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

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"Reading a Chris Morphew 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 BE SURE WHAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG?

CHRIS MORPHEW

Illustrated by Emma Randall

thegoodbook COMPANY

To Cathy Tucker,
Thanks for everything!

How Can I Be Sure What's Right and Wrong?
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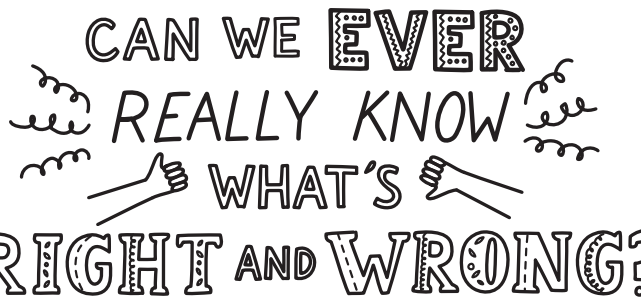
Chapter 1



"Yeah, I hear what you're saying," my friend shrugged, leaning aside as a waiter came by to top up our water glasses. "I just don't see why you need to bring God into it."

I stuck a forkful of pasta into my mouth, buying myself a bit of thinking time, wondering how in the world we'd got here. Five minutes ago, we'd been having a perfectly normal conversation about our plans for the summer break, and now all of a sudden we were talking about the meaning of life—about what it means to be a good person.

"Well," I said, finally swallowing, "I guess, for me, the whole way I figure out what right and wrong even *are* is by looking at Jesus."

"And that's great if that works for you," my friend said, "but you know I don't believe in any of that stuff. And you still think I'm a good person, right?"

"Well, I mean, obviously I don't think following Jesus means I'm a better person than you are," I said. "But that's kind of my point: if there's no God—if we're all just here by accident—then who decides what a 'good person' even is?"

"Don't *we* decide that?" my friend asked. "Anyway, it's really not that complicated, is it? Think of it this way—" He leaned in towards me, gesturing with his fork. "Let's say you found out tomorrow that God didn't exist."

"How would that work, exactly?"

"I dunno. Say they uncover Jesus' tomb and it turns out his bones are still in there. But, whatever—somehow you become convinced there's no God. Would it honestly make that much difference to the way you lived?"

"Of course it would!"

"*Would* it, though? Would you stop loving the people around you? Would you run outside and start murdering and stealing, just because there was no God to say you shouldn't?"

"Well, for your sake, I hope not, but—"

"Exactly." He poked his fork at me again. "My point is, you're absolutely welcome to your beliefs, but I don't need God to tell me what's right or wrong, and neither do you. Seems to me like we've both got it covered already. I mean, when you get right down to it, isn't it mostly just common sense?"

The title on the front of this book is, "How can I be sure what's right and wrong?" Figuring out the answer matters because most of us want to be, on balance, good people who make good choices—and we want to live in a world with other good people who make good choices too.

There's a lot I could say about that conversation with my friend, but I tell you this story because I think it paints a picture of the way most people in our culture make sense of morality—of what's right and wrong:

Sure, we all have different beliefs about the world, different ways of figuring out what's right, but don't they mostly come out to the same place?

Be kind rather than cruel.

Be honest rather than dishonest.

Do what you can to make the world a better place.

Treat other people the way you'd like them to treat you.

We might disagree on some of the details, but when you get right down to it, isn't basic morality pretty simple? Don't we all just kind of *know* what's right and wrong?

On the surface, that all sounds pretty reasonable. Basic right and wrong seem straightforward, at least in theory. But you don't have to look very far before things start to get a lot more complicated.

Think about it: If right and wrong really are so obvious, then why is it that politicians can never stop arguing about the best way to run the country? Why do people spend so much time debating with total strangers on the internet? Why are so many families and friendships torn apart by drama and disagreement?

If morality is so simple, why all the fighting?

Well, there are probably a bunch of reasons. But I think at least part of the answer is that, sure, it might be simple enough to agree on a few basic *ideas* about morality—but as soon as you start trying to bring those ideas into the real world, that agreement starts to break down.

Figuring out *that* we should be kind to other people is the easy part.

Figuring out *how* we should be kind to other people is a whole lot harder.

Let's say you have a friend who starts making some choices you *really* disagree with—choices you're convinced are going to land them in a world of pain and trouble.

What's the kindest thing to do?

Should you keep out of it and respect their freedom to live

how they want to live? Or should you try to talk to them about it? Should you try to convince them that *your* ideas about what's right and wrong in this situation are better and clearer than *their* ideas about what's right and wrong?

And if you do decide to talk to them, what if they don't listen? Is it more loving to honour their choices, or to step in and try to change the situation?

Is there even really one right thing to do here? Or are there multiple different decisions that would all be equally "right"?

Meanwhile, even when you *do* think you've figured out the right thing to do, what if it turns out you don't actually *want* to do what's right? Or what if you *do* want to, but you're scared of the consequences?

It's complicated, right?

And the same thing is true when you zoom out to bigger, more global questions. It's easy enough to agree that people should aim to create a better world. What's way harder to agree on is what that "better world" should actually *look* like, and what steps we should take to get there.

Spend five minutes scrolling online and you'll find all kinds of people with all kinds of opinions about everything from climate change to racism to education to refugees to mental health to who the next president or prime minister should be.

And so if we agree that we want a better world, but we can't see eye to eye on what it is or how to get it… how much are we actually agreeing, after all?

Meanwhile, with so many different opinions out there about right and wrong and how to make the world a better place, you might start to wonder: in the end, is that what all this morality stuff really comes down to? Is it all just opinion?

Or are some things *actually* right and other things *actually* wrong, no matter what we say about them?

Ok. So it's complicated.

But still, why bring God into it?

(Because, not to give away the ending, but I do plan to bring God into it.)

Maybe you're on the same page as my friend, back at the restaurant. Maybe you're not convinced that God even exists—and even if he (or she or it) does, why would you need their help to figure out how to live your life?

Or maybe, to you, God seems worse than just irrelevant. Maybe you look at some of the ways religious people behave, or some of the ideas about right and wrong that the Bible seems to teach, and think it seems like the complete *opposite* of a good and moral life. Maybe bringing

God into this conversation doesn't just seem pointless; maybe it even seems harmful.

Or maybe you've grown up in a family that loves and follows God, and you've heard all along that he's our good and loving King, and so of *course* he's the one who gets to say what's right and wrong. And so far, you might've just assumed that was true—but now you're starting to wonder if it actually checks out. Is God's vision of right and wrong really the only way, or even the best way, to live? What about all the people you know who leave God out of the picture and still seem like good, decent, moral people?

These are the kinds of questions we're going to spend the rest of this book exploring, but here's the short version:

The reason that, despite all those questions, I'm *still* determined to bring God into it—and, more specifically, the God I believe Jesus came to show us—is that I'm convinced he can help us out here in ways that no one else can. I'm convinced that Jesus invites us into the truest, clearest, most life-giving way not only to *understand* right and wrong but to actually start living that reality out in our everyday lives.

But, like I said, there are plenty of other opinions out there. So before we get to God, let's start by taking a look at some of the *other* ways people try to figure out what's right and wrong.