



Exploring Spirituality: What is Faith and How Do I Get It?

iFOLLOW

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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What is Faith and How Do I Get?

Learning Objectives

1. Examine a clear and full definition of faith
2. Identify some signs of “bad faith”
3. Find some characteristics of healthy faith
4. Learn some specific strategies for developing strong faith

Content Outline

- A. What is faith?
- B. Defining faith
- C. Bad faith
- D. Good faith
- E. Evaluating your faith
- F. Getting a faith upgrade
- G. Conclusion

Background Material for the Presenter

The teacher in a children’s Sunday school class asked what faith was. A little boy raised his hand and said, “Faith is believin’ what you know ain’t true.”

Many people have that concept of faith. Faith is the opposite of reason. It’s that special something that helps you hang on in spite of the evidence or in the face of no evidence, contrary to what reasonable people know. Faith is what you turn to when knowledge runs out. It is what you need when beliefs and knowledge conflict.

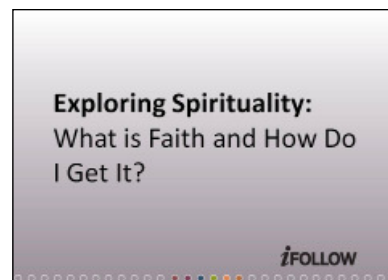
Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday school. “Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue

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mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his army build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then he radioed headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved.”

“Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?” his mother asked.

“Well, no, Mom. But if I told it the way the teacher did, you’d never believe it!”

This is the way many people approach life; if something doesn’t make sense, then faith steps in and rewords reality so that we have something to hang on to, something to still believe in. Faith is believing something you know isn’t true, the big leap across the chasm of the unknown, the big jump no matter what the evidence. But is this genuine faith?

Defining Faith

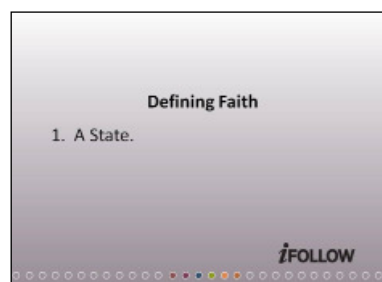
Brian McLaren, in his book *Finding Faith*, provides an intriguing definition of faith: “Faith is a state of relative certainty about matters of ultimate concern sufficient to promote action.” He breaks down this definition into four parts:

1. A state. Faith is a condition we find ourselves more or less “in.” It’s the context in which we feel and experience and think about everything in life. It includes data—propositions, ideas, specific beliefs—that form an intellectual framework, a paradigm, in which all other phenomena take place and by which they are evaluated. It is a person’s worldview; how they look at life and how they interpret what they observe and experience in life.

An analogy of the computer might be helpful. The operating system of the computer is the “state” in which the computer operates. It provides the foundation and framework upon and within which all the operations of the computer occur. Faith is, in this analogy, the operating system of the computer. It is the state or condition or system a person operates in. That is not to say it is “static” or changeless, though. Genuine faith continually self-modifies, like an operating system that continually upgrades.

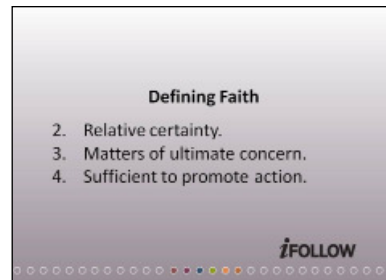
So using this analogy of the computer operating system, we would say that everyone grows up with faith, a framework and foundation in which to interpret life. A lot of this is determined by what family a person is born into, the influences a person experiences as a child, and what exposure to the rest of the world a person has. Everyone has this faith.

But even as it is important to upgrade the computer operating system to include new and more useful features to meet the ever-changing technological advancements and needs,



so our faith must continually be re-evaluated and “upgraded” to meet the diversity and growth and dynamic nature of life. We’ll talk about how to do this in a later section.

2. Relative certainty. The reality is that there is very little in this world that we can face with absolute, unquestioned certainty. Even the best, most brilliant scientists face their explorations with a degree of awe, humility and sense of mystery. Spirituality is no different. We don’t have all the answers and those who try to convince people that they do are misguided and arrogant. So we acknowledge our predicament: that we have to function in relative certainty which always includes relative uncertainty. Genuine faith acknowledges this reality.



3. Matters of ultimate concern. Faith is involved with the core values of life, universal principles, those issues that go to the heart of human existence such as meaning, purpose, destiny, process, origins. We aren’t simply talking about mathematical equations or scientific formulas or, as Brian McLaren puts it, the middle name of the vice president or the cost of green beans at the grocery store. “Matters of ultimate concern” refer to how we live our lives, make our decisions, solve our moral dilemmas, face death and the possibility of an afterlife for ourselves and other people, how we cope with suffering and loss, how we decide whether life is worth living or not, etc.

Faith is the worldview that informs those kinds of conversations, decisions and paradigms. It’s a way to describe our perspective on reality, the truth of our world as we see it. This kind of faith isn’t satisfied with make-believe or pretending or fantasy. It’s a serious search for truth and reality as far as is possible, not simply accepting things that are “nice” or make us feel good. As iron sharpens iron, so genuine faith is willing to be shaped and molded and sharpened by exposure to alternative views and paradigms, willing to be engaged in exploration and discussion and challenge and questioning. The goal of faith’s search is to find the most universal truths and intents for what is real and true “in here” (subjectively) and “out there” (objectively). Anything less than that is “bad” faith.

4. Sufficient to promote action. The ultimate goal of faith is action. If a professed belief or paradigm of life (worldview) is not sufficient to promote action, then it would better be called an opinion or idea or concept. We may hold it as data in our memory banks, but it does not constitute part of our operating system. If an idea (say, for example, that God exists) doesn’t promote action (say, to search for God or pray or monitor one’s own moral behavior or love one’s neighbor), it isn’t genuine faith at all, it’s just an idea.

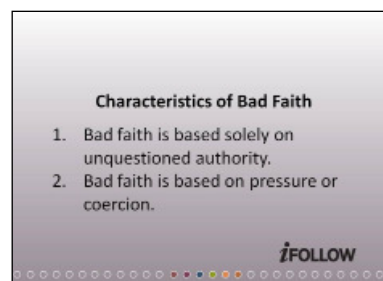
So the question is: How much certainty is sufficient to qualify as faith? The answer revolves around whether or not that understanding of reality empowers a person to act on it, to lean into it, to engage life from within it. Faith that leads to action is genuine faith.

One of the ways to evaluate whether the faith a person claims to have is helpful or not is to perhaps evaluate the kind of action that it prompts. If that faith empowers one to act

in harmony with the universal principles of love and compassion and service to others, than that faith is based upon a meaningful world view (assuming that love and compassion and service are truly life-enhancing universal principles). And most people of faith would make that assumption.

Characteristics of Bad Faith

Sometimes it is helpful to see what something is not in order to more clearly understand what it is. What does “faith” look like that doesn’t stand up under closer scrutiny or doesn’t lead to positive, helpful action and empowerment for life in the most meaningfully possible ways. Bad faith is a version of faith that affects the operating system in negative and unhelpful ways. It either collapses when confronted with new information or perspectives or it is abandoned because it does not provide meaning or significance when a person is evaluating changes in life. Bad faith is faith that does not “work” in the real world. It does not stand up to the scrutiny of life issues and challenges and crises.



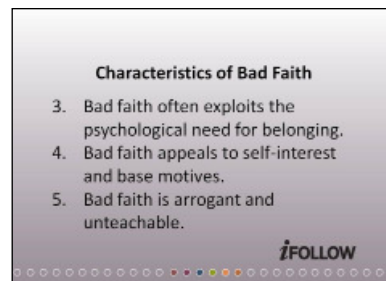
1. Bad faith is based solely on unquestioned authority. In other words, in bad faith a person believes simply because an authority figure or structure tells them to. They don’t think for themselves. They don’t question. They comply, thoughtlessly believing what they’re told to believe. This “faith” is never internalized. It simply lies on the surface of the mind or heart because they never had a part in the process of developing it, they just received it from another source. It was never truly owned.

This kind of faith is easily abandoned or rejected when another authority comes along with what appears to be a stronger argument or more persuasive reason. The Bible calls this kind of person “a reed blowing in the wind.”

2. Bad faith is based on pressure or coercion. People in religious communities and organizations can be susceptible to this approach to faith. Even in our culture, we are so used to the subtle “tyranny of the majority” that we seldom buck it. Madison Avenue (with all its slick advertisements telling us what we must have and why we must have what they’re selling) has created a culture of consumerism. People watch, buy, use, and discard mindlessly, never evaluating the true need, the issues behind the need, and how what we buy contributes or doesn’t contribute to the diverse range of global challenges. We are all largely unaware of the ways the groups and cultures in which we participate pressure us to conform and chastise us when we rattle the cage.

To the extent that a religion or ideology operates in the same way, it is not real faith. Faith cannot function in that kind of mindless atmosphere. Faith cannot be pressured or coerced for it to be genuine and real. Faith must be allowed to emerge in freedom and encouragement for it to become real and genuine and ultimately meaningful.

3. Bad faith often exploits the psychological need for belonging. Maybe no one is coercing me to believe, but if I am so desperate to belong that I will claim to believe anything the desired in-group requires of me, how can my faith be authentic? I must regularly evaluate my motives for believing. What is motivating me? What internal needs am I trying to fill? Who am I trying to please and why?



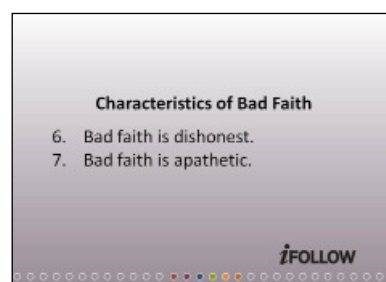
4. Bad faith appeals to self-interest and base motives.

There are some evangelists who have actually offered financial incentives to people to attend their events. (You get paid for coming and staying through the whole meeting.) That is very blatant. More subtly, some churches use the promise of wealth, health, revenge, power, pain avoidance or easy solutions to all life's problems to attract people to their church. Or they use fear and guilt to motivate belief and faith.

But the sad truth is, belief and faith based upon the desire to become rich, popular, comfortable, or to avoid hell or God's displeasure and so on, with no real desire for the true, the good, or the beautiful, is not genuine faith. Jesus described that kind of faith as a house built upon sand instead of rock. When the storm comes, the house collapses.

5. Bad faith is arrogant and unteachable. When a person takes pride in feeling "right" and rewards himself with a sense of superiority, when his faith puts him in a high and mighty posture to look down in judgment on others, it's hard to feel that we're dealing with good faith. When the religious indulge in spiritual status-seeking—Look at how much I give! Notice how much I suffer! Aren't you impressed with my knowledge, my piety, my zeal.—their desire for attention seems even more disgusting than those who parade their material wealth in a quest for social status. That know-it-all spiritual attitude; that pretended certainty that makes one talk, talk, talk, but never listen; that obnoxious "you can't teach me anything I don't already know" spirit; that "I'm right and you're wrong" attitude; these traits are ugly in the irreligious, pathetic in the religious.

6. Bad faith is dishonest. Faith with integrity is faith that admits you don't have all the answers. It's faith that is honest with the evidence as far as is possible. It is faith that upholds the highest human values like equality for all, justice and compassion for every human being, respect for life and the natural environment.



When I continue to recite the "party line" even when that "line" goes against those highest human values, how can I have integrity? Bad faith puts more emphasis on image and perception than on truth and openness.

7. Bad faith is apathetic. Since genuine faith inspires action, if a person's faith produces no action, it cannot be healthy and good. If he or she cannot say that their faith makes a difference in making the world a better place, if they would behave just as they do

without their faith, then their faith is bad faith, if it is faith at all.

“Sometimes this lack of action is covered by a surplus of talk,” writes McLaren. “Sometimes the jargon flows thick, like lots of strawberry jelly on moldy bread. Sometimes people substitute the active life of faith with the fascinating lore of faith, terminology, facts, opinions on religious esoterica, and so forth. This immersion in words no doubt positions them well to win at religious ‘Trivial Pursuit,’ but that’s about it. Who is fooled by the barrage of words besides the talker himself?”

8. Bad faith is a step backward. If a person adopts a faith given to them by a religious organization in order to be told what to think, believe and do, that faith is really an excuse for immaturity. If a person is overwhelmed by advances in science, by complexities in ethics, by gray areas in their personal life, and they throw themselves into a religion that tells them easy answers so they don’t have to think for themselves, their religiosity is an excuse for fear or laziness, not a motivation for growth and courage.

“Good faith ought to produce good fruit; I ought to become a better person for holding it. A faith that makes me less loving, mature, wise, alive, or responsible sounds to me like bad faith.” (McLaren, pp. 34-38)

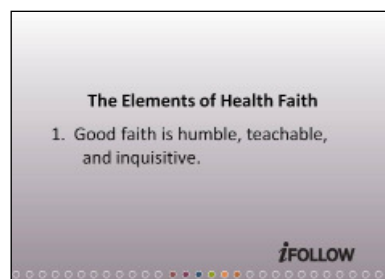
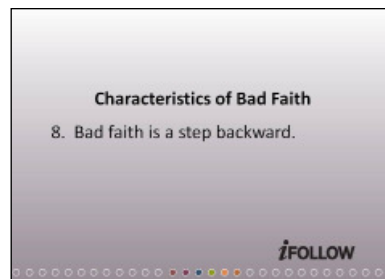
Healthy people don’t step backward or down; they only step forward or up. Healthy faith acknowledges both the mysteries of life and the certainties of life and can live with some ambiguity and uncertainty. Healthy faith embraces a both/and paradigm rather than an either/or. Healthy faith acknowledges areas of weakness and courageously works at bringing as much resolution and growth as possible. And then lives with what can’t be changed.

It is often the case that a person who says they have rejected faith has in fact been turned sour by another person’s or group’s example of bad faith. Lack of integrity and honesty and authenticity among people who claim to have faith are strong determinants for how people respond to faith at all. The great spiritual need of this world is for good faith exhibited by honest people.

The Elements of Health Faith

So what is “good faith”? What are the characteristics of a healthy attitude of believing?

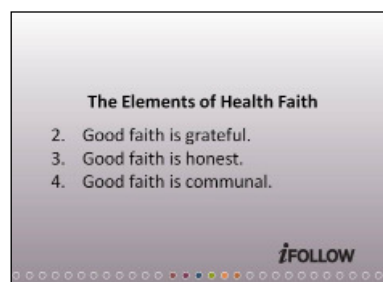
1. Good faith is humble, teachable, and inquisitive. If I am aware of how contingent and limited my knowledge is, how can I be proud about how much I know? How can I



look down on someone else for knowing less? Isn't pride—the sense of certainty that I am right and superior and don't need to learn or listen—the greatest possible barrier to faith? In this way, isn't religious pride the most hideous sin imaginable—because it is incredibly dangerous—and ridiculous? If there is a God, wouldn't good faith begin by humbling oneself before God, acknowledging one's ignorance and asking for guidance and enlightenment?

If I am appropriately humble, isn't it possible that anyone can become my teacher, from a little child to a mental patient, from a sage of old to a comedian of today? Isn't an open mind, eager to learn, the essence of good faith (as it is of good science)? Aren't yesterday's certainties sometimes the enemies of tomorrow's faith, since we'll be tempted to say, "The old wine is good enough; I don't need any new wine"? Shouldn't humble, child-like inquisitiveness be characteristic of good faith, since I'm young, new here, with an awful lot to learn? Wouldn't it make sense to ask God my questions and see if any answers are forthcoming?

2. Good faith is grateful. If I reach some conclusions as I humbly and teachably continue on my quest, some working hypotheses to base future experiments upon, shouldn't I be grateful for them? Even if they are only a few very basic things, such as "God exists and loves me and wants me to imitate God by loving everything God loves," aren't these few basic things very precious and worth celebrating? Even if I can't claim to comprehend (or grasp completely) everything, can't I acknowledge that I have at least apprehended some things (having at least touched them, come into contact with them, begun to experience them)? And rather than being puffed up by this "knowledge," shouldn't I be grateful to God and others for helping me learn what I've learned, being sure not to close myself off to further learning?

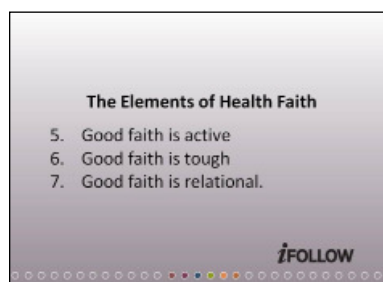


3. Good faith is honest. Shouldn't I feel free to be as accurate as I can about what I am relatively sure about and relatively unsure about? Shouldn't good faith feel free to express both doubt and confidence, neither overstating nor understating its level of certainty? Shouldn't I abhor dishonesty, since it clouds the already difficult search for truth? Shouldn't I seek to honestly acknowledge and remove my own blind spots before critiquing others about theirs? Shouldn't I be as honest about the weaknesses of myself, my faith, and my community of faith as I would want others to be about theirs?

4. Good faith is communal. Since my individual understanding is so limited, don't I need connection with a group of trusted companions, so we can help and encourage one another in our common search for faith, God and truth? Don't I especially need friends – a faith community – who will gently confront me when they see me losing these qualities of good faith? And just as I value highly my cohorts in my faith community, don't I also need honest, humble dialogue with people of other groups (religions, ideologies, parties, denominations, and so forth), since they may see things I and we are missing, and

vice versa? And shouldn't humility and teachability prompt me to include in my faith community people from the past, so I can learn from the writings and art of the great sages through history? Granted, we don't want coercion and pressure, but don't we need mutual encouragement and support from other seekers past and present, in our spiritual search?

5. Good faith is active. If I apprehend what I believe to be truth, am I not obligated to live by it? Shouldn't I abhor apathy (not acting on my beliefs), hypocrisy (covertly acting contrary to my beliefs), inconsistency (overtly acting contrary to my beliefs) just as I abhor dishonesty? Shouldn't my pursuit of truth be "hot" rather than "lukewarm," suggesting a hunger and thirst for more truth, rather than complacency about what I believe I have already found? And if I believe the search for truth and faith and God are indeed important, shouldn't I sensitively try to influence others (who are open to my influence because I have earned their respect) to take steps forward in their own search, always without coercion?



6. Good faith is tough. How much is an easy, untested faith worth? If faith brings all benefits and no costs, how can we be sure our belief is an honest pursuit of truth and goodness, as opposed to a pursuit of benefits? If my faith always gains respect and compliments, and never rejection or misunderstanding, might I not just be a believer out of social convenience? My faith may feel strong today, but how will it fare under tomorrow's tragedy, depression, disappointment, or delay? When money is tight or when money is flowing freely, when friends are few, when temptations are enticing, when patience is thin, when I'm in the middle of a project and the end seems to elude me, will I abandon my faith? Is a faith that doesn't cost me anything worthy anything? Is a faith any good that doesn't challenge me to do good and become better, even when I don't feel like it?

7. Good faith is relational. If I believe there is a personal God behind (and with) the universe, shouldn't my search for truth in God's universe begin with an acknowledgment of my relationship with God? In other words, given my personal limitations and the limitations of human knowledge, wouldn't it make sense to live in dependence on God to help me learn and search fruitfully, to live with expectancy and hope that God will in some way be my teacher and guide? Wouldn't my relationship with God thus become the basis or context for my search for truth? And shouldn't I consider what loyalties and responsibilities are incumbent upon me as a party in this relationship with God?

And if I can't quite wrap my mind and heart around the idea of a personal God, shouldn't I be open to experiencing the highest values of life in the context of meaningful relationships with others, recognizing that the core human experience is relational; that the best of human life is experienced in the context of loving, supportive relationships; that good, healthy faith is forged most effectively and productively within healthy relationships?

Evaluating Your Faith

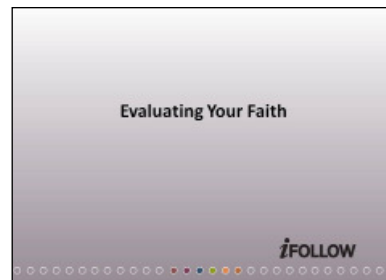
So let's go back to the definition of faith we've working with. "Faith is a state of relative certainty about matters of ultimate concern sufficient to promote action."

Faith is our basic operating system, our worldview of how life operates, where the connecting points between the divine and human exist and what they imply about how to live life in the now and here-after. We all have a basic faith. So the process of healthy living is to evaluate that worldview as time goes on to make sure it's based on as much reality as possible and that it works itself out as effectively as possible in today's world. The truth is, we need regular "up-grades."

So how does that part work? Unlike our computers, where we receive information about operating system upgrades as often as they come out on the market, in our faith life we don't necessarily receive those advertisements. But perhaps they do come to us in different forms and equally frequently?

Here are some questions to ask your self regularly as an evaluation of your need to up-grade your faith:

1. Does your current worldview adequately answer some of the basic questions of life such as: Where have I come from? What is my purpose in the world? Where am I going ultimately? How do I explain evil and suffering in the world? Does that explanation make sense to those who are suffering? Does it provide a modicum of comfort and hope?
2. Does your current worldview give you courage and strength to face the difficulties of life? Does it give you a reason to live, even when the going gets tough? Does it give empowerment to others going through difficulties?
3. Does your current worldview prompt you to an active life of compassion, justice and service to others? Does it reinforce the human core value of equal rights and respect for all? And does that empower you to treat all others in harmony with those values? Does your current worldview center around the highest core values of what it means to be human? Does it bring out the best in you and others?
4. Does your current worldview shape you into a person that people enjoy being around? Does it give you a humble confidence in who you are and what you're all about? Does it make you approachable to people who are uncertain about themselves or life in general? Does it make you a person who listens well?
5. Does your current worldview empower you to face death with confidence, no regrets, and peace?
6. Does your current worldview leave open the possibility of God? If so, how you describe



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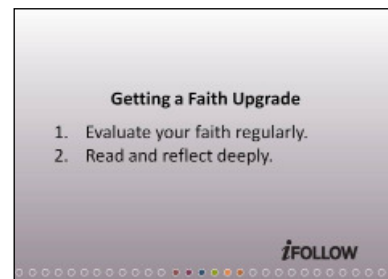
God? If not, what do you replace the God-factor with?

If you answer no to any of these questions, or if your answers are a bit hazy or incomplete, then you would benefit from a faith upgrade. So how does a faith upgrade take place most effectively?

Getting a Faith Upgrade

Faith is a journey, a process that continues through all of life. Our choice is to decide whether or not our faith is serving us and others well. So here are some strategies to upgrade your faith.

1. Evaluate your faith regularly. Set aside times to assess your faith. Ask yourself the above questions periodically (perhaps in the context of a personal retreat; or take a question every day and spend 15-30 minutes reflecting on your answers). Faith that isn't re-evaluated becomes toxic or static or unusable. If faith is your personal worldview, and the world is constantly changing, then it becomes mandatory to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of your faith often.



How does God or your picture of God fit into a changing world? How does your current faith respond to the challenges and crises of a changing world; is it adequate? Are the perspectives and answers of your current faith meaningful and effective in helping you and others navigate the ever-undulating journey of life?

2. Read and reflect deeply. Reading sacred scriptures helps to fine-tune and shape our worldview and our faith in God. We must continually expose ourselves to the deep faith of other people, people who seem to possess a faith that makes a difference in their lives and in the world. We must expose ourselves to the rich sacred literature of spiritual giants through the centuries, men and women who have developed purposeful and meaningful faith, who have wrestled with the deep and difficult questions of life, God and the world.

The New Testament makes the statement, "By beholding, we become changed." (2 Corinthians 3:18) That's a hugely significant human process. Life change and transformation (which includes our faith journey) comes by contemplating, reflecting upon, thinking about the highest values of life. And in that scriptural context, the author is talking about the dynamic of Godlikeness, becoming transformed into the character of God by looking at Jesus who manifested God so completely. The spiritual principle is that we become like that which we spend time observing.

Another New Testament faith development principle suggests this dynamic: faith comes by hearing the words of God (Romans 10:17). In other words, according to this sacred

example, if one's faith centers around belief in a personal God, then that faith is grown and deepened by spending time listening to the words of God, reflecting on them, and allowing them to penetrate the heart and mind and soul. Sacred scriptures in every religion provide one of the resources for encountering the words of God.

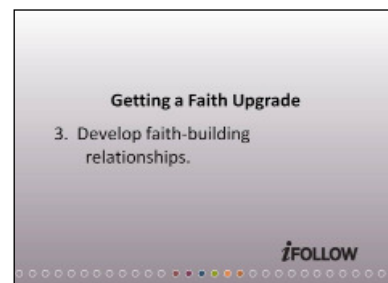
The New Testament book called "Hebrews" has a chapter (11) often referred to as the "faith chapter." It tells abbreviated stories of many of the faith heroes in biblical history and what constitutes their faith. These are great biographies of people who wrestled with God and life, who struggled to build and maintain faith in the midst of crisis and suffering, doubts and uncertainties, who experienced spectacular failures as well as successes, who were at times both faithless and faithful. These stories (the more complete versions are told in the Old Testament) are powerful resources to building your own faith journey in the real world.

So if you want to build your faith (upgrade it), do you have a regular time set aside to do spiritual reading and reflection on that reading? Are you willing to immerse your mind, heart and soul in those words from people who have journeyed before you and who have encountered the struggles of faith that have often resulted in a deepening of their faith? Are you willing to expose yourself to contrasting points of view about faith from people or sources you perhaps haven't always agreed with in the past, to challenge your current worldview, your current faith perspectives? Iron sharpens iron. Either that exposure will help to deepen your current faith or it will expose flaws and weakness or inadequacies in your current faith so you can reshape and reform and make more effective your faith life.

3. Develop faith-building relationships. Faith is a relational experience. Spirituality is most effectively shaped and built in the context of supportive and mutual relationships. As one psychiatrist said, "There are two things in life you cannot do alone: be spiritual and be married."

So whom do you have in your life that is journeying with you and supporting you along your faith path? Who is there that you trust with whom you can talk, raise doubts and questions, share your deepest fears and wonderings, bounce thoughts and ideas off of; people who can be supportive of your personal journey, people whose own lives can help transform yours, people who might not only share your beliefs but who might also challenge yours, and people with whom you can do the same?

Faith, for it to be genuine, helpful, and based upon reality and truth, must be upgraded. The world is too complex and ever-changing for an old "operating system" to be effective. The basis of your faith might never change. But the details and dynamics and way you live it out in order for your life to be meaningful and significant to yourself and others might need to.

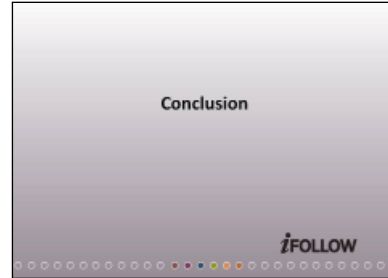


Conclusion

A Sunday school teacher said to her children, “We have been learning how powerful kings and queens were in Bible times. But, there is a higher power. Can anybody tell me what it is?” One child blurted out, “Aces!”

You can see how significant a person’s worldview is in shaping a helpful response to life. This child had no background or understanding of biblical history. So when the words “kings and queens” were used, the immediate context that came to mind was poker. And, admittedly, for some people, the rules that operate poker (the ability to count the cards played, to know what the deck is made of, etc.) comprise their “higher power.”

Your view of the “higher power” does indeed shape your faith. What is your ultimate “Ace”? And what are the rules of the game so that when you have the Ace you win?



Handouts in this Package

1. Participant’s Notes



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Additional Resources

McLaren, Brian D. (1999). *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Meek, Esther Lightcap (2003). *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.

Newbigin, Lesslie (1995). *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Paulien, Jon (2001). *Everyday Faith: How to Have an Authentic Relationship With God in the Real World*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assn.

Pippert, Rebecca Manley (2001). *Hope Has Its Reasons: The Search to Satisfy Our Deepest Longings*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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Discussion Questions

1. How would you define “faith” in your own words? Do you have positive, negative, or both positive and negative ideas about faith?
2. Share a time when you saw the word “faith” used in a negative way, and how you felt about that.
3. Share the reason why you have come to explore the idea of what faith might really be and how to “get it.”
4. From this presentation, have you learned new ideas about faith? Which ideas appeal most to you?
5. How will you guard against being one of the people who use the word or concept of faith in a negative way?
6. Do you plan to add or subtract anything from your life in an attempt to develop stronger faith?

Group Activities

Purpose: To explore what faith means to the various participants and give them opportunity to plan together for any changes they might like to make.

Preparation: This is a simple activity. All you need are tables and writing materials, and copies of Handout 1. The group will be divided into breakout groups of only two or three each, so you will need enough room for them to have some privacy.

Assignment: Divide your group into pairs or trios to work together at one of the tables. You might suggest that they pick partners in a way that will allow them to work together beyond this meeting. People who live with or near each other, or who are already friends and wish to further develop their faith life, can be together in the teams, and may then choose to work together over a longer time frame. Ask them to turn to page 4 of the handout and use the questions in the box to discuss together whether they think their faith needs an upgrade. If they come to the conclusion that they do need a faith upgrade, the second assignment is to write one or two specifics related to each of the three faith-building strategies. If they are planning to work together in the future, have them also plan specific ways of helping and supporting each other.

Debrief: What were the reactions and emotions? Did everyone feel comfortable sharing this sort of thing? Was it difficult for some? Was it impossible for some? Are there some partners or teams with plans for future work together?

Time: Allow at least 30 minutes at the tables and another 20 minutes for debriefing with the whole group back together again.

Handout 1

What is Faith and How Do I Get It?

1. A Definition of Faith

Faith is a state of relative certainty about matters of ultimate concern sufficient to promote and sustain real-world behavior.

Four Parts to this Definition:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

2. Characteristics of Bad Faith

A. Bad Faith is based solely on unquestioned authority.

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B. Bad Faith is based on pressures or coercion.

C. Bad Faith is often the result of a psychological need for belonging.

D. Bad faith appeals to self-interest and base motives.

E. Bad Faith is arrogant and unteachable.

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F. Bad faith is dishonest.

G. Bad faith is apathetic.

H. Bad Faith is a step backward.

3. Characteristics of Healthy Faith

A. Good Faith is humble, teachable, and inquisitive.

B. Good Faith is grateful.

C. Good Faith is honest.

D. Good Faith is communal.

E. Good Faith is active.

F. Good Faith is tough.

G. Good Faith is relational.

4. Do You Need an Upgrade?

A. Does your current worldview adequately answer some of the basic questions of life such as: Where have I come from? What is my purpose in the world? Where am I going ultimately? How do I explain evil and suffering in the world? Does that explanation make sense to those who are suffering? Does it provide some comfort and hope?

B. Does your current worldview give you courage and strength to face the difficulties of life? Does it give you a reason to live, even when the going gets tough? Does it give empowerment to others going through difficulties?

C. Does your current worldview prompt you to an active life of compassion, justice and service to others? Does it reinforce the human core value of equal rights and respect for all? And does that empower you to treat all others in harmony with those values? Does your current worldview center around the highest core values of what it means to be human? Does it bring out the best in you and others?

D. Does your current worldview shape you into a person that people enjoy being around? Does it give you a humble confidence in who you are and what you're all about? Does it make you approachable to people who are uncertain about themselves or life in general? Does it make you a person who listens well?

E. Does your current worldview empower you to face death with confidence, no regrets

and peace?

F. Does your current worldview leave open the possibility of God? If so, how you describe God? If not, what do you replace the God-factor with?

Personal Reflection: Answer “No” or “Yes” to the above questions, and then ask yourself: What does that say about my life?

5. Strategies for Upgrading Your Faith

A. What is one or more ways in which you will evaluate your faith, and how often do you wish to do it?

B. What kinds of spiritual reading and reflection do you find helpful?

HANDOUT

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C. Do you have faith-building relationships? If so, who? If not, how will you go about developing some?
