

Praise for other books in the Big Questions series

“Chris Morphew is like Tim Keller for teens. In the *Big Questions* series, he tackles some of today’s tough questions with Scripture, wisdom and clarity—and just the right amount of fun to keep young readers turning the page. I cannot wait to put these books into the hands of my three children.”

CHAMP THORNTON, Pastor; Author, *The Radical Book for Kids* and *Why Do We Say Good Night?*

“Chris spends his days around young people, and you can tell—his writing is readable, biblical and full of stories.”

ED DREW, Director, Faith in Kids

“Our biggest questions prepare our hearts to hear God’s greatest answers. Pick up Chris Morphew’s Big Questions books and find key gospel responses to your kid’s honest questions about God and his plan.”

BARBARA REAOCH, Former Director, Children’s Division, Bible Study Fellowship; Author, *A Jesus Easter* and *A Jesus Christmas*

“*Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?* addresses the tough topic of God’s goodness in a world of great suffering, and it does it in a winsome, easy-to-read way. Yes, it’s for young people, but I’m recommending it to people of all ages—and I commend this remarkable book to you!”

JONI EARECKSON TADA, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

“*Who Am I and Why Do I Matter?* takes one of the core truths of Scripture and explains it in a way that middle-schoolers (and their parents) can understand. I can’t wait to put this into my children’s hands, and also encourage them to put it into the hands of their unbelieving friends.”

JOHN PERRITT, Director of Resources, Reformed Youth Ministries; Author, *Insecure: Fighting Our Lesser Fears with a Greater One*; Host, Local Youth Worker Podcast; father of five

“Chris is the teacher you wish you had. He gets where you’re coming from and takes your questions—and you—seriously.”

DR NATASHA MOORE, Research Fellow, Centre for Public Christianity

“What an excellent series—seriously excellent! I am certain Chris Morpew’s chatty style, clear explanations, relevant illustrations and personal insights will engage, inform and equip tweens as they work through some of the big questions they and their peers will be asking.”

TAMAR POLLARD, Families Minister, Wahroonga Anglican Church, Sydney, Australia

“Reading a Chris Morpew book is like sitting with a friend, with an open Bible between you, asking all the tough questions that are on your heart and getting solid, straight, honest answers that line up with God’s word—answers that bring you to the light and hope and truth of Jesus. I love friends like that!”

COLIN BUCHANAN, Singer/Songwriter

HOW CAN
I FEEL
Closer to
GOD?

CHRIS MORPHEW

Illustrated by Emma Randall

The logo for The Good Book Company features the text "thegoodbook" in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with "COMPANY" in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font directly below it. A thin, curved line arches over the word "good".

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To Josiah and Mim

How Can I Feel Closer to God?

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Chapter 1

IF GOD IS REAL, WHY DOESN'T HE Feel REAL?

The bell had just gone and the rest of my Christian Studies class were busy packing up their things, when one of my students—maybe 7 years old—found me at the front of the room and said, “Mr Morphey, I have a problem.”

“What’s up?” I asked, crouching to her eye level.

“The thing is,” she said, “I know Jesus is real in *here*—” She tapped the side of her head. Then she lowered her hand and patted it against her chest. “—but I still don’t know if he’s real in *here*.”

This kid had been learning about Jesus here at school for years now. She was smart and thoughtful, and she had plenty of information. But now she was discovering something that millions of others before her have learned about God:

Believing he loves you is one thing.

Actually *feeling* that love is something else.



The Bible makes some huge promises about the friendship God offers us as we put our trust in Jesus.

Jesus says he's come to lead us into the best life possible—life to the full (John 10 v 10).

He says if we're exhausted and stressed, we just need to come to him and he'll give us rest and peace, even in the middle of all life's chaos (Matthew 11 v 28; John 14 v 27; Philippians 4 v 6-7).

If we need wisdom for any situation, the Bible says to just trust God and ask, and he'll give it to us (James 1 v 5).

We're told that Jesus came to bring his friends a total life transformation—a change as huge and powerful as a caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly (Romans 8 v 29; Galatians 4 v 19). The Bible says that as we put our trust in Jesus, his Spirit comes to live in us, filling us with more and more of his love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5 v 22-23).

Which sounds really great and everything.

But is it *true*?

I mean, is that what you're experiencing in your life right now? Complete, caterpillar-to-butterfly-level

transformation? Or does this all seem like a bunch of nice ideas that don't actually work out in real life?

You pray, but nothing seems to happen.

You open the Bible, but it all just seems confusing and irrelevant.

You go to church and struggle to stay awake.

Meanwhile, you look around at your friends who don't follow Jesus, and they seem to be getting on just fine without him.

Does it feel like you're missing something? Like you've failed, somehow? Or like God's failed you?

All those promises might *sound* great—but if they don't work out in real life, then what's the point?

If God is real, why doesn't he *feel* real?

If God wants to be close to us, why does he often feel so far away?



Imagine a new kid shows up at your school. You see them across the room and think to yourself, *Maybe I'll be friends with that person.*

But not yet, obviously. I mean, you don't want to rush into things. First you need to figure out what their deal is. So you don't talk to them yet. You just watch from a distance.

You see them lean over to talk to someone, but they're too far away for you to hear. You sidle up behind them, trying to listen in—but unfortunately, the teacher sees you out of your seat and sends you back to your work.

At lunch, you spot the new kid sitting down to eat with some other people from your year. They invite you to join them, but you wave them off. After all, you're still completing your investigation. You wait until their backs are turned and sneak into the bushes behind them. You raise your binoculars, focus them in on the new kid, and pull out a notebook to record your observations: hair colour, eye colour, height, food preferences, chewing technique...

It's amazing what you can learn when you study someone closely enough.

Later, you have class with the new kid again. They answer a question from the teacher—and it's a pretty good answer, actually. Almost too good, though, you know? Like, who are they trying to impress? You flip your notebook to a new page, write the words, KNOWS TOO MUCH, and underline them.

By the end of the day, your notebook is filling up, but you still feel like you've barely scratched the surface—and so when you get home, you do the obvious:

Stalk them online.

You find their socials, but unfortunately they're set to

private. Which is suspicious, right? I mean, what does this kid have to hide?

At school the next day, you point this out to a friend. They shoot you a weird look and say, “Well, why don’t you just add them and see if they accept?”

You roll your eyes. “Yeah, right! What if they’re some kind of weirdo?”

Fast-forward another few weeks. You’ve got heaps of great notes on the new kid. All those hours you’ve spent staking out their locker have really paid off! And yet somehow...

You can’t quite figure it out. But for some reason, you don’t feel like you actually *know* them any better than you did on their first day.



What’s wrong with this picture?

Well, a bunch of things, obviously. But my point is to highlight the fact that knowing *about* someone and actually *knowing* someone are two very different things.

Hiding in the bushes with your binoculars might get you all kinds of *information* about a person, but it’s unlikely to lead to any kind of actual *relationship*—because there’s a massive difference between being someone’s friend and being their stalker.

And the reason I bring this up is that I think it’s all too

easy for us to end up treating God this way without even realising we're doing it. It's possible to spend all kinds of time and energy learning *about* God without ever reaching the point where we feel like we *know* him.

Of course, getting the facts about God straight in our heads is incredibly important. (And if you're interested, there's another book in this series called *How Do We Know That Christianity is Really True?* which outlines the solid historical evidence that Jesus really is who the Bible says he is.)

But that's only part of the picture.

Like with anyone else, the way to really get to know Jesus isn't by hanging back at a distance, just learning *about* him. It's by stepping into a friendship.



There's this story that my mum tells about how all this finally started making sense for her.

Mum had grown up learning about Jesus; she had a head full of facts about him. But there was still something holding her back. Could she *really* trust that it was all true? Could she really give her whole life to it?

When she asked her mum—my grandmother—about it, Grannie gave her what turned out to be some really excellent advice: “Why don't you just live as if it's true for a while and see what happens?”

In other words, why not run an experiment?

Rather than just learning *about* the promises of Jesus, try spending some time living as if those promises are true.

Rather than just gathering more information *about* Jesus, try spending some time building a friendship *with* Jesus.

And so that's just what my mum did.

She ran the experiment—and she's never looked back.

Because the more she lived as if Jesus' promises were true, the more she discovered that they actually *are*. The more she chased after a relationship *with* Jesus, rather than just gathering more information *about* Jesus, the more she experienced the truth of Jesus' love, not just as an idea, but as a living, breathing reality in her life.

Years later, my mum passed this same advice down to me—and years after that, I passed it on to that little girl in my class who was trying to move her knowledge about Jesus from her head to her heart. It's made all the difference in my life, and I'm convinced it can do the same for you.

Ok. But how do we actually *do* it?

How do we live as if the promises of Jesus are true?

How do we put down the binoculars, climb out of the bushes, and start building an actual friendship with Jesus?

Well, that's what the rest of this book is all about.