

0:00:00 Well, here we go. First session of the Exploring Theology course, Who is God? If you haven't already, I would strongly encourage you to go and watch the introduction to the course. That'll help you orientate yourself as to what's how it all works and various things to bear in mind.

0:00:23 But assuming that you have, we'll see We'll get going, and given that this is a, uh, theology course, an introduction to theology, uh, an Exploring Theology course it's only right and proper that we begin with a prayer.

0:00:36 So, I'm gonna pop a prayer up on the screen but I would invite you to say that along with me as I do.

0:00:46 let's pray. Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding. Pour into our hearts such love towards you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.

0:01:15 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

0:01:24 we go. So, with that prayer that we've just said in mind, we're already in the world of theology. We're already thinking about God, and implicit in that prayer is a particular understanding of God.

0:01:42 But first, before we go any further, let's unpack a little bit what we mean by theology. As I indicated in the introductory video, there are so many definitions, and we're going to come to different ones as we go along the course.

0:01:59 But here, to get us going, are two.

0:02:04 first definition comes from Alistair McGrath in his book, What's the Point of Theology? Theology unpacks the core themes of faith.

0:02:15 It tells us how these were developed, illustrates how they may be explained and preached, and shows us the difference they make to real life.

0:02:27 Above all, theology sets out the Christian understanding of how we can achieve wisdom, enjoy well-being, and nurture a sense of wonder.

0:02:44 Take a moment with that definition and just, just have another read of it. let's look at the second definition. This is from Beth Felker-Jones in her book Practicing Christian Doctrine.

0:03:23 Christian theology is a conversation about scripture. About how to read and interpret it better. About how to understand the Bible as a whole and imagine a way of life that is faithful to the God whose word it is.

0:03:48 So So again, take a moment with that. This definition of theology from, from Beth Philip Jens. See what jumps out at you.

0:03:56 unpacking the core themes of faith, talking about, as it were, the history of how it was developed, how they might be explained and preached.

0:04:24 And, but then you have this bit which is drawing, making a connection there for that Felker Jones shows us the difference they make to real life.

0:04:33 Look at the, back to the Felker Jones one imagine a way of life that is faithful to the gospel.

0:04:39 God, whose word it is. So, it's all about talking, theology is very much something for both of these people, both of these theologians.

0:04:48 It's very much something which is about, that makes a difference to what it is to live, to live a good life.

0:04:56 uh, McGrath's one is focusing. More, a little bit, perhaps, on the, uh, the, the core themes and things like that and how they were developed whereas Beth Elker-Jones, you may have noticed, has more of a focus on the Bible and, uh, the, and, and developing and, and imagining a way of
0:05:22 life that is faithful to the God whose word it is, so very much making those links. with the Bible there.

0:05:28 Okay, so, two definitions of what theology is.

0:05:36 as much as these two definitions are interesting and the differences between them, as I was just sort of exploring a little bit there, I don't want us to get too bogged down in definitions at this point.

0:05:46 Better to get going and then see what it's actually like, and then to do this, and then come back to some other definitions later on.

0:05:55 In other words, if you remember the introductory, uh, video, in other words, instead of, uh, uh, talking about swimming and thinking about swimming, let's get in the water and start splashing about.

0:06:09 So, I'm gonna, we're gonna turn to our first activity and, we're gonna think, in broad brush terms about the title for this session, Who is God?

0:06:21 And we're going to do this over about the next half hour. cause like, why do you go with a question like that?

0:06:29 It's like, it's huge. so what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you a moment to think about that question.

0:06:37 And then every five minutes or so over the course of the half hour, I'm going to give you another question to think about, which is like a adjacent to the main question.

0:06:45 Or approaching it from a different angle. and as I said in the introductory video, this is going to be done in real time.

0:06:54 I'm not going to pause the video, I'm just going to let it roll. You'll see my little face down at the bottom left-hand corner.

0:06:57 I will turn down the microphone a bit so you don't hear me clattering around on my desk, I hope, too much.

0:07:01 but yeah, I'm here. And, and then I'll pop up and say, Okay, right, now, think about this next question.

0:07:08 And, as you go, you've got your Moleskine, I was about to say, other notebooks are available. you've got your notebook there, and you can just jot down your notes to these questions.

0:07:20 There's no, you know, it's not something like, oh my god, I've got to get the right answer, I think. It's not.

0:07:25 It's much more important, as you do this, that you respond honestly, that this is what comes to mind, this is what you feel, this is, so on and so forth.

0:07:34 then we can proceed. So, okay, I'm going to put the first question up, which gives us the opportunity to talk about this main one first, and just to see what your response is.

0:07:45 So, here comes the slides.

0:07:49 so, here's, as I say, here's the first question. This, this is the main question for, for this session. and without giving you any pointers, any kind of angles or anything like that, just take a moment, sit back, and if you, as I am asking you to, answer this question, Who is God?

0:08:09 What comes to mind? Make a note of it as you go. And, uh, I will give you uh, about five minutes for this to get going.

0:08:20 And remember what I said earlier, if you're just like, you've been in the pool and you're thinking, what on earth, where do I go with this?

0:08:28 Don't worry, that's okay. All right, back to you in about five minutes. Okay. Five minutes goes by quite quickly, doesn't it?

0:13:38 I wonder how you got on with that. Well, let me give you another, uh, question, which is adjacent, related just to see if it opens up some questions.

0:13:48 territory for you. So the next, uh, question, I'm on the wrong screen there. The next question, here we go, is, what is God like?

0:13:57 Now, when I'm thinking about this, so, this is a bit of a pivot, rather than who is God, it's like, what is God like?

0:14:03 There are differences there, aren't there? so if you were to speak of God's character, what would you say?

0:14:10 what comes to mind. or, put it another way, if you were to think of God's qualities what comes to mind then?

0:14:22 yeah, so, God's character, God's qualities, what is God like, rather than who is God. We're going to come back to the who is God, but this is to sort of shift the angle a little bit and see if that opens up some space for you.

0:14:39 So, yeah another five minutes, and yeah, over to you. I meant to say, if at this point, some music or something like that helps, then, by all means, put something Jotted down a few words and maybe a sentence or two for that.

0:19:53 in a similar vein I wonder what images come to mind when you think of God. It may be that what you've already been jotting down is, has something to do with images.

0:20:08 and it may be that when it comes to this, you might like to actually draw, or sketch, or anything.

0:20:18 Any kind of way of response to this question is absolutely fine. So yeah, what, what, what images come to mind when you think of God?

0:20:26 Again, take a few moments to think about this. of God. So, I'm now going to show you some images and, uh, the question now is that do any of them the, of these images that I'm going to show on the screen, uh, do any of them, which of the following images resonates, uh, with you?

0:25:46 some may leave you totally cold others may provoke a reaction, uh, or prompt thoughts as I'll go through them twice I'll get to the end and then I'll flip back to the beginning and then go through them a second time.

0:26:00 So, you'll get a chance to look at each image I think I'll probably leave it for about 15 seconds per image, 20 seconds per image, something like that.

0:26:08 There you are, I think there are about 10 or something along those lines. So, let's do that, and, yeah, which of the following images resonates with you, and if it does, if an image does, just jot down what it's making you think or feel, okay?

0:26:22 Here we go, so. Let's go back to the, uh, first image. Move myself out of the way there so you're not having to look at me when you're looking at the image.

0:35:47 And remember, the, the question is, just what, mmm, does this image resonate with you? When you're thinking about who God is, who is God, does this image in some way say something to you about God, or of God, or in some way does it connect?

0:36:00 this time through I'm not gonna I'm gonna, it'll be a shorter period for each photo, and then we'll move on to the next question.

0:36:13 Okay, there we go.

0:39:33 So, uh, one of the things that's interesting about this is, A, as it were, what images, which image, resonates with you.

0:39:42 There may be, may have been several, and in certain ways, and how it makes connections for you in your mind with God.

0:39:47 and then the flip side of that is also interesting to think of, no, that image. That doesn't, I don't see any kind of connection there with God.

0:39:57 I'm, I'm not having any kind of sense. It doesn't resonate. That is as much interesting, both the clear kind of statement of, yes, that's having very much a, a, a, a, a, a, having an impact, and it resonates with me, but also when it doesn't.

0:40:11 Okay, and with thinking about feelings and so on and so forth in mind, let's go to the next question. Bring my screen back there. There we go.

0:40:18 What feelings do you experience when you think of God? What, what feelings? We've been talking about images, and looking at images, and thinking about maybe what God is like, and starting off with who is God.

0:40:33 Well, as we approach this question of who is God, And let's move to our feelings. The images may have changed.

0:40:40 Stirred up some feelings. There may have been some resonances there. So, let's explore that area a little bit more together.

0:40:46 And take these next five minutes to think about what feelings you experience when you think of God. Okay. Okay, so, let's turn to the final question in this sequence.

0:46:10 so it's this one. Has your understanding of God changed over time? Maybe that you came to faith at a very young age, it may have happened when you were older in between times, whenever you came to faith, there have been, may have been times where your understanding of God was not in

0:46:42 one sense, it was one way of kind of thinking about God, and then at a different phase of life, different stage, you started to find yourself thinking about God in other ways.

0:46:54 So, how has your understanding of God changed over time? Okay, so, there we go. Okay, so, there we go. Those are our initial questions.

0:52:18 We're trying to think through this question of who is God, what is God like, what images have come to mind.

0:52:23 We've looked at some images, we've talked about some feelings that we might experience when we think of God, and we've spent these last few moments thinking about how our understanding of God has changed over time.

0:52:37 so, uh, this might be a good moment to pause the video. We've got one little more sequence of things to think about before we come to the end of this first video.

0:52:48 so, if you want to pause the video, stretch your legs, make yourself a cup of tea, great. If you think, no, I can still, I'm, I'm still good, then, then we can carry on.

0:52:58 So, I'm just gonna pause for a moment, as in, and then we carry on. Okay, so assuming that you're, you're back, you're ready to go there's just a little bit more to think about before we come to the end of this first video.

0:53:14 so, uh, yeah, so, given the answers that you've been, uh, giving to those initial questions, the things you've been jotting down in your notebook and, and so on, the next thing we want to think about is what has shaped the answers we gave, the answers you, you jotted down, what, what shaped

0:53:40 them, what's, what's brought them, as it were, to this point that when you were asked, like, who is God, what is God like, you go like, of ah, okay, boom, and you start writing these things down, these, these ideas, these thoughts, these feelings, they don't just come out of thin air, there's, something's

0:53:55 shaped them over time so, yeah, we're gonna, we're gonna uh, think about this, so to explore how we reached the conclusions that we did, or those, well, I say conclusions, those initial thoughts in response to those questions.

0:54:12 So, again, we're back in the swimming pool, we're splashing about, and we're gonna start thinking about some of these questions, like, well, what has shaped how we think when we think about God?

0:54:30 this is our first question to be thinking about, you know, what's shaped it, what's been brought to bear to bring us to a point where we talk about things in the way that we do in terms of the ideas that have come to mind when we've been looking at those initial questions.

0:54:47 So here we go, so first one is, growing up, did people around you talk about God? And if so, who, when, and where?

0:55:02 Who were the people who were talking about God, if there were people talking about God, when, on what occasions, and where did it, where did it happen?

0:55:12 So, growing up, did people around you talk about God? If so, who, when, and where? Take a few minutes to think about that.

0:55:22 And, don't forget, jot down your thoughts in your notebook. Okay next question.

0:58:32 Just coming back to the present, to the present day. Do any of your friends and family or work colleagues talk about God?

0:58:45 Depends on your setting. for my part, growing up, God was not something that was given talked about, and so on, and, you know, my experience in commercial work of talking, work colleagues talking about God.

0:59:02 so yeah, coming back to the present, do any of your friends or family or work colleagues talk about God?

0:59:11 And, this is where, sort of, tighten the question a little bit does what they say affect what you think? Be it about specifically to do with God, does what they say affect what you think?

0:59:32 Take a couple of minutes with that. Okay, let's turn to the next question. So these are slightly shorter questions.

1:02:01 so first one to do with this, and remember we're thinking about what you're that we give in response to those initial questions as we were trying to unpack and explore this understanding of, our understanding of who is God and how we answer that question and we're looking at things that have

1:02:18 shaped how we have come to the conclusions and how we think about God ourselves. So next question up is, do you read the Bible?

1:02:27 and you can explore that question over the next couple of minutes in whichever way, whatever the answer is. If it's yes, then how do you read it?

1:02:38 Do you read it often? do you, you know, enjoy reading it? so and if you don't uh, is that something that you used to do, but now you don't?

1:02:49 You've fallen out of the habit or is it something that's never really, you know, really vibed for you at any point?

1:02:54 Any stage, so take a couple of minutes with, uh, in response to this question, do you read the Bible? Okay, so, having jotted down some thoughts

in response to that question, let's turn to the next one, which is, do you go to church?

1:05:12 if you do go to church where do you go to church? Have you always gone to church?

1:05:23 have you dipped in and out of going to church? Do you not go to church? Yeah, just take a moment or two to just think about church in, in terms of your involvement in going to church.

1:05:40 Okay. And the final question, as we think about these things that have shaped how we come to our understanding of who God is and everything, is to talk about this question.

1:08:00 To discuss and consider this question. Do you read books about God? apparently people still do read books so, fantastic.

1:08:09 uh, do you read books about God? Or do you listen to podcasts? More contemporary way of, of listening to people and understanding things.

1:08:22 so do you listen to podcasts? Or do you watch YouTube videos? Or Vimeo videos? Whatever they may Even. so, do you watch online content?

1:08:35 Do you, uh, engage with online content, uh, in your thinking about God? And does that shape how you think about God?

1:08:41 or do you read books? what can I say? you know, so, things to think about in terms of another source, as it were, of what might shape how we come to some of the conclusions we come to and what we think and what we say when we're answering this question for session one, which is,

1:09:06 who is God? So, have a think about the reading books and, and engaging with materials in that kind of sense, online and off.

1:09:13 Okay, so there you go. So that was the fifth question thinking about the different, uh, as it were, sources things that shape us, uh, go into how we, how we think.

1:11:19 when we're trying to answer a question, like who is God and if you do read books or you listen to podcasts or YouTube videos, make a, make a note of the ones, if you haven't already, of the ones that you do watch, uh, or you do read or you do listen to, because then we can share them when

1:11:36 we meet and we can talk about these various things together when we gather in person for our first session.

1:11:44 we go. Okay, so this is probably a good point, if you haven't already, to pause. We've covered we've considered and looked at things from a variety of angles already, and so this is probably a good moment just to stand up, stretch your legs, ward off the DVT.

1:11:59 I'm gonna go make myself a cup of tea, possibly have a slice of cake. Yeah, I think so. And then we'll come back, and then we can resume, and then we'll be looking about these sources that we draw on as we're exploring theology, and we'll think a little bit more

1:12:24 specifically about what those sources are. Okay, so, See you in a minute. I'm assuming that this is where the first video is going to come to an end, and if that is the case, then to resume session one, then simply start the second video.