

Covenant Gifts

Bible Stories and Interactive Lessons

“Make Your Starting Point Certain”

(2 Peter 1: 10)



Covenant Gifts

Story Two: The Story of God

“beginning” / “start” — “created” — “**God**” — “everything”

‘God’ is the third word in the (original Hebrew) Bible. What can be known about God, and how and to what extent can we know Him?

Paul the Apostle (messenger for God in the ‘New Testament’) provides a summary answer to this question:

The God who made and organized the cosmos and everything in it,

Being the Ruler over everything (“heaven and earth”),

Does not inhabit human constructs (“temples”)

Nor is He served by humans as if He needed anything.

Instead, He himself gives to every person life and breath and everything.

Moreover, He made all human societies from one person,

Pre-assigning them appropriate times and the boundaries of their habitations

So that perhaps they might reach out to seek God and might be found by Him.

Besides He is near to each one of us.

So then we ought not to suppose that human imagination and craft

Could fashion gold, silver, or stone to represent the divine.

Now, God has overlooked those times of ignorance, and

Commands everyone everywhere to repent (turn to Him).

Because, He has set a day when He is about to fairly judge all humans,

According to a single criterion: a man proven to everyone to be raised from the dead.

(From Paul’s case to Greek philosophers at Athens in about A.D. 50, Acts 17:24-31)

Most frequent description of God in the Bible

“God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in unwavering love to thousands, forgiving error and sin, but by no means excuses the guilty.”

At the end of every story you will find a section to help 'connect the dots'. It will always include the following thought / discussion questions.

Thought / discussion questions:

1. Pray, then read or listen to the story
2. Retell the story in your own words
3. Discover the significance of this story. When you sense that you are familiar with it, select the most appropriate question(s) to ask yourself and/or discuss with others:

Q1: What does this story tell me about God?

Q2: What does this story tell me about the people in the story?

Q3: What does this have to do with me / what did I learn / what changes will I trust the Holy Spirit to make in me?

Q4: Who am I going to tell?

Additional material and questions are provided on the last page(s) of each lesson. These are intended for further study and/or discussion, and will include two sections (both intended for group interaction):

- **Food for further thought and discussion** (further Scripture, info and questions)
- **Wrap up** (what is not explicitly *taught*, but leads to what next and/or *action points*)

At the very end of this booklet *Covenant Gifts* under 'Supplemental Material' you will find lists of Starting Points and Covenant Stipulations, as well as step-by-step Instructions for filling out the Work Box, and even more research notes and suggestions.

Food for further thought and discussion:

Q: Why do people ask, “Where is their God?” Hint: because He is unseen, but real (see Psalms 115:2-3).

Q: Why can we see, know, only ‘hints’, or faint traces, of God? Because we are a distinctly different reality from Him. Imagine a potter (one who makes pottery) lovingly holding a vase he or she has just made. The vase is not the same as the potter. Rather, it is distinct, completely different, yet held lovingly close. This is similar to God and His created universe.

Starting points: (see List of Starting Points under “Supplemental Material”)

Starting Points revealed/inferred:	Inside		Outside
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Core Starting Points: What is real / reality?	<div data-bbox="651 695 867 772" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Only Physical / natural </div> <div data-bbox="699 783 834 814" style="text-align: center;">(S. Hawking)</div>	<div data-bbox="878 695 1170 772" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Only non-Physical (mental/spiritual) </div> <div data-bbox="935 783 1133 814" style="text-align: center;">(Oprah or Chopra)</div>	<div data-bbox="1211 695 1414 772" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> God and creation </div> <div data-bbox="1243 783 1393 814" style="text-align: center;">(Jesus Christ)</div>
Story 2 Starting Point (which do you think it is?)			

What do you think it means that the distinct God described in the Bible is our main Starting Point?

END

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Supplemental Discussion and Leader Material

Complete List of Starting Points / Assumptions / Preconceptions and their Types:

	Starting Points revealed/inferred:	Inside		Outside
		Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
Question about Reality	1. Core Starting Points: What is real / reality	Only physical / natural exists <small>(S. Hawking)</small>	Only non-physical (mental / spiritual) <small>(Oprah or Chopra)</small>	God and creation <small>(Jesus Christ)</small>
	2. Where everything comes from	The physical universe made itself	Mind / Universal Spirit everything = projection	God made everything
	3. How everything works	Natural laws operate the universe	Everything evolving toward perfection	God runs all per laws=His character
	4. Where everything is going	The universe ends in annihilation	Everything reaches perfect oneness	God completes all we will live w/Him
People Question	5. What is a human being	Random atoms; highly evolved animal	Evolving expression of mental/spiritual perfection	Created physical, mental & spiritual to reflect God
	6. What is the source of knowledge	Chemical processes in the brain	One's own mind / Universal Spirit	God reveals
	7. What is 'good'	Neither good nor bad; we decide	Whatever will make a better world	Only God is good
	8. What is our basic problem	Religion that is ignorant of physical only	Ignorance of the Ideal or inequality	We are not good

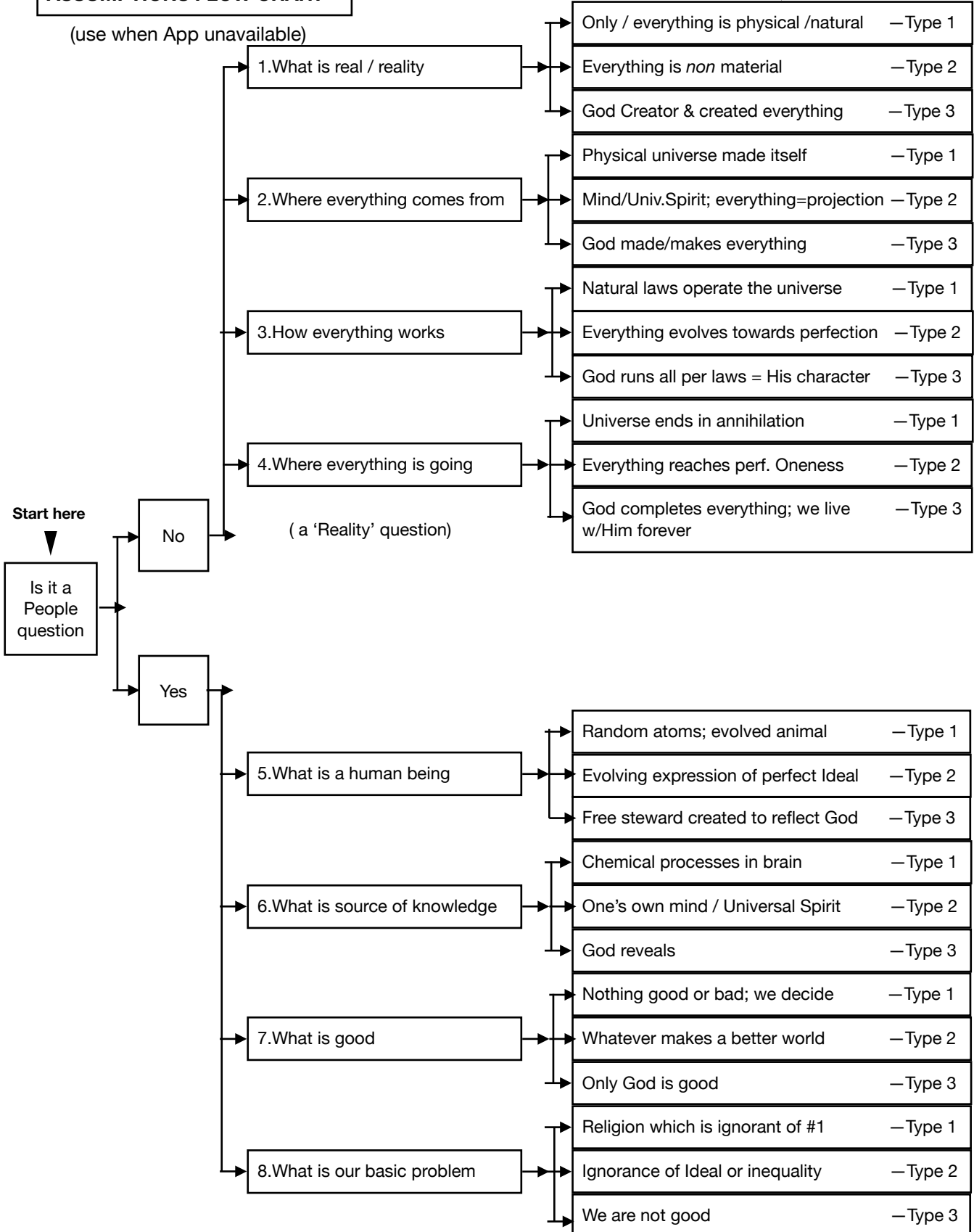
Using the “Transparent” App or Assumptions Flow Chart:

All the choices on the Assumptions Flow Chart are contained in the App. You can buy the App on any App store for \$.99. When you turn it on, the first page contains the Question: “Is it a people question?” plus two choices: Yes? or No? Each choice leads you to further choices until you discover what Type of Assumption is being made for anything you see or hear.

The Assumptions Flow Chart can be used if you do not have the App or if you prefer this type of decision flow chart.

ASSUMPTIONS FLOW CHART

(use when App unavailable)



Follow step-by-step instructions to reveal which Starting Point is being demonstrated:

Use one of the three Decision Types below (see **Example** below)

— together with —

The App or *Flow Chart* above to identify Starting Points / Assumptions / Preconceptions:

1. Something is **explicitly** stated, such as:
 - Everyone knows that natural laws operate the universe
 - Whatever frees me . . .
 - There is no objective reality
 - We shape ourselves and/or our destiny
 - Everyone is basically good (inside), or there is no inherent evil

OR

2. If **not explicitly** stated, **ask** yourself or the text or the person: “Is this about . . .
 - . . . the nature of reality?” or “what is real?”
 - . . . human nature?”
 - . . . what is good (right or wrong)?”
 - . . . where one looks for answers?”

OR

3. You can **determine fairly closely** by either asking yourself, or the source, something close to what they apparently assume: “Are you saying that . . .
 - . . . humans are basically good inside?”
 - . . . reality is what we think or imagine?”
 - . . . whatever works is what is right?” etc.

These two tools enable you to reasonably determine which main Type you are encountering:

Type 1 like Stephen Hawking (everything is material / natural and therefore atheist)

Type 2 like Deepak Chopra (Eastern Pantheist / New Age), OR Oprah (Postmodernist who assumes reality = what they think in their minds)

Type 3 like what Jesus would say (to the *right* of the bold line)

Using the Work Box (see end of each lesson):

As its title states, the box is to help you discover which Starting Points are revealed, or inferred. Everyone has Assumptions / Starting Points / Preconceptions. They operate like GPS software. Without our notice, unconsciously behind the scenes, they guide our every thought, word and behavior. Crucial: *which Starting Points most closely align with Scripture?*

In order to use the Work Box for each lesson, you must (a) understand it, (b) understand how to use the “Transparent” App or if you do not have it, the Assumptions Flow Chart (above), and then (c) follow step-by-step Instructions (see **As an example** below).

First, notice two categories: ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’, divided by a bold line. Most people, when they come to the end of their understanding, tend to look *inside* themselves, their human knowledge ‘system’ for what they assume to be true. Some however learn to look *outside* (their box, outside human knowledge) to God’s revealed Word (Bible) on the *right* of the bold line.

Next, notice the three ‘Types’ of Assumers, each characterized by a famous proponent. Most of us grow up a mixture of Type 1 (mostly older generation) and Type 2 (younger generation).

The *core* Starting Points / Assumptions: What is Real / Reality, upon which all others build, are always listed first in the shaded boxes. (see **example** below):

- some assume that reality is *only* physical / substantial or natural (Type 1)
- most assume reality is *only* non-physical (Type 2), either (a) our ideas, like Oprah, or (b) a universal spiritual Force, like Deepak Chopra or other New Age ‘gurus’
- only the Bible assumes two simultaneously actually-existing realities: God the Creator, *and* everything He created and cares / provides for (Type 3)—to the *right* of the bold line.

As an example, together let’s fill in the three blank boxes after Lesson 1 God Created (p. 8):

1. Since it is not stated explicitly in the lesson, try #2 above “...ask the text: what is real?”
2. On the App or Flow Chart, choose “No,” not about people but a ‘Reality’ question
3. Since the lesson is about creation, choose box #2: “Where does everything come from”
4. This yields the three positions for origins: (a) the universe made itself, (b) our mind/Universal Spirit is the origin and everything else a projection, (c) and God makes everything.
5. Fill in Work Box on pg. 7 Lesson 1 Starting Point: “Where does everything come from” and then the three boxes with #4, a-c (see filled in Example below).

Starting Points revealed/inferred:	Type 1	Inside Type 2	Outside Type 3
Core Starting Points: What is real / reality?	Only Physical / natural (S. Hawking)	Only non-Physical (mental/spiritual) (Oprah or Chopra)	God <i>and</i> creation (Jesus Christ)
Story 1 Starting Point (Where everything comes from)	Universe made itself	Our Mind / Un. Spirit everything projection	God makes everything

Covenantal Stipulations (10 Words / The Ten Commandments, Criteria & Issues):

It has been observed that the Ten Words (Commandments) given to Moses by the hand of the Lord on Mt. Sinai are the *key* instructions God wants us to know. As such, they are a summation of the Starting Points that God wants us to know from outside. They are called ‘covenantal stipulations’ because they function more like marriage vows than like civil Laws. They lay out what God is like and what being in relationship with Him entails.

A further helpful exercise is to try to identify which are being instructed / learned in each Bible Story. The following is a list of the Ten Words, and how they provide criteria for our response to God and all that He has created.

Covenantal Stipulations:

(#1-3 Based on the Lord)

1. I am the Only Lord; None other

Criteria for: Ultimate reality

2. No substitutes/icons/idols

Criteria for: Who/what you love

3. Do not misuse My name

Criteria for: Glory/power/authority

4. Remember the Sabbath

Criteria for: Whom do I trust to set limits?
(rest & recreation) Use time wisely?

(#4-5 mediating)

5. Honor parents and all authority

Criteria for: Trust/respect

(#6-10 Worked out in community)

6. No murder

Criteria for: Life & Death

7. Love only one; no fornication

Criteria for: Loyalty or Lust

8. No theft

Criteria for: Individual & Work Value

9. No falsehood/lying/slander

Criteria for: Integrity

10. Be content; no coveting

Criteria for: Pleasure & Appetite

“Whether a god is made of stone, wood, gold or silver, or whether it is a projection of the mind of modern men (who make their gods merely in their thoughts), the Bible says there is a great distinction between it and the living God” (Schaeffer, Francis. 1975. No little people, 40).

What is the Bible? It is a realistic book . . . in contrast with the romanticism that characterizes the twenty-first century concept of religion (from Francis Schaeffer. 1975. No Little People, 43).

(see also Discover Bible Story. 2020)

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