

WHY... HAVE FAITH?

CHAPTER 5

Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

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Why? Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions.
Revised Edition
Chapter 5, Why Have Faith?

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WHY... HAVE FAITH?

This booklet contains chapter 5 of
“Why? Finding answers to 5 of life’s big questions”

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Chapter 5

Why have faith?

On 5 June, 1943, Collier's Magazine printed the story of Holly Meynell. Holly was a young woman in the United States, who had, like many others, donated books to the army library for servicemen to borrow and read. One day Holly received a letter from a lieutenant John Blandford. He explained that he had borrowed one of the books Holly had donated and in this particular book she had written lots of notes and comments in the margin. While this habit of writing in books normally infuriated John, Holly's notes and her personality which shone through, intrigued him. So, having found her name written in the front of the book, he had looked her up in a New York telephone directory and had now written to her.

Over a period of some months Holly and John exchanged letters and when the time came for John to ship out, he asked for a photograph of Holly to keep with him. "Absolutely not!" Holly replied. "If our relationship is to progress it will most certainly not be based on appearances!"

John went off to the front. He and Holly continued to write, their relationship growing deeper with each letter, as they poured out their hearts to each other. Still though, Holly refused John's requests for a photo. "The basis for our relationship will not be my appearance!" she repeated. Eventually, as John was preparing to return to the United States at the end of his deployment, he wrote to Holly. "I think it's time we met." John promised to stand under the clock in Grand Central Station in New York City at 6 PM on a particular day. "Will you meet me there?" Holly wrote back (it was all very tedious before email, wasn't it?!), "Yes, let's meet" she says "I'll have a red rose in my lapel. You carry the book that first brought us together, Somerset Maugham's *On Human Bondage*. That way we'll recognise each other."

The day arrived. On the stroke of 6 PM, John was standing under the clock in Grand Central Station, waiting, looking at every young woman who walked past. Each time he wondered, "Is *she* the one? Is *she* the one?" A woman approached and, well, John's heart skipped a beat. The beautiful blonde-haired woman, stunningly dressed, walked by *very* close, looking at him. It almost seemed like she wanted John to follow her. But ... she had no rose in her lapel.

As John managed to drag his gaze away from the beautiful woman, he saw Holly; red rose in her crumpled brown jacket. He realised now why she hadn't wanted to give him a photo. She looked much older than he had thought and in contrast to the blonde beauty who had just walked past, she was, well, let's just say *not* beautiful!

And in that moment John had a choice. He needed to choose between the woman who had caught his eye a moment earlier, to chase after her, or the woman he had got to know and love through her letters. So John squared his shoulders and walked up to Holly, "Good evening Holly, I'm John. It's a pleasure to meet you." The older lady smiled politely and said to him, "I'm sorry young man, I really have no idea what's going on here. That blonde lady who just walked past asked me to wear this rose. And she said that if you were to speak to me, I should tell you that she's waiting for you in the café across the street!"

That Holly, she was a smart girl, wasn't she? She knew her relationship with John needed to be based on character and not looks. If she was going to marry this man, her marriage wasn't going to be a relationship based on her physical merits.

Perhaps you believe in God.

Maybe you're like the 78% of Australians who think there is, or that there may be, some kind of God or universal spirit out there somewhere.¹ If so, is there any reason to think that God would be *less* careful in establishing the parameters for a relationship than young Holly was?

Do you think that God will allow you to have a relationship with him based on your merits?

Do you think that God will relate to you in a certain way, out of a sense of obligation, because of how good you've been?

Do you think that you can be good enough, impressive enough, distinctive enough, to catch God's eye, so that he would say, "There's someone good enough to be with me forever"?

Do you think that you can be good enough, impressive enough, distinctive enough, to catch God's eye, so that he would say, "There's someone good enough to be with me forever"?

Whether you prefer the language of "forgiveness," or "going to heaven," or "eternal life," I imagine that if you've read this far then you're at least interested in a relationship with God and

¹ Pepper M. and Powell, R., *2016 Australian Community Survey* (2016 ACS), 2016, Sydney: NCLS Research.

that you accept that there needs to be some reason for God to say, “Yes, you can come to me. I’ll have a relationship with you.”

Because, let’s face it, we’re expecting that some people won’t get to heaven, aren’t we? The promise in the Bible of being able to enjoy eternity in a relationship with God and receiving all his blessings - there are some people who we think aren’t going to get that.

People like Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011; when we get to heaven, we don’t expect to walk in through the pearly gates and see him sitting there, do we?

There must be some kind of line in the sand, a cut-off. We don’t think that everyone is right with God. Not everyone can be “Mates with God,” as Mick ‘Crocodile’ Dundee says.

Well, the Bible tells us we’re onto something with that line of thinking. There’s a letter in the New Testament from the Apostle Paul, one of the leaders of the early church, to Christians in the city of Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. Paul says (and we’ve seen this in Mark’s gospel already) that there is a problem facing every single person in the world. It’s a problem called sin, which is simply to be a rebel against God and his rule, living in God’s world, as God’s creature, without any reference to God.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time.

Ephesians 2:1 – 3

Do you see the problem?

As far as spiritual things go, when it comes to relating to God, we're dead. And it's because of sin. And Paul isn't up on his high horse looking down on people who he considers much more sinful than himself. He's included in this painful description. This is "*All of us*" he says.

I was talking with some friends recently about the things that are said at funerals, and the sorts of things people would *like* said at their own funerals. One person commented, "What I'd like them to say at my funeral is, 'Look, he's alive!'"

To be described as dead is bad!

That one word conjures up the seriousness of the problem that we face.

Because of sin, we have no relationship with God.

We are not his allies.

He is not favourably disposed towards us.

We are not his mates.

We are his enemies.

So how can we get into relationship with God?

Well, for most of us, I think we find ourselves trying to be good enough. We imagine that as long as I do more good things than bad things, or more good things than somebody else, then I can have a relationship with God.

And that *sounds* fair enough. We know, as Australians love to say, that there's no such thing as a free lunch!

I don't know if you've ever gone to one of those *The Sound of Music* singalongs at the cinema. They show the movie, and they also project the words to all the songs on the screen, so all the die-hard fans can sing along! I've never witnessed it, but I imagine it's something like group karaoke!

But if you've been part of it, you will have sung along with Maria when she realises that Captain Von Trapp has fallen in love with her;

Here you are, standing there, loving me,

Whether or not you should.

So somewhere in my youth or childhood

*I must have done something good.
Nothing comes from nothing,
Nothing ever could.
So somewhere in my youth or childhood,
I must have done something good.*²

That's often how we think life ought to work, isn't it? The song may have been set in the hills of Austria, but you could almost call it the Australian way:

*Nothing comes from nothing,
Nothing ever could.
So somewhere in my youth or childhood,
I must have done something good.*

But it all raises a rather uncomfortable question.
If nothing comes from nothing.
If whatever good comes my way is a result of some good
that I've done.
How good do I have to be?

And when it comes to God, if like Holly Meynell feared, my relationship is based on my merits, then just how *meritorious* do I need to be - and *keep* being - in order for God to welcome me?

² Rodgers, R. "Something Good" from *The Sound of Music*, 1965.

It's easy to think of a relationship with God as some kind of spiritual ladder; if you do good stuff, you move up, towards Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. If you do bad stuff, you move down, closer to Anders Breivik and Adolf Hitler.

And most of us imagine that we, and our friends, are probably in the middle somewhere. We're not up the top, but we're definitely not with those guys down the bottom. Perhaps just a little bit over half-way up.

One of the things they teach you in husband school - actually there is no husband school - you just have to figure it all out for yourself! But if there *was* a husband school, they would teach husbands about the Love Bank.

Husbands, your wife holds an account in the love bank. And you make withdrawals and deposits - of love!

So, if you get home late from work, that's a withdrawal from the love bank.

You buy flowers, or you cook dinner, that's a deposit.

If you want to go fishing with your mates on the weekend, that's a withdrawal. So you need to put in lots of deposits during the week prior, so that you don't overdraw the love bank! Simple, right?

Actually it's not simple! Ask any husband!

But is that imaginary bank what it's like with God?
Can I offset my living as God's enemy?
Can I make extra payments, by doing good things, so that
when I face God at the end of my life, I don't suddenly and
embarrassingly discover I'm overdrawn?

But the Apostle Paul goes on to say this to the Christians in
Ephesus:

Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Ephesians 2:3

On that ladder, that imaginary ladder, that leads to a
relationship with God, Paul would be on the very top!
Actually, Paul would be off the top. He would be standing
on top of that extension bit of the ladder they sell on late-
night TV that makes your ladder even taller! If you were
looking for someone who could really pride themselves on
doing good, ticking all the boxes for religious devotion, and
sincerity, and achievement, and helping little old ladies
across the road, Paul would be your guy. And yet even Paul
says, all that is not enough.

He still can't get into a right relationship with God on his
own.

He has no basis for the relationship he so earnestly desires.

But listen to how Paul explains that, just like with smart young Holly, there is only one basis for a relationship with God, and it's not merit.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God
— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8 - 9

The only basis for a relationship with God, the only way we can be acceptable to God, is by grace.

Do you know what grace is? A friend of mine used to explain grace by saying, "Picture a turtle on a fence post." It doesn't sound very profound, does it? But when you see a turtle on a fence post you know it didn't get there on its own! Somebody else did everything that was required to get it where it is.

So poor old Maria in *The Sound of Music* got it wrong when it comes to this. There's nothing good in my youth or childhood, or any other part of my life for that matter, that gives me any right to this relationship. The basis for a relationship with God isn't merit.

Or good works.

It's grace. That is, the undeserved kindness of God, shown to us "*in Christ*" to use a phrase that Paul employs

repeatedly to emphasise the importance of trusting in Jesus and taking hold of what he offers us.

The only possible basis for a relationship with God is what Paul goes on to call;

... the incomparable riches of God's grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:7

It is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that God's undeserved kindness towards us is seen most clearly. God breaks into the world that he made, dying for the very people who have rejected and ignored him. And God says, because of the death of Jesus, you can swap your death for life. Your separation for relationship.

It is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that God's undeserved kindness towards us is seen most clearly.

There is no other basis for a relationship with God than God's grace, his undeserved kindness that comes to us through Jesus' death in our place.

So, what do we need to do?

We need to have faith. Remember these words?

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God
— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8 - 9

The relationship and blessing that God offers us through Jesus' death in our place can only be ours "*through faith.*"

It's important, of course, that we know the meaning of the words we use. As Winnie the Pooh famously observed, "I like talking to Rabbit. He talks about sensible things. He doesn't use long difficult words ... he uses short, easy words like, 'What about lunch?'"³

"Faith" is an easy word that lots of people use, but it is still a difficult word, because of the various different, even contradictory meanings, people attach to it.

So, let me first dismiss three alternative definitions of faith, so we can be clear what faith is *not!* There are three intellectual positions or approaches to life that are often

³ Milne, A. A. *The House at Pooh Corner*, Methuen & Co. Ltd. London, 1928, p 58.

confused for real faith. Frequently people use the word “faith” to describe these positions, but in fact, what they describe is not faith at all.

Perhaps the most common mistake is to consider that faith is all to do with the realm of things that we can’t really know. We often hear that science and empirical research are the things we can be sure of. This is the realm of “certainty,” we’re told, the world of hard evidence.

And so, some people like to say that faith is what’s needed if we want to believe something for which there is no evidence. And so “faith” of this kind (which, as I’m saying, is not really faith at all!) is always a little uncertain. And it tends to be scorned and mocked by people who believe that they themselves depend on those much more reliable worlds of evidence and science.

This misunderstanding of faith I like to call “Alien Faith.”

As far as I can tell there is no evidence that aliens from other planets have ever visited earth. I’ve done a bit of research, a few minutes in strange corners of the Internet, but I can’t find any evidence at all!

But the fact that there is a complete absence of evidence that aliens have ever visited earth doesn’t seem to stop

thousands of people believing that aliens *have* in fact, frequented our planet. For the sake of your sanity, I suggest not looking at the websites I visited where these claims are made!

These people, who have Alien Faith, insist that evidence is well and good, but believing or having faith, is something entirely different. And where there is no evidence, you just have to have faith.

This is what celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins imagines faith to be. He has famously said, "Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."⁴ As an aside, I always find it somewhat puzzling and amusing that Dawkins insists that he has no faith, and yet he expects us to adopt his definition of faith! It doesn't seem quite right! It would be like me insisting on defining the various stages and experiences of childbirth; there's something of a credibility gap!

But let me remind you, this is not what the Bible calls faith. This is not Christian faith. So let's stick to calling this approach to life Alien Faith; the faith that leaps off into the dark where there is no evidence.

⁴ Richard Dawkins, speaking at the 1992 Edinburgh International Science Festival.

The second position that is sometimes confused for faith, but is also not real faith, is believing in something *despite* evidence to the contrary. This kind of “faith” (which is not real faith!) generally seems to be the domain of those people who ignore or reject evidence because they want to maintain a position to which they are already committed. Picture a horse pulling a carriage through the streets or taking part in a parade; it has blinkers on its eyes so as not to see anything except where it’s already headed. That’s what this kind of false faith is like. It’s a blinkered, dogged determination, “I *going* to believe. I’m going to believe. I don’t care what the evidence says. I’m going to believe.”

False faith like this we could call “Flat Earth Faith.” I don’t know if you’re aware of this, but there is a whole community of people right around the world (so to speak!) who believe that the earth is flat. They’re part of an organisation called the International Flat Earth Society.

They get together for meetings.

They have websites.

They organise conferences.

The very best evidence available to us demonstrates that the earth is roughly spherical, with a few bumps and lumps. But the members of the International Flat Earth Society maintain their belief in a pancake-shaped planet *despite* all the evidence to the contrary. They want to

convince people of their point of view *despite* the evidence that shows otherwise.

Their approach to life is to simply ignore or refuse to acknowledge the mountains of evidence that are available to them.

In fact these people are such a striking example of this kind of “faith” that the term “Flat Earther” has become a synonym for any person who believes something despite all evidence to the contrary.

So Alien Faith exists in a vacuum where there is no evidence, and Flat Earth Faith believes in something *despite* the evidence.

Neither of these is what the Bible calls faith.

The third error that’s sometimes confused for real faith is what we might call “Knowledge in Lieu of Faith.” This kind of “faith” (yes, you know, it’s not real faith!) is simply what people sometimes call “head knowledge.”

I heard a story on the radio once about a prominent community leader in the city where I lived. As a young adult he had come top of his university theology class in Scripture Knowledge. This man had scored 100% on a test that sought to demonstrate how much he knew about God, Jesus, and the Bible.

But he was an avowed atheist.

He didn't know Jesus was worth trusting.

His knowledge of God didn't evoke any kind of response.

The words of the Bible with which he was so familiar, didn't give him any confidence or hope for this life or beyond.

But his knowledge of what God had said, what God was like, and what God had revealed of himself in Jesus was outstanding. At an intellectual level, his knowledge of God was literally second to none!

Some people think that's what real faith is like;

Just study some facts.

Learn some stuff about God.

Read up about Jesus.

Memorise some parts of the Bible and you've got faith.

But in reality, this is "Knowledge in Lieu of Faith."

So let's be clear, none of these mindsets, or approaches, or whatever you like to call them, that are sometimes passed off as faith are really anything like what the Bible calls faith. These three intellectual positions bear no resemblance to the faith in Jesus that the Bible outlines and that Christian people all over the world share.

So that's what faith is *not*. What, then, is it?

When the Bible talks about faith, this is what it means; faith is being convinced enough by the evidence to live our lives according to it. You can see that Christian faith is not like that Alien Faith which would be happy to say, “We don’t know what God is like. We don’t know if there’s anything more to life than what we see and touch. But still

Christian faith is being convinced enough by the evidence of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, that you’re willing for those events to shape your life.

let’s believe in God, anyway.” And Christian faith is not like the Flat Earth Faith; closing our minds to the evidence. And Christian faith is not like that “Knowledge in Lieu of Faith” which is all about gaining knowledge that has no impact or expression in everyday life.

Christian faith is being convinced enough by the evidence of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, that you’re willing for those events to shape your life. Or let me put it another way; it’s allowing what I have seen, learned, and understood in the Bible to shape my behavior and decision-making, for what I believe to have some visible and practical outworking in my life.

As it happens, this is really what faith is in any situation. Let me illustrate. Imagine a chair.

An ordinary chair.

An office chair. Or a classroom chair. Or a kitchen chair.

When you look at it, the apparent, visible evidence indicates that it can support your weight. Perhaps you've sat in it before. Maybe you witnessed someone about the same size as you sitting in the chair previously. If you really want to be sure, perhaps you cast your mind back to high school physics classes and do a quick calculation of forces and vectors. You consider equal and opposites, all those sorts of things, and you conclude that yes, it will hold you.

So far what you have is knowledge. Evidence. Facts.

Faith comes in when you're convinced enough of the evidence to put your trust in the chair. And you demonstrate your faith in the chair, not by saying "I think this chair will hold me," or "Look at the chair.

When you're convinced by the evidence, your life reflects that. You live according to it. That's faith.

Isn't it strong?" You demonstrate the reality of your faith by sitting in the chair. Until your faith plays out in that real, physical step, it's not faith, it's just knowledge.

When you're convinced by the evidence, your life reflects that. You live according to it. That's faith.

So, having worked out what faith really is, let's take a look at a couple of examples from Mark's account of Jesus' life. Mark our historian introduces us to two people whose knowledge of Jesus, and their understanding of who Jesus is, shapes their life. Their confidence in him leads to action. That is to say, they have real faith.

First, we meet a synagogue leader named Jairus, who is in the midst of an unfolding personal tragedy; his little daughter is dying. What do the words of this man in his moment of crisis reveal about his faith in Jesus?

Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Mark 8:22 - 23

Clearly Jairus has some knowledge of Jesus. Perhaps he's listened as Jesus taught the crowds. Maybe he's heard people speak of the miracles Jesus had performed. Possibly he's even witnessed some of Jesus' miraculous works himself.

Whatever the source of his knowledge, regardless of where he's gathered his evidence, he believes that Jesus can heal his daughter, and his actions reflect that. His actions demonstrate that he has faith.

But before we get a chance to see whether his faith in Jesus is misplaced or rightly placed, another person comes onto the scene whose knowledge of Jesus has also driven them into action.

A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years ... When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

Mark 5:25 – 29

This woman's knowledge: Jesus can heal people. She might have heard people speak about how Jesus had healed them. She might have witnessed Jesus' healing miracles with her own eyes. The facts that she knows and the evidence that she's seen demonstrate that Jesus can heal people.

This knowledge becomes faith when it drives her to action, when she's so convinced that Jesus can heal her that she'll stop at nothing to get to Jesus.

This woman isn't content simply to *know* facts about Jesus, or to have surveyed the evidence for his healing power. We could never say that this woman is interested in merely intellectual discussion about matters of faith. Her first conversation with her friends after this episode is not going to start with, "Oh, I learned an interesting new fact about Jesus today!"

What she understands, what she knows, what she believes, drive her to action. Convinced by the evidence that Jesus can do something for her, she forces her way through the crowd, "I believe this man can heal me."

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Mark 5:30, 33 - 34

As Mark records for us, even though Jesus is surrounded by an enormous crowd pressing in on him, he is aware of her step of faith, and he says to her in verse 34, “Daughter, your great knowledge of me and of my words and deeds has healed you.”

No? Maybe it was, “Daughter, your ability to ignore the evidence and to press on regardless has made you well.”

Or perhaps, “Daughter, your ability to leave facts and evidence behind and make a mental leap in the dark has healed you.”

No!

No!

No!

Jesus commends the woman, saying, “*Daughter, your faith has healed you.*” Your faith has healed you! Your complete conviction that Jesus can heal you which extends to the point that you step out and touch him. *That* has healed you. Go in peace.

If the woman had been content simply to understand something of who Jesus is, if she had been convinced that Jesus could in fact heal people, but was not willing to take the step of transforming that knowledge into real faith by reaching out and touching Jesus, she would still be sick. Still suffering.

“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

Of course, Jesus’ interaction with the woman, while it’s beautiful and transformative for her, it can only be most unwelcome for Jairus. As the words are coming out of Jesus’ mouth, Jairus receives a message that his daughter has died.

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

Mark 5:35 - 36

The crushing blow Jairus must have feared but hoped would never come has been landed. And what is Jesus’ response?

Not, “Try and ignore this terrible situation.”

Not, “Just ignore the evidence for the tragedy you’re in.”

Not, “Learn some more about me and about what I can do.”

Not, “Try and remain hopeful despite the fact that there’s no evidence that things will get better.”

“Just believe.”

Believe what?

Believe that Jesus can do for you what he's done for others. Believe that Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, as we would have heard earlier in the chapter if we'd read the previous episode.

Believe that Jesus acts with God's authority on earth, like we read from Mark 2 in chapter 1, "*Why Jesus?*"

Believe that Jesus is God. And therefore, he holds power over sickness and death.

And Jairus does believe.

He goes with Jesus into the room where the body of his daughter is laid out, and he witnesses the object of his faith at work.

The object of his faith is Jesus.

He sees Jesus restore his little girl to life before his very eyes.

And let me highlight something very, very important at this point, something we must always remember. Faith is

Faith is only as good, as strong, as effective, as reliable, as the object we put our faith in.

Remember the chair that was the object of our faith earlier? If I have faith in the chair, confident that it will hold me up, but somebody has sawn

through all four of the legs, then no amount of faith is going to keep me from falling into a heap on the floor!

If this man or this woman we encounter in Mark 5 have faith in Jesus to heal, or even faith that Jesus can raise someone from the dead, if Jesus is just an ordinary person, no different to me or you, then no amount of faith is going to stop them being bitterly disappointed.

Maybe you would say that you have some faith in Jesus.

Maybe faith in him for your future.

Faith in him for your eternal standing before God.

Faith that he can act in this world, now, for your good.

If Jesus is just a wise man,

If Jesus is simply a good teacher or a kind example,

If Jesus is still dead in the grave, then no amount of faith is going to stop your heart being broken when Jesus can't do what you might desperately want him to do.

Everything about faith depends not on how *much* you have.

Or how *deep* it is.

Or how *long* you've had it.

But everything depends on the *object* of our faith.

And it seems to me that compared to anything and everything else that we trust in across our daily lives, Jesus is an entirely deserving object of our faith.

As we've been asking our questions, "Why Jesus?" "Why did he die?" "Why believe in the resurrection?" and "Why trust the Bible?" the evidence we've uncovered all the way along points to Jesus as being completely worthy of our faith. The evidence all indicates that he is completely reliable, and we won't be left disappointed, if we trust in him.

To have faith in Jesus means believing what Jesus says.
It means believing what Jesus claimed about himself.
It means believing the Bible's eye-witness and historical claims about Jesus.
It means believing these things, based on the reliability of what we see.
And it means living in the light of what we've come to know to be true.
That's what the Bible calls faith.

The basis for relationship with God, is exactly this kind of faith.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God
— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8 - 9

So, if that's the basis for a relationship with God, where do you fit?

A man named Hiroo Onoda passed away in 2014. He was 91 years old. Not a bad innings, we would say, and so there was nothing really remarkable about his death. His obituary, however, was printed on page 2 of the international edition of the New York Times. And that's because Hiroo Onoda was the very last Japanese soldier in the Philippines to surrender after World War 2.

In fact, although the war ended in 1945, 2nd Lieutenant Onoda was cut off from communications and didn't know that the war had finished. He held out, fighting against the Philippines, initially with three other soldiers, but then all alone, for *29 more years*, until 1974. His guerilla warfare entailed killing animals, burning crops, and even killing people who lived in the villages near where he was hiding. He resisted all efforts to get him to lay down his arms, eventually only surrendering when officials in Tokyo located his former commanding officer and sent him to the Philippines to relieve Onoda of duty and instruct him to lay down his arms.

It's an intriguing tale, isn't it? But really, it's a tragedy that a man would spend most of his life living as an enemy,

when in fact he was at peace with those he was fighting against.

Here is a greater tragedy; that someone could go their whole life thinking they are in right relationship with God, when in fact the very opposite is true – they are living as God's enemy.

Yet here is a greater tragedy; that someone could go their whole life thinking they are in *right* relationship with God, when in fact the very opposite is true – they're living as God's enemy.

Maybe that's not you though.

Perhaps in God's kindness you already realise that you need to put your faith in Jesus.

You know you've been living in rebellion against God, even if it's been very polite rebellion.

You put yourself first.

You live for other things, or for other people.

You don't honour God with your decisions, even though he made everything and has given you every good thing you enjoy.

But you recognise that you need to be forgiven.

You understand that there's no way you can be in a right relationship with God, other than through trusting in Jesus' death in your place.

If that's you, you might like to pray this prayer. This is a prayer about putting your faith in Jesus. You don't have to pray it out loud. You can just pray in the quietness of your heart.

Dear God,

I know that I have sinned against you.

I have rejected your pattern for life and lived with myself as lord.

Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending Jesus to die, taking the punishment for sin that I deserve.

Thank you for the free gift of relationship and blessing you offer us through faith in Jesus.

Please help me honour you with my life, as I follow Jesus as my Lord.

Amen

You can see that there is nothing special or magical about the words, they are just a way of responding to God's grace, and acknowledging your faith in Jesus.

If you have prayed this prayer and put your faith in Jesus, please tell someone! You may have a Christian friend who would love to hear. You can even get in touch with me via the website, www.ClaytonFopp.com

I'd love to hear your story and help you in any way I can.

There are two great things you can do now to help you live out your faith in Jesus and learn more what it is to trust in him. Firstly, I'd suggest reading Mark's account of Jesus' life. We've been dipping into it, but the whole thing is only sixteen chapters long and won't take you long to read.

You can read it online at www.BibleGateway.com, or download the YouVersion app for your device.

The second important step is to find a church you can become a part of so that you can be encouraged and be an encouragement to others. If you don't know of any churches in your area, have a look online for churches that teach the Bible and love Jesus, or again, get in touch through the website.

Thanks for spending this time asking "Why?"

Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

CHAPTER 5

WHY... HAVE FAITH?

In this series

Why Jesus?

Why did Jesus die?

Why believe in the resurrection?

Why trust the Bible?

Why have faith?

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