

# towards▶belief

## Towards Belief

### WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

*“My hope for anybody that watches this series is they come to a place of belief and recognise that they can be confident in what they believe. (Cristian faith) is not a flaky idea; it’s not kind of weak resignation to something that’s intellectually fragile. This is firm foundations of belief that you can be confident in, that you can hold your head up in any community, in any space and say, ‘Yes, this is what I believe,’ and we trust that the whole series of Towards Belief has been people coming to a place where they’re firm in their faith, firm in their belief and sure of their future. That’s my hope.” (Karl Faase)*

### WATCH THE DVD

### THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF FAITH

**John 20:30-31; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Hebrews 11:1-3**

Q1. How would you, from the above verses, describe ‘Christian faith’ to a non-believer?

The Apostle John explicitly tells us why he wrote his Gospel: to encourage ‘faith in Jesus’, God’s Son, based on the evidence provided earlier and, by so believing, receive new life in His name. The Apostle Paul says that the Gospel he proclaims, with its central claims about Jesus’ death and resurrection, is based on solid evidence; eyewitnesses (500+) and the fulfilled Scriptures. In Hebrews 11 we are reminded that ‘faith’ has many concrete ‘heroes’ in the Old Testament who witness to God’s reality and dependability, assuring us that we can be confident to trust God. Therefore Christian faith is not ‘blind stupidity’ (as Dawkins argues) but is focused on trusting Jesus as the risen Lord based on reliable evidence, eyewitnesses and wise commonsense.

*“Every one of us knows that for trust and loyalty to be worthwhile they must be based on evidence... The Gospel of John ends with the statement of its purpose. “Many other things Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that believing you might have life in his Name.” In other words, John said, ‘Look, I’ve selected this material. This forms the basis in order that you might believe.’ So belief here is central in the OED definition of faith, that is, trusting where there’s evidence.” (John Lennox)*

### COME FOLLOW ME – JESUS’ PERSONAL CALL TO FAITH

**Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 2:20**

Q2. What does following Jesus require?

Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Him. This required a personal commitment from each of them...

- i. to put certain things aside (their previous careers as fishermen) and
- ii. to trust the new life-direction Jesus was offering.

It was a personal decision to ‘follow Him’ into an unknown future but was solidly grounded on who Jesus is. As Paul says: *‘this life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.’*

*“I was studying philosophy at the time so I began to be attracted to this Christian faith but it was really important to me not to throw my mind out the door and just take a step of blind faith. So at that point I started to search. That took a lot of different forms. It took looking into the evidence and finding myself*

*really impressed with some of it. I started to read the New Testament for the first time in my life...Over time I just found myself really impressed with the integrity with which Jesus lived. I thought that the life He lived was the most beautiful life that had been lived and that He was worth following.” Vince Vitale*

*“I don’t know if I came to a decision that Christianity was the right religion but I came to the decision that Jesus was the only way; that every other religion seemed to tell me how I could hopefully access God’s acceptance and love. And the message of Jesus was that there was no way to earn God’s love and earn his favour but to simply accept a favour and a love that was already coming my way. And that’s the beautiful thing to me about Jesus. Every religion was me chasing after God and the message of Jesus was God chasing after me.” Erwin McManus*

## **FAITH & THE BIBLE**

### **2 Timothy 3:14-17, Psalm 119:105**

Q3. How does God’s Word strengthen our faith?

The Bible has lots of ways to support and strengthen our faith. As God’s Word it is vitally important to keep Christians on track in their theology, morality, mission and worship. Paul reminds Timothy that it is the Scriptures that made him ‘wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ because they are God-breathed (i.e. from God through human writers) and useful for guidance, and many other important things.

The Bible shows us a God who, in the words of Karl Faase, *“is like a loving parent who longs for a relationship with His children. Unlike the picture some people have of an angry, accusing deity, the God of the Bible is full of mercy. Not only does He desire to forgive us and be in a relationship with us but, as the life of Jesus clearly shows, He is willing to pay the ultimate price on behalf of each of us.”*

There are millions of Christians throughout history who can testify to a personal encounter with God through the devotional use of the Scriptures. Their faith is renewed, redirected and enhanced through daily Bible reading, prayerful reflection on the selected passage and resulting action. The Psalms are excellent for this.

## **WHAT DO WE DO WITH OUR DOUBTS?**

### **Mark 9:14-29**

Q4. In this story Jesus accuses the people of ‘faithlessness’ v19 and focuses on the father’s uncertainty vv.22-23 adding that *‘everything is possible to the one who has faith’* v23. Why does Jesus focus on ‘faith’? What should such faith look like?

Regularly Jesus is surprised at people’s lack of faith. They have been with Him and should have realised that God was working powerfully through Him. Instead they are uncertain and unbelieving. Even His disciples seem to have dropped the ball, as it were, and taken God for granted by failing to ‘pray’ when confronted with the evil spirit in the boy. Faith is ‘relational’ – it has a personal object, God or Jesus.

Q5. We all have doubts at times, how can they best be overcome?

For the father in this story faith is hard. After the disciple’s failure he isn’t sure that Jesus will succeed. He is living in that shadowy world between half-faith and half-doubt where he is not fully confident he can trust Jesus. Again Jesus redirects the father’s faith towards himself. *‘Everything is possible for the one who has faith (in me)*. Then later he reminds the disciples that they failed because they needed to *pray* v.29. These two things: i. looking to Jesus in faith and ii. prayer, are vital in overcoming doubt.

## **SUMMARY: WHAT TO SAY TO THOSE WHO SAY THAT TODAY FAITH IN GOD IS IRRELEVANT?**

- i. Christians can be confident in their faith because Jesus is utterly dependable and true.
- ii. There is still a hunger for faith among a significant number in the Western world. It is just untrue to claim that faith is becoming irrelevant.
- iii. The search for a meaningful life and hope shows that people are open to Christian faith, particularly if some of their 'belief blockers' are overcome.
- iv. Doubts are part of life but can be overcome by steadily looking to Jesus and an openness in prayer; *Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief*.

## **SHARE & PRAYER**