being exposed. The first is called “*Being Wrong*” by Kathryn Schulz.

*Of all the things we are wrong about, this idea of error might well top the list.
It is our meta-mistake; we are wrong about what it means to be wrong.*

*Far from being a sign of intellectual inferiority,
the capacity to err is crucial to human cognition.*

*Far from being a moral flaw, it is inextricable
from some of our most humane and honorable qualities:
empathy, optimism, imagination, conviction, and courage.*

*And far from being a mark of indifference or intolerance,
wrongness is a vital part of how we learn and change.*

*Thanks to error,
we can revise our understanding of ourselves
and amend our ideas about the world.*

The second quote is by Brian Greene, Ph.D., (Chairman, World Science Festival; professor, Columbia University).

There is a very, very good chance that our understanding of gravity will not be the same in five hundred years. In fact, that’s the one arena where I would think that most of our contemporary evidence is circumstantial, and that the way we think about gravity will be very different.

4. Every belief began with a person at a specific time and place.

After being trained and ordained as a minister, I became a “**defender of the right beliefs**” – “**our beliefs**”! We saw ourselves as “**warriors for the truth!**” We viewed **those who didn’t believe what we believed as threats and enemies.**

Obviously viewing someone as an enemy doesn’t bring people together!

But, when people agree to follow the guidelines listed above an amazing transition takes place – *they become fellow explorers on the same team*. Explorers learn use the skills below to explore each other’s stories together and help each other stay on track.

Skill #1

Identify Different Type of Belief

Below are three types of beliefs:

1. **Individual Beliefs** – *These are beliefs an individual places trust or confidence in, even though they have no factual evidence to support them.*
2. **Institutional Beliefs** – *These are beliefs created by institutions and backed by authority. They are beliefs that are in accordance with an institution’s standards and shared by members of the institution.*
3. **Fact-Based Beliefs** – *Facts have the quality of being actual; they are observable and measurable by any person.*

Skill #2

Identify the People Involved in a Communications Experience

At least two people are involved in a **Basic Communications Experience**.

1. **Source** – *The person writing or speaking the words.*
2. **Receptor** – *The person reading or hearing the words.*

Skill #3

Linguistic Model for Determining Meanings of Words

A word or phrase is a group of symbols or sounds with an attached bundle of associations that determine meaning. The bundle of associations consists of the Source’s culture, historical time period, geographical location and personal experiences.

1. *Identify the Source’s culture and the language of the communications.*
2. *Identify when and where the Sourced lived.*

3. Learn as much as possible about the Source's personal life experiences, especially traumatic or life changing experiences.

4. Identify the Receptor and why the Source communicated with the Receptor.

Exploring the stories behind our beliefs and realities is a lot like working on an archaeological site. As pieces of evidence are discovered and fitted together a story begins to emerge. They are stories about people's lives, challenges they faced and things they wanted to share. Sources do both good and bad things. It is from their stories that the stories of institutions emerge – *why they were founded, their authority, and their beliefs and standards.*

4. We are all trapped in our thin slice of Reality.

Dr. David Eagleman points out how our biology determines the limits of our Reality:

"We think of color as a fundamental quality of the world around us. But in the outside world, color doesn't actually exist. When electromagnetic radiation hits an object, some of it bounces off and is captured by our eyes. We can distinguish between millions of combinations of wavelengths — but it is only inside our heads that this becomes color.

Color is an interpretation of wavelengths, one that only exists internally.

*"And it gets stranger, because the wavelengths we're talking about involve only what we call "**visible light**," a spectrum of wavelengths that runs from red to violet. But visible light constitutes only a tiny fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum — **less than one ten-trillionth of it**. All the rest of the spectrum — including radio waves, microwaves, X-rays, gamma rays, cell phone conversations, Wi-Fi, and so on — all of this is flowing through us right now, and we're completely unaware of it. This is because we don't have any specialized biological receptors to pick up on these signals from other parts of the spectrum.*

The slice of reality that we can see is limited by our biology.

"Each creature picks up on its own slice of reality. No one is having an experience of the objective reality that really exists; each creature perceives only what it has evolved to perceive. But presumably, every creature assumes its slice of reality to be the entire objective world.

*Why would we ever stop to imagine there's something beyond what we can perceive?
They won't until someone makes them aware of it!"*

Today, religion, politics, economics, technology, medicine, law, family, and other values play out in markets, organizations, and networks. If we cannot speak about the roles beliefs about God influence markets, networks, and the organizations -- *then we are not talking about reality!* **BHC**

April Memorials

In Loving Memory

**JERRY MAC
KELSOE**

b. June 17, 1937
d. April 10, 2017

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JANET K.
LEWIS**

b. 1936
d. 2016

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**WILLIAM LESTER
STEWART**

d. April 26, 2005

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**CHARLES L.
"CHUCK" GREGORY**

b. January 25, 1925
d. April 11, 2011

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**KAREN SUE
HARRISON**

b. February 8, 1953
d. April 17, 2017

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*May their memories
continue to live & bless
all of the lives they touched.*

Thank you for remembering them!

*May their memories inspire us to seek those qualities of mind and heart,
which they shared when we walked life's journey together.*

May we help to bring closer to fulfillment their highest ideals and noblest strivings.

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to those things which we valued and shared -
faith, love, peace and devotion. As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

Sources

- *God: A Brief History* by John Bowker © 2002, DK Publishing, Inc., New York, NY; p. 17.
- *Letters from an Astrophysicist* By Neil DeGrasse Tyson © 2019; W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY; p. 90, 91, 99, 172.
- *What's Right No Who's Right: A Simple Shift to End the World's Madness* by Robert S. Tipton © 2018; Alden-Swain Press, Denver, CO; pp. 21-23, 33.
- *The Brain: The Story of You* by David Eagleman; pp. 63, 64.