



The End of Our Exploring: A Book about Questioning and the Confidence of Faith

Matthew Lee Anderson

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What does it mean to ask a question?

That's a funny way of putting it, isn't it? The answer seems perfectly obvious: people want information, so they make an inquiry. What else could a question mean, if it's more than that?

It's pretty popular these days to say that Christians ought to ask the hard questions. And for good reason: it's true. There are challenges that deserve serious attention, questions that we should carefully consider. Faith isn't the sort of thing that will endure as long as our eyes are closed. The opposite, in fact: faith helps us see, and that means not shrinking from the ambiguities and the difficulties that provoke our most profound questions.

I'm a fan of questioning. My education was built on the notion not only that we need not fear questions, but that by the grace of God we have the safety and security to rush headlong into them and find ourselves better for it on the other side.

The past decade of my life I have continued that process of inquiry, exploration, and discovery. I can't claim to have always had the right disposition about my inquiries. (And all his friends and his spouse said "Amen!"). But I have never once quit caring about the learning, about the growth that is before us, and the questions that will lead us into it.

Which is why I want to look at questioning itself, to step back and examine how exploration and inquiry fits within the Christian life.

In our embrace of questioning, we must learn to question well. In our uncertainty, we must not give up the task of walking worthy of the calling which Christ has placed upon us. For we have not yet reached the end of our exploring.

What does it mean to question well? That's a good question.

-Matthew Lee Anderson

The End of Our Exploring: A Book about Questioning and the Confidence of Faith Details

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From Reader Review The End of Our Exploring: A Book about Questioning and the Confidence of Faith for online ebook

Aaron says

My full review can be read at [Blogging Theologically](#):

Christians don't really know what to do with questions. Some of us seem afraid to ask anything; others seem terrified to receive answers. But questions were never meant to be a source of angst nor a mask for unbelief.

In his new book *The End of Our Exploring*, Matthew Lee Anderson challenges us to examine the heart behind our inquiries and embrace the God-glorifying design of asking questions—to see them as opportunities to edify and encourage, to grow in our faith.

After reading this book, one thing is abundantly clear: Anderson is a uniter. He finally brings “progressives” and “conservatives” together—but it's not to hold hands and sing “Kumbayah.” Instead, he recognizes that both are guilty of the same thing: simplistically approaching questions....

My full review can be read at [Read the rest](#).

C.J. Stunkard says

The book opens very well, with Matthew taking the lecture approach of first asserting the value of questions themselves then providing a preview of all that he intends to tell us about them, chapter by chapter. This section is immensely strong, and the rest of the book follows suit, embracing the inquisitive mind of the truth-seeker while also tempering it with a dose of examination to ensure that the questioner is not driven by selfish ambition or vain conceit but a genuine desire for truth and understanding.

Matthew presents himself well as not only a teacher but also a fellow learner, jumping between roles as necessary within the chapters, exhorting his readers at one point and expressing his own lessons learned at another. This ability in conjunction with a number of footnotes that are both self-deprecating and rather charming make the book's content accessible, even while it is dense.

And I mean that in the best sense of the word. *The End of Our Exploring* is a full book, one that contains both many quotable sentences ("As Christians, we do not possess the truth; we live within it and are possessed by it." [p109]) and wonderful overarching considerations throughout the chapters, with particular insight into the nature of questioning and context. His analysis of the cheapness of facts due to the pervasiveness of information [p71] is perhaps one of the most astute things I've read this year.

The book contains many such cultural analyses as well as personal anecdotes and mindful observations about not only the nature of questioning but life itself (and their inherent relationship). By the end of the book, when matters become a bit more practical and concrete, Matthew is on fire as an author, both in terms of his content and communication. He provides excellent insight into how individuals can dialogue well despite their disagreements and how they can question within those dialogues and through those disagreements.

My only real complaint about *The End of Our Exploring* is Matthew's tendency to begin sentences with

“there” and end sentences with prepositions (though I am unsure if he does both in a single sentence). These grammatical choices are pet peeves of mine, and in two out of three books I would not be overly bothered, but Matthew's work is so well-written that these specific shortfalls (likely done to make the work more accessible) are jarring each time I encounter them. But again, these are personal pet peeves, similar to another reader's dislike of gerunds or a viewer's frustration with wipe transitions in the Star Wars trilogy.

In the end, I still think this is a great book, and I am sure that those who are more forgiving of the aforementioned grammatical faux pas will have nothing but good things to say. The End of Our Exploring can be purchased on Amazon.com in paperback or Kindle formats.

Avery Thorn says

Quality Musings

Perhaps not my favorite, but definitely the best book I have read this year. Anderson, as if to make the theme of the book the substance itself, does not come to many hard conclusions. If you want a manual on questioning and the Christian faith, this book won't be for you. But if you want great food for thought on curiosity by a curious man, this book will almost certainly satisfy.

Ron says

This book is just plain weird. I get the feeling the authors heart is in the right place, but there are some really strange vibes running through it.

I think it might be a beneficial text if one is coming from a worldview where any question beyond the Sunday school canned answer is viewed in a scandalous light. While the authors worldview differs from anti-intellectualism / canned answer theology in the domain of questioning, there are likely some paths of mutual understanding as he appears to hold to very high views of scripture, obedience, holiness, and submission to authority. He then uses these high views as a baseline upon which he provides scaffolds for "proper" questioning.

In doing so, the author promotes a less dangerous path of exploring faith while minimizing the potential of going down the seemingly rabbit hole to nowhere. The way in which he does this is likely not going to appeal to the skeptic and may well throw up a multitude of red flags for others outside his particular worldviews. Ie, I see the potential for abusive practices and passive aggressive behaviorisms running in and out of the text like rabbits... many folks in the canned answer school might not see this, and some even thrive on it. On the other hand, the author would likely would be aghast at my Christian mentors focus on the rabbit hole and the concept that faith deconstruction / reconstruction while dangerous is often times more beneficial than not.

In addition to the worldview issues, there is a danger that when / if those scaffolds collapse, what happens to faith? Certainly it is a better approach than one of avoidance or anti-intellectualism, but it seems to lean far more towards a theology of glory than I'm comfortable advocating.

Along the theology of glory domain, a common premise of the author appears to be one of "whats in it for

me". How do I question for greater understanding for my walk with Christ, rather than one of questioning from the domains of skepticism and doubt. While on an individual Christian level, such may be a good thing, I seriously wonder how it impacts empathy as concerns others in the skepticism and doubt domain. To me, it looks like yet another path to circular apologetics which are helpful to the choir, but not so much for anyone else. Granted, there are many parts of the body of Christ, one size doesn't fit all.

I realize I come down hard on the theology of glory and worldview thing, but to give the author a benefit of a doubt, I think there is likely a cultural aspect involved. He presents a chapter of how to survive a Christian College... the portrayal of such is something much more attuned with the proverbial IFB Bible College than a mainline US Christian university. Alas, as concerns matter of faith, the wisdom he presents has value for both.

Bottom line, there are bits of greatness and items to ponder spread throughout the text, with ever increasing relevance to entire body of Christ as the page numbers increase. It's not the sort of text I'd recommend due to the theology of glory leanings and aforementioned red flags, but for Christian cultures where such is not as problematic, it might well be worth checking out.

Charissa says

I received an advance copy of this book in return for writing this review. My opinion of this book is just that - my honest opinion.

When I read I could receive an advance copy for review I jumped on the opportunity because the title seemed a title for a book that would be of interest to me. I have been a Christian for a few years now, but my journey has not been the homecoming I first imagined it would be. Even last year when I got baptised (as an act of obedience, because that naturally flows from believing) I had my questions. I hoped this book would give a clearcut answer to some of my questions. It didn't. It did something very different but equally worthwhile, though. It validated my questioning while teaching me a lot about the process (and the rights and wrongs) of questioning.

I rate this book four stars because it has proven to be a very interesting, challenging and enlightening read. I did not rate it four stars (as Goodread's rating system implies) because I 'really liked' the book. I liked it, but I didn't really like it. It's a challenging read, both with regard to the actual reading (difficult words, I can't remember having to look up so many words in any books written during the last 50 or so years) as the topic it explores.

Who would I suggest this book to? First of all to anyone who takes their beliefs seriously and because of that also questions those beliefs at times. I think this book would be an especially useful read for pastors or Bible study teachers and small group leaders. As the book states, questioning (and looking for something besides the clichés) is something which is too often avoided in churches. Why and how questioning could, and indeed should, work in these situations is covered in the book.

The main things I took away after reading *The End of Our Exploring* is that questioning is permitted and can be desirable. Oh, and that there are good and bad questions and that you can learn to question well. An important lesson to learn in my opinion.

Keith says

When asked, "What lesson took your whole life to learn?", Al Geier (a wizened, Socratic, 80-year old philosophy professor) answered, "I've become comfortable being lost."

If questioning is being lost, then Anderson helps me get comfortable being lost.

This topic (in less capable hands) might have become so meta it collapsed. But "The End of Our Exploring" confidently strides forward, a playful, readable, provocative, sometimes profound exploration of -- well, exploring.

In turns literary, philosophical, and conversational, the book is meditative, confessional, and (at the end) even mystical. For MereOrthodoxy readers, the voice is one we know and love (at once plucky and self-deprecating). It takes our hand and takes us on an adventure.

Anderson walks his talk. He talks about and exemplifies key intellectual virtues. And when were such virtues as patience, suspending judgment, asking hard questions, and avoiding intellectual fashion so needed as they are today?

This is a book for students, teachers, pastors, and the incurably curious.

It is a book to help us critique bad arguments, cope with information overload, and relate lovingly to people of a widely varying diversity of worldviews.

It is a book to help us slow down, keep going, and get perspective.

This is not a book to read through quickly; it is a safari. Soak it in, look around, pay attention.

It is not a book to be read alone. Read it with a spouse. Give it to your pastor. Start a book club.

It is not a book to be read only once. Like the Four Quartets (from which the title comes) it is musical and bears repetition.

I look forward to reading it through again, noticing new sights, pondering old questions, and (until death brings one end to our exploring) becoming more comfortable being lost.

Richard Myerscough says

Why should you read a book on questioning? And if you're going to do so, why should it be this one?

Because questioning is a vital part of knowing God in Christ more deeply and truly. And because Matthew Lee Anderson has written a thoroughly engaging, winsome and wise book on the subject.

But don't be fooled. This is far more than the subject appears to be - this is a proper work of pastoral theology and of biblical reflection. Some of the chapters are outstandingly helpful and the writing is always worthy of being read.

(It also includes 2 very helpful appendices on surviving at college and loving those who leave)

A must-read? You betcha.

K.M. Weiland says

I discovered an excerpt of this book at the front of a free digital version of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*—and it truly is a fitting introduction to that great classic. Anderson here posits questions about questioning. He encourages the merging of conviction with curiosity and offers insights into the kind of mature inner (and outer) dialogue every Christian needs to be having. Always humble, always generous, he is a refreshing lighthouse in the midst of a sometimes very murky night.

Mathew says

Let me just say up front: I thoroughly enjoyed *The End of Our Exploring* and I highly recommend it. It may be my favorite read of the half-year. Matthew engages a topic that's crucial for the church today. Many people who grew up in the church are setting their course as adults and questioning everything. Some of these questions are better than others, but many are asked without the desire for any answers. In short, it's become trendy to become a skeptic à la Rob Bell. All questions. No answers. Matthew offers a better path, one which ends somewhere. One which is ground in Christ. He says, "I am chiefly concerned to explore whether we can question well and what such questioning might look like" (p. 12).

He makes a piercing insight I thought would share. He points out we all grapple with different questions which shake our faith. He rightly points out children and young people often question the most, but don't have the depth of life experience to question well. Some questions then can't be asked without the proper life context. "The art of questioning takes a lifetime to perfect, for the most interesting questions flow from a deep well of insight" (p. 21).

I see this as a major problem in the young, restless, and reformed crowd. Many of the YRR do not have the life experience to be asking the right questions for life's toughest problems. Or to be answering them for others. Yet here we have reformed theology with seemingly "easy" answers to sin and suffering. God is sovereign. So we go around answering every one's struggles with the hard realities of our fallen world without the life experience to answer their questions meaningfully and also without actually reading our most thoughtful forefathers--the people who actually lived, struggled, and breathed these truths (p. 26 "Learning to Ask Better Questions"). This passage sums up my hope nicely,

Compared to the easy answers, the long, tumultuous, and frequently painful work of seeking understanding seems really hard and generally useless. . . . But questioning well means more than "finding an answer" so that we can simply get on with our lives. Those who inquire well must move from answers to understanding, from the instant gratification of our need for comfort and security toward the deepened desire for the enduring good of wisdom. (p. 72)

He also lays the groundwork for questioning well by demonstrating not all questions are good questions. He starts in the Garden and reminds us of Satan's question, "Did God really say?" Says Matthew, "The question itself casts a shadow over the Lord God and His kindness, a shadow that becomes a shadow of death" (p. 34). Matthew asks a crucial question in this regard, "The first thing to ask when our faith is 'called into question,' as Adam and Eve's was, is whether the inquiry is an invitation to join the rebellion. Does the form of the

question itself presuppose hostility toward God?" (p. 37). A lot of the questioning I heard is an invitation to rebellion and sweeps many people who are questioning with good faith into the depths where they can't swim.

My favorite chapter was, "On Doubt and What Doubt Isn't." Matthew questions those who praise doubt as the highest virtue and suggests asking questions within the framework of the creeds as the path to truth, beauty, and goodness (p. 49). He advocates not for the brow-beating confidence of fundamentalism, triumphalism, or shallow faith, but rather a confidence grounded in Jesus Christ who died for us.

I could go on and on sharing favorite passages from *The End of Our Exploring*. I'll save something for your reading. I'll end with this: I appreciated Matthew's writing. It had depth. You could tell he took his time. He searched Scripture, listened to people, and asked life's toughest questions when the time was right. That came across in this book. What he says doesn't come across as simple. He also doesn't stop with questioning but lands on some answers. For those doubting, feeling jaded, and questioning you won't find a better book to guide you on your journey.

Joseph Sunde says

Wonderful, beautifully written book on the importance of questioning well. Offers a strong critique of evangelical anti-intellectualism while wincing at those who relish in their doubt.

Daniel says

We live in an age when doubt is cool, when we're supposed to "live the questions." Matt reminds us that questions have an orientation -- they search after Truth -- when posed well and honestly, they seek after answers, even if they aren't answered immediately. Whether you pastor a church, lead a small group, or simply seek to cultivate a more thoughtful approach to your intellectual endeavors, this book is an invaluable guide to seeing the end of our questions -- to placing our inquiries under the authority of the One in whom every question is answered.

Barnabas Piper says

One of my favorite kinds of books is the kind that makes me think better. Matthew Anderson has provided just such a book. It is a book of questions and about questions. It calls our questions into question and makes the reader think about how and why we explore what we do. This book is structured a little like a wheel, with a hub of an idea and spokes running off it in different directions. But each idea is connected. Really an excellent book.

****Full disclosure:** I work for the publisher who produced this book, but I had no part in it except for reading it upon release.

Jeremy Manuel says

I can't remember exactly when it was, but it was either in late college or early on in seminary that I realized the importance of questions. So when the offer to get a review copy of a book about questioning came up on the blog Mere Orthodoxy I took it because who wouldn't be happy to get a book that only cost a review of it. It seemed like a book that could be very interesting. Most books are content to give prepackaged answers from a popular figure, so a book on questioning kind of bucks that trend. So how does this book go about talking about questions?

This book is ultimately about learning to question well. We live in a day where questions are viewed as important, but it sometimes seems like answers are less important than the questions that are being asked. Questions are also viewed in some circles as a challenge to authority and therefore heavily discouraged and squashed when they do arise. Anderson deals with both of these issues and ultimately seeks to have us ask good questions and to teach those around us to ask good questions, instead of being afraid of questions.

At this point it should be said that Anderson is focused on questions centering around Christianity and faith. This isn't so much a manual on questioning across any discipline, but more of how questioning should function in our faith. I'm just saying this because Anderson comes unapologetically from a belief in Jesus Christ as central to his faith and also his questioning (this should be picked up in the subtitle *A Book About Questioning and the Confidence of Faith*). This needs to be realized because Anderson is honest about where he comes from, he is not working from any idea of a "clean slate" in regards to his questioning.

In fact if there was one point all people should take away from this book it is to learn to question our questions more. I think we all too often assume a "clean slate" or that we're asking our questions from a neutral starting place. The reality is that we ask questions based on our experiences past and present. It isn't that hard to believe that our questions would be influenced by those aspects of our life. It probably isn't hard to believe that the answers that we'd accept would be influenced by that as well. The idea of not coming from a "clean slate" or neutral starting point isn't necessarily a bad thing, but something that I think we have to be aware of if we are seriously asking questions. Are we really wanting well thought out answers? Do we just want the answer that will make us happy? Will we then reject any answer that doesn't fit the assumptions that we already hold? I think these are important questions no matter where you are in life and is a main point in the early chapters of this book.

I think another point of *The End of Our Exploring* worth noting is his emphasis on questioning in a community. He talks about the need of a community to pass along its traditions and the questions that go along with that tradition, which I think is a great insight. As he puts it on page 129, "When the questions are forgotten, tradition ossifies into a rigid, hardened legalism that everyone must accept even if no one can remember why." I'd call this aspect questioning with the past and present church community that we're in.

He reinforces his idea that later on page 175 where he says, "Our local church communities, instead of on blogs or at conferences, should be where the hardest questions about the Bible are pursued (rather than passed over.)" While I agree with this sentiment, it's possible that he could be read as saying that the church is the only place these questions should be discussed. I don't think he is really saying that, but if he is I'd disagree with him a bit. I'd call it one of the places we should be asking the hardest questions but not the only one.

I would place importance also on questioning and inquiring with those who don't readily agree with us as important aspects too (not saying that all our church communities will agree with us on everything, but there

is probably at least more common ground than not). He seems to as well since he has a whole chapter dedicated to that kind of questioning too. The reason why I think that this idea of communal inquiry is important is that it helps us run into the questions of others. This helps us sharpen our own questions, help others question well, search for answers, and look at the answers we already have when we disagree with them. However, I'd say we need both questioning within our own church community/congregation, but also with others that may be outside that community. I think this is important so we don't become ingrown and over confident in our questions and answers, but also because our lives are often more than just our church community or at least should be. So the types of people we are inquiring with should reflect that to some degree.

The ideas of questioning our questions and inquiring within a community are two ideas that really popped out at me in the book. I do wonder though if there is that much difference between Anderson's idea of community inquiry and the current focus on dialogue, at least in terms of practice. Yes he may be calling for a search for answers based on some authority, but I'm not so sure it would look that much different either. Regardless, I think that searching for answers within a community is important whether you call it inquiry or dialogue. I also think that Anderson is right in saying that some authority has to be recognized to get anywhere with this process. I guess I just wonder if he doesn't play a bit of semantics at the same time.

I think this book does more right than wrong. I think Matthew Lee Anderson does a great job at bringing up the issues around questioning. I may wonder about some of his thoughts or if he's just playing with semantics to make a differentiation, but overall the content is solid. I've also heard that the grammar is not the greatest in the book in places, but I'm not a grammar nut so I can't speak on that too much. I did notice that one of his many footnotes didn't make sense so there does seem to be the possibility of errors and editing that could have been done better.

Who do I think would enjoy this book? Honestly anyone who wants to take questioning of their faith seriously. This book is somewhat easy to read, but moderately hard to digest. It may surprise you how easy the book reads, except for maybe when you hit a big vocabulary word like ossifies. While the sentences by themselves may be easy to read they form ideas that take a little bit of thinking through when put together. This may not be a super easy read for everyone, but if you've been experiencing doubt and have questions about the faith this may be a good book to read. Not because it gives you the answers, but because it might help you sort out how you should be questioning.

To finish up here, I'll leave you with the analogy that I keep coming to about this book. It reminds me of a beautiful tapestry. If you look too close you'll find that the edges are maybe a bit frayed or not quite stitched just right, but it doesn't really take away from the final picture. There are little statements I'm not sure I agree with here and there, the random footnote typo, or whatever, but it doesn't take away from the book's message or the insight that is within. This work may be frayed around the edges in places, but the picture it presents is not undone because of it. Maybe it would have been even better without the flaws, but it can still be appreciated and admired for what it is.

mpsiple says

Very good. More about the nature of doubts and questioning than trying to provide all the answers. I appreciated Anderson's framing of the questioning process - that at its best, it concerns our longings and the hope for answers. And that means questioning is a *good* thing for those who seek the truth. The fundamentalist impulse to stamp out questions betrays a frailty and a lack of confidence that our faith can

withstand scrutiny. But Anderson also warns that our questions are never neutral, and therefore we must question ourselves and our motives as well.

Recommended for anyone interested in learning how to think about doubts (their own and others'). He also has some helpful thoughts on engaging the skeptic.

Jacob Liao says

This book serves as a handy guide for young Christians on an intellectual journey. Though the journey starts off with intellectual inquiry, Anderson directs our attention to the spiritual basis for our questioning.

"The path toward questioning well demands that we surrender ourselves to the questions of God and make our confession if necessary. Or to put it another way, **the true beginning of our exploring is when we are explored by God**. Inquiry stands under judgment: it is a gracious judgment, to be sure, by a judge whose mercy is everlasting...As many questions as we have about the world and as important as they are, **we should remember that the Bible has its own questions that it poses to us.**"

What a breath of fresh air in this age of skepticism! We put God on trial when we embark from a place of doubt; but when we seek and question by faith, we acknowledge God as the prize of our pursuit. "Our assurance as Christians is not rooted in our own knowledge and love of God but in God's knowledge and love of us." Anderson proclaims the gospel as the foundation upon which we begin our questioning and Christ as its end. Because it is God's love which takes hold of us and constrains us, we can be truly, paradoxically, free in our inquiries.

The rest of the book interprets what our dialogue communities, friendships and intellectual discourses should be like when we situate our questioning within the gospel. This is highly relevant especially in societies where hostility towards constructive dialogue is rampant and in places where the preferred mode of engagement is to drown your opponent's voice.

The book's poetical conclusion is this: we reach the end of our exploring when at last we are found by God. Read and cherish the wisdom contained in this book. Let the doubter in you become the returning prodigal!
