



THE BENEFITS OF BELIEF

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In this Prager University course, I want to focus not on the evidence for God's existence, but on the benefits of belief.

If God exists, then the world didn't just evolve by chance, but by deliberate design. There's an Artist behind this incredible work of art—this big and beautiful world.

If God exists, we're living in a great story, an epic like "The Lord of the Rings," with real heroes and heroic tasks. Ultimately, all the twists and turns of this epic narrative will be paid off, everything will make sense. It will even have a happy ending, not necessarily, or even likely, in our own lifetime—even Moses didn't get into the Promised Land—but over the grand course of time in an afterlife, which exists as surely as God exists.

If God exists, the presence of evil, hard as it is to accept, makes sense. God allows it for a reason—namely, to preserve our free will. And God will reconcile all injustices in the end. If there is no God, life is one big crapshoot.

If God does exist, morality is a real, objective feature of the world. If there is no God, morality is just the rules we make up for this little game of life we play.

If God exists, love is the nature of an eternal reality. If there is no God, love is just a fleeting feeling, no more than a bunch of chemical and neurological interactions.

If God exists, you are of infinite value. He knows you as a parent knows his child. He's accessible to you. If there is no God, each of us is as insignificant as a rock on an unknown planet.

If God exists, death is conquered because if there is a God there is a reality outside of space and time. If there is no God, there is nothing immortal, and all the good things in life are destroyed forever. You, and everyone you love, and everything you think matters are all consigned to oblivion. If there is no God, life is pointless. Everything we've done and lived for will ultimately be in vain.

Can I prove with an absolute certainty that God exists? I can make the case that overwhelming evidence suggests that he does. But no I can't prove that He exists with absolute certainty. That's likely part of His plan. God deliberately doesn't give us absolute proof so that we're free to choose or not to choose to believe in Him.

So which way do you want to go?

Be honest. Doesn't your heart at least hope that there is a good God, a transcendent Validator of love and all the highest human values? Of course it does. Why would anyone not wish that life has some ultimate purpose; that good and evil are real; that there is ultimate justice; that our love for others means something?

If you choose to live as if there is a God—even if you are not sure there is a God—you lose nothing and you gain everything.

Religious Christians and Jews are happier, live longer, and are more charitable than their less observant or secular fellow citizens. These are not my opinions. These are the findings of a multitude of scientific studies.

If you have been an atheist for a while, it may be difficult for you to change your thinking, even if you find some merit in the many rational arguments for God's existence. But you can change your behavior. You can live as if God's exists, even if you hold doubts. Why not? As I said, you lose nothing and you have everything to gain.

This behavioral approach is far from new. The Jews have long had a saying, "We will do, and we will understand," which acknowledges that action often precedes understanding. So why not begin with an action? Why not pray the prayer of the skeptic? "God, if you exist, you must know that I'm not a believer.

So, please, God, give me the gift of faith, in your time and in your way. I want to believe whatever is true. Amen." If you say that and mean it, and give it some time, be prepared, because He will not ignore that prayer.

Go on, say it. Find a private place and say it. Your Creator is listening.

I'm Peter Kreeft, Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, for Prager University.