

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

THE SUPERNATURAL DEAL?

FAITHTM **UNDER FIRE**

IS JESUS A PROPHET?

DID JESUS RISE F

EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY'S TEN TOUGHEST QUESTIONS

DO CHRISTIANS AND I

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DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO GOD?

LEE
STROBEL
GARRY
POOLE

SESSIONS

10

IS ANYTHING BEYOND FORGIVENESS?



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LEE STROBEL AND
GARRY POOLE



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Faith Under Fire Participant's Guide

Tough Faith Questions Participant's Guide

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

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PREFACE

The idea came to me in the shower one morning: why not create a television program in which people of various beliefs—from Muslims to Christians to atheists to New Agers—could debate the most provocative spiritual and moral issues of the day?

What's more, prominent religious leaders could be invited on the program to be cross-examined about the stickiest questions concerning their faith.

Thanks to the vision and creativity of Jim Berger and Joni Holder, we ended up producing *Faith Under Fire*TM for a national television network. As predicted, the weekly show generated a slew of vociferous letters from viewers around the country. More than one person admitted that he found himself shouting back at his TV set.

This curriculum is based on the interviews and debates we aired on the program. You'll see knowledgeable and passionate experts discussing not just *what* they believe, but *why* they believe it. Our hope is that your group will provide a safe environment for you to be able to share your own thoughts and opinions—as well as to consider the viewpoints of others.

You'll quickly see that many of the claims made by the experts are mutually exclusive. In other words, the Christian and Muslim cannot both be right if the Bible claims Jesus is the Son of God and the Koran asserts that he's not divine but merely a prophet. One of them might be correct, or both of them could be in error, but each one of them cannot be true at the same time.

That's why we insist that our experts back up their claims. Can they defend their position logically? Do they have evidence

from history or science that supports their assertions? Our task should be to determine where the evidence points.

In a similar way, the U.S. Constitution provides equal protection to all expressions of faith, and yet that doesn't mean all religious claims are equally true. According to the U.S. Supreme Court, the American ideal is to create a "marketplace of ideas" in which various opinions and beliefs can freely battle with each other so that truth will ultimately prevail.

So what is "true" about God, about Jesus, and about the after-life? What can we know with confidence about issues of faith and morality? I hope you'll grapple with these issues in unhindered debate and discussion in your group.

One thing is true for sure: a lot hinges on the outcome.

Lee Strobel

IS THE SUPERNATURAL REAL?

session 1

Read It!

Wishful Thinking?

As spotlights streak across the world-famous monument, suspense spreads among the live audience of New Yorkers gathered to witness the spectacle. With the dramatic flair of a seasoned showman, David Copperfield shocks and amazes an estimated fifty million people watching by television—the Statue of Liberty *disappears*! Go figure. Is it a miracle, magic, or a trick of the eye?

Intricate patterns and complex geometric designs mysteriously appear in farm fields overnight. Aerial photographs offer the best view of these veritable works of art created by flattened wheat and corn crops: people around the world are calling them *crop circles*. Are they alien navigational tools, electromagnetic natural occurrences, or a group of talented artists tromping around at midnight with boards strapped to their feet?

A twenty-year-old Estonian woman lost her sight after a head injury when she was a little girl. Doctors diagnosed lifelong disability. During a televised 2003 healing conference, however, she put her hands on her eyes during a service and prayed along with the leader. “When I took my hands away I was able to see!” she exclaimed. Miracle, magic, or a staged television scam?

An Arizona housewife’s psychic ability to communicate with the dead helps solve crimes, piecing together complicated, confusing clues. Is it an accurate source for legitimate investigations, supernatural communication from God, satanic activity, or simply an intriguing concept for a prime-time television show?

Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea, and all night long a strong east wind drove the waters back and formed a path of dry land. With a wall of water on their right and left, the Israelites crossed over to the other side without getting wet—not even a single drop. Miracle, myth, a great scene for a bearded Charlton Heston, or a natural occurrence with lucky timing?

When Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand with only five loaves

of bread and two fish, he looked up to heaven, gave thanks, and handed the meager food to the disciples, who in turn passed it to all the people. Everyone ate and was satisfied, and when they counted the leftovers, there were twelve basketfuls. Did the food miraculously multiply, did the disciples make it all up, or did Jesus simply inspire the crowd to pull out their hidden lunches and share what was already there?

Do miracles really happen? Or are they the exaggerated result of mere wishful thinking? This is a foundational issue to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. To believe he's the unique Son of God who proved it by rising from the dead, we need to first believe the supernatural is possible. But is it — *really*?

Watch It!

Use the following space to take notes as you view the video in which Lee Strobel interviews Dr. J. P. Moreland, a Christian philosopher, and skeptical attorney Edward Tabash.

Discuss It!

1 Consider the following list of events: a spectacular sunset, the birth of a baby, the healing of a broken bone, a complete recovery from cancer without medical treatment, and a man walking on water. Which of these events, if any, would you label as a miracle? Why?

2 Define *miracle*. Define *supernatural occurrence*. Is a miracle a supernatural occurrence and vice-versa? Explain.

3 Have you or anyone you know ever had a personal experience that you believe to be a modern-day miracle or a supernatural occurrence? Tell about that experience.

4 Why do you suppose many people find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe in miracles? What about you? Do you think it is logical and reasonable to believe a supernatural realm exists? Why or why not?

"There are two ways to look at life. One is that nothing is a miracle, and the other is that everything is a miracle."

Albert Einstein

5 J. P. Moreland outlines three strands of evidence to support the occurrence of the supernatural: "Bangers have bangers, rigged dice have riggers, and information (referring to DNA) has informers." How well do you believe these three categories of evidence support belief in the supernatural? Why?

6 Edward Tabash argues that "if there really is a banger, a dice thrower, and an informer, then such a being should not play dice with our knowledge and should be more amenable to direct experience. But we have no evidence of the types of miracles that allegedly occurred in the Bible happening today." Do you agree or disagree with Tabash's argument that if some kind of divine being—God—is real, then there should be more sufficient evidence of the occurrences of modern-day miracles? Explain your answer.

7 Dr. Moreland claims that healings occur today. Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?

8 To what extent do you think miracles are a product of exaggerated hope or delusional thinking? To what extent do you think miracles are genuine? Explain.

9 Dr. Moreland suggests that the mere existence of human free will is strong evidence of a realm beyond the natural realm of cause and effect. Does this line of reasoning make sense to you? Why or why not?

“For nothing can happen without cause; nothing happens that cannot happen, and when what was capable of happening has happened, it may not be interpreted as a miracle. Consequently, there are no miracles.... We therefore draw this conclusion: what was capable of happening is not a miracle.”

Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 2.28

10 The Oxford American Dictionary defines the word *supernatural* as: “Of, or caused by, power above the forces of nature”; and the word *miracle* as: “A remarkable and welcome event that seems impossible to explain by means of the known laws of nature and is therefore attributable to a supernatural agency.” Assuming that supernatural events such as miracles *do* occur—even rarely—would you say that by definition, *any occurrence* of the miraculous must necessitate the existence of some kind of divine being? Why or why not?

“A miracle ... is an event that cannot be given a natural explanation but must be attributed directly to God, who has acted in a special way in the natural order.”

C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe?*

11 Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If God doesn’t exist, by definition miracles don’t happen, because a miracle is an act of God. If, on the other hand, God does exist and he is the creator of the universe, miracles are possible because the God who created everything has the power to choose to do something else.”

12 Consider the purpose of miracles. John 2:23 says, “Now while he [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the [miraculous] signs he was doing and believed in his name.” John 10:24–25 says, “The Jews who were there gathered around him [Jesus], saying, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works [miracles] I do in my Father’s name testify about me.’” According to these passages, what is the value of miracles? Even though we are twenty centuries removed from the events, how is this point still valid?

“First, whatever begins to exist has a cause. Second, the universe began to exist. And, third, therefore, the universe has a cause. As the eminent scientist Sir Arthur Eddington wrote: ‘The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural.’”

Theologian William Lane Craig

Watch It! Lee's Perspective

There was a time when I would have agreed wholeheartedly with Edward Tabash: the supernatural is a figment of wishful thinking. As an atheist, I ruled out the possibility of a supernatural realm. Later, though, I became more open-minded. I decided to follow the evidence of science and history wherever it pointed—even if it seemed to indicate that miracles are possible and that the supernatural exists. Based on the kind of scientific evidence that Dr. Moreland describes, as well as the convincing historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus that I describe in my book *The Case for Christ*, I became firmly convinced that the universe is the product of a Creator and that Jesus of Nazareth is truly his Son. To me, that's the most logical conclusion I could reach. So here's my question for you: does it make more sense to deny the supernatural because of an assumption that it's impossible, or to follow the evidence wherever it leads?

Chart It!

At this point in your spiritual journey, what do you believe about miracles? On a 1–10 scale, place an X near the spot and phrase that best describes you. Share your selection with the rest of the group and give reasons for placing your X where you did.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I'm not convinced miracles occur.				I'm unsure what to believe about miracles.				I'm convinced miracles occur.	

Study It!

Take some time later this week to check out what the Bible teaches about miracles and the supernatural.

- Jeremiah 32:17–21, 26–27
- Matthew 8:23–27
- John 11