Welcome to ReThink

“Faith is not a leap in the dark; it's the exact opposite. It's a commitment based on evidence...It is irrational to reduce all faith to blind faith and then subject it to ridicule. That provides a very anti-intellectual and convenient way of avoiding intelligent discussion.”

- John Lennox

This series came out of conversations I'd had with good friends, who aren't Christians, but who were grappling with life and trying to fit it together. Some were sure they had answers. And some had no idea. But there was one common thread in our discussions - Christianity offered little by way of intelligent discussion. It was a worldview & religion of the past, on the decline, soon to be replaced entirely with a more enlightened and rational way to view the world.

Hearing these observations again and again, even from people I loved and respected, stung. I knew they thought I believed in fairy-tales, urban myths and superstition. And when I considered the things I spoke to other Christians about - eternal life, being born again, being renewed by God’s Spirit all bought about by the resurrection of a 2,000 year old Jew - I had to admit that, without context, they were right. It did sound bizarre. So that's what this series is. Context. Going back to square one to put the claims of Christianity on the hook. And in doing so, make people once more consider the man who inspired it all, and who brings life even in the face of death. Jesus Christ. Welcome to ReThink.
Chapter 1

Epistemology

**epistemology** ɪˈpɪstəmələjɪ

noun Philosophy

“The theory of knowledge, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.”

In this study we’re going to be grappling with how we know what we know, and whether Science is going to answer the questions we have in life, leaving no room for Christianity or any other religion.
Section 1

How do we know anything?

It’s not a question we ask ourselves most days, because most people assume that what they believe is true...otherwise they wouldn’t believe it. But there’s a recent trend to say that belief in something is only justified if it can be empirically proven. The problem is, there’s plenty of things we believe that we can’t prove.

1 - List some things that you know to be true in your life? (History, Relationships, Knowledge etc.)

2 - How have you come to that conclusion?

3 - Evidentialism is the theory that the justification for any belief depends solely on the evidence for it. Yet on the video we saw a range of opinions as to how people “knew” things - from “touch it, taste it, smell it, feel it” to the need for “proof”. In your opinion, are there more “valid” ways of knowing things?

4 - How do you balance the difference sources from which we know things?

For most of us, there are a mix of sources that inform what we believe. The differing sources don’t make them either more true or more false. And it’s not always possible to produce empirical evidence for them. These truths which we all generally accept philosophers call properly basic beliefs. Beliefs that we accept, even while we may not necessarily be able to ‘prove’- like the world isn’t really just a figment of our imagination, that objects are real, that the world wasn’t created 10 minutes ago and us given memories. Some things we just accept. But which things? And why?
Epistemology (this topic) is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion. But how do we determine which is which?

5 - One of the Bible’s observations about people is that while we can know truth, a consequence of being out of relationship with God is that we have a tendency to suppress the truth when we don’t like it. Is this true in your own experience?

6 - This tension has caused some to claim that the only things we can truly know then are things we can prove empirically. Richard Dawkins asks and answers the question:

“Have you ever wondered how we know the things that we know? … The answer … is “evidence.”

By “evidence”, Dawkins is referring to scientific testing, and the construction of theories based on that testing. What do you think of this? Does it help explain your truths from question 1?

One of the things that's necessary when we speak of “knowing” things is humility (epistemic humility). We need to be suspicious of what we think we know (because we could be mistaken), and we can’t assume that there is one (and only one) way to know something.

7 - For the following areas, discuss how you test its truth:

- Whether you love someone.
- Who fought in the battle of Hastings.
- What it was like to live through the Depression.
- What effect pouring fanta over ice-cream will have.
- Whether God exists.

One of the foundational tenets of the Judeo-Christian worldview is that because God made the world, and He exists outside of the world, there is such a thing as objective truth. And it’s through understanding this objective truth - through all available avenues - that a fuller, deeper, more satisfying life is possible.
One of the major stumbling blocks for many is the idea of faith. It seems to be synonymous with ignorance, a lack of curiosity, the ability to accept limits where we shouldn’t, and even the denial of truth for convenience sake.

In his book “The Selfish Gene”, Richard Dawkins makes the comment that:

“[Faith] means blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence.”

8 - Is this a widely held view? Do you agree with it?

The Bible has a very different picture of faith. It says faith is “the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) That is, faith is meant to point to, reflect a reality that cannot be seen, but is nevertheless true - like gravity.

After Jesus death & resurrection, John’s account of Jesus’ life records an interaction (& summary) between Thomas who doubted Jesus’ resurrection, and Jesus himself. Seeing this interaction gives us a good understanding of what faith (belief) according to the Bible is. Read John 20:24-31

9 - What is Thomas’ problem in this passage? Is he being reasonable?

10 - What brings about faith in Thomas? Do you think he can explain everything that’s gone on?

11 - In verses 30-31, what are the means by which John seeks to bring about belief / faith in Jesus? How does this differ from blind trust?

John Lennox, a professor of Mathematics at Oxford and a Christian says:

“Faith is not a leap in the dark; it’s the exact opposite. It’s a commitment based on evidence...It is irrational to reduce all faith to blind faith and then subject it to ridicule. That provides a very anti-intellectual and convenient way of avoiding intelligent discussion.”

12 - To finish, discuss whether you feel like the things you have faith in are a hindrance to your engagement with the world or not.

To delve a bit deeper in properly basic beliefs, check out this interview with Philosopher Alvin Plantinga: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7377jU2a8Y