

An underwater photograph of a diver in silhouette, swimming downwards. The water is a deep, vibrant blue. The text 'Deeper Faith' is overlaid in white, with 'Deeper' on the top line and 'Faith' on the bottom line, both in a clean, sans-serif font.

Deeper Faith

The following document is a rough copy of Pastor Drost's sermon notes

from January 19th, 2020

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- ✚ In a moment I'm going to explain why there are three tables...
- ✚ First let me tell you what I want to speak about: I want to talk about **Deeper Faith**. What deepens our faith?
- ✚ The word "faith" is one of those words like "love". It's a bit hard to define. Most dictionaries define faith something like this: **To believe, trust, have confidence in something or someone.**

"I believe something is true" "I believe that Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon" (Some people do not believe that!) "I believe in God" "I believe He hears my prayers" or... "I don't believe in alien abductions" "I don't believe in Martians visiting earth"

For some, to believe in the Bible, in God, in Jesus, to pray, is similar to believing in alien abductions or in fairy tales with unicorns!

The late Richard Robinson was one of the leading atheist philosophers during the latter part of the twentieth century. In 1964 he published a book called **An Atheist's Values**, in which he stated: "Christian faith is not merely believing that there is a God. It is believing that there is a God no matter what the evidence may be." To have faith" in the Christian sense means, "make yourself believe that there is a God without regard to the evidence." In other words, to some, Christians disregard any kind of reason or evidence in order to maintaining their faith in God. Or as **Archie Bunker** put it to "Meat Head" in All In The Family: "*Faith is something you believe that nobody in his right mind would believe.*"

Some see Christians as Archie Bunker type people, closed minded fanatical individuals who park their brains at the door when they go to church. And no doubt there are "Christians" that are that way!

"I've made up my mind. Don't interrupt me with the facts."

The truth is that the great spiritual leaders in the Bible were people who often wrestled through hard and difficult questions.

- The oldest book of the Bible is Job. In it we find some of the deepest questions about life and about the mysterious ways of God.
- Psalms is full of the struggles, the doubts, the why questions; questions about life and justice and eternity.
- The book of Ecclesiastes is all about Solomon's search for the meaning of life.
- The great prophet Jeremiah struggles with his faith in Lamentations.
- All the great men/women in the Bible had moments of doubt, moments filled with questions about God's ways.
- After John the Baptist so boldly and publicly pointed to Jesus and called him the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world... whose sandals I am not worthy to untie"** he later from jail sends word and asks Jesus, **"Are you the one?"**
- The history of Christianity is filled with great thinkers, great minds, who battled through the deep questions of life.
- Many of the world's oldest and most famous universities were established as Christian institutions of learning.
- Oxford & Cambridge universities were both founded by Christian leaders.
- Harvard was started by Puritans and named after a Christian minister. Yale was started by clergymen. Princeton was started by Presbyterians and its first year of class was taught by Reverend Jonathan Dickinson. Princeton's crest still says "*Dei sub numine viget*" which is Latin for "Under God she flourishes."

- Modern medicine, philosophy, science, the formation of our human rights and freedoms, all owe a huge debt to Christian thinkers.

So the Bible and Christianity have never been opposed to seekers, to people wrestling with doubts, to questions... the “why” questions!

+ Hebrews defines faith like this:

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Faith is about confidence. It’s about hope. It’s about assurance even when we do not see. **Faith is about TRUST!** *Our English word for faith comes from the Latin “Fides” = trust*

- Faith is not to be confused with **BELIEF!** There is a difference.
- Faith is about having trust; Belief is more about knowledge. (Doctrine, opinions, creeds, apologetics)
- **Faith is about the heart; Belief is more about the head**
 - Faith is more intuitive; it’s deeper than words.
 - Belief is more logical; it’s expressed in statements.

You can have a profound faith in Jesus without being able to clearly articulate what you believe.

Many in the time of Jesus expressed a deep faith in Jesus while having a very limited theological understanding of who he was (Jesus commented on their great faith). Yet they would not have known about the fundamental doctrines of Christianity (The incarnation, the Virgin birth, the doctrine of Grace and Salvation, the Godhead).

I’m not suggesting that having the right beliefs (the right doctrines) are not important. I’m suggesting that you can have all the right beliefs in your head (Knowledge) and be far from God in your heart. Faith is having that uncomplicated childlike trust! **Jesus said:**

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Luke 18:17 (NIV)

Childlike faith begins with an uncomplicated trust in God.

Children don’t have their theology all straight! In fact, at times they have it wrong. But they have faith/trust!

+ Now I’m not saying that proper belief statements, that the Creeds, that Doctrine, that good Theology is not important. **It is important!** That’s why we have the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, statements of faith, the Canon. **They are like the road signs that keep us from going off the road!**

We need these convictions to guide our actions, our morals, our choices, our behaviour.

But here is the reality (Please hear me clearly): All of us form a framework of personal beliefs that becomes the window (the paradigm) through which we see the world. **Some of those personal beliefs might be right and some might wrong.**

- Illustration: The first 18 years of my life I was surrounded by a group of people who had amazing faith and trust in Jesus. But they also had some very dogmatic doctrines. One of them was that many of them believed that unless you were baptised in a particular way you were not truly saved. In other words, you were going to hell!

That influenced my way of thinking and my paradigm (the window) through which I saw the world was simple... everyone who was baptised wrong was lost and I had to tell them the “truth”. Now considering that over 99% of the Christians in the world were baptised wrong that was a big task! **That was my belief!** The window through which I saw the world.

✚ Let me borrow a way of putting this from Christian author Dave Tomlinson. He uses three boxes. I’m using three tables.

The first table (the green one) is **ORDER**, the second (the red one) is **DISORDER**, the third (the gold one) is **REORDER**.

1) We’re all raised in the first table of ORDER. We were prescribed a list of behavior modifications and a list of what is true, what is correct, what to believe, who is Jesus, what is sin, who is saved, who goes to heaven, who does not, etc.

Life is black and white, this is wrong, this is right... this is true, this is false.... Your beliefs get neatly organised in compartments that make sense! And you form your paradigm (the window) through which you see the world. Some people are very comfortable here. **It has a very childlike simple faith feel to it.**

But soon you start bumping into problems! Questions. Doubts. You fight to try and defend your beliefs. You become afraid, “What if what I believe is wrong?” “If this is wrong what else is wrong?” **(I know, I have been here!)**

Now you have a choice, you can stay at this table, ignore those questions, block out the doubts! Circle the wagons! **But what will happen is that you will become the Archie Bunker Christian.**

Judgemental, angry, rigid, dogmatic, critical and closed-minded.

The kind of Christian people out there try to avoid!

2) But if you have courage and face the honest doubts, you will land on table two called **DISORDER**. Much of your ordered little belief systems gets **deconstructed**, tested, challenged and you struggle with belief. I know, I lived a big part of my life HERE as well!

Very often Christians find themselves HERE after a crisis in their life. Someone dies that should have been healed. A son/daughter leaves the Christian faith. Their house of cards falls down!

But if you have courage, if you don’t lose heart, what will fall apart will not be your **authentic faith** (that deep trust in God) but the fluff, the phoney, the man-made rules, the pet answers, the hypocrisy, the “straw-like religion”... You will become less dogmatic, more compassionate, kinder, less opinionated, way more humble and less rigid.

3) This will take you to the third table called **REORDER**.

You start to realise that ‘it wasn’t as simplistic as I thought, but it’s not all wrong either’. You don’t throw ‘the baby out with the bathwater’. And God will lead you to the fundamentals of Christian faith. Things like love, kindness, humility, patience, compassion. You’ll start to discover what was good in table one and what was distorted.

And here’s the wonderful news: **God will reconstruct your faith into a more authentic and a DEEPER Faith!**

Close: Illustration: Have you ever done a puzzle?

- You have all these pieces that belong and you try to put them together. In table one we tend to force truths together. Verses out of context, we grab this truth and push it into that truth and make it go together. But as we look at it something is wrong... pieces don't fit!
 - Some people just make it fit (ignore the questions)
 - Others face the honest questions, the doubts... something just doesn't fit.
- So, we end up in table two. We get frustrated and tear it all apart.
 - Some people give up, walk away from God, church, the Christian faith, Jesus...
 - Others courageously keep searching.
 - Then they find that corner piece, that edge... and the frame starts to come together.
 - You may not have all the puzzle done (You probably never will!) but now it's making more sense... your faith deepens, **it's more about the heart than about the head!**

Advice from someone who has lived this:

- 1) If you're in table one be careful with your rigid judgemental attitude. With the way you look with contempt at those in table two as if they were some backslider Judas betraying the Lord. **Tomorrow your table might fold!**
- 2) If you're in table two, don't lose heart, trust the Lord. This to shall pass! Look for that one corner puzzle piece and hold on to it. You will eventually find the next... and the next...
- 3) If you are at table three, don't look at those in table one with disdain... they might have their doctrine and theology messed up but they still have Faith and God loves them as well...

We're closing with this song: This I Believe (Based of the Apostles Creed)

- These are the corners of the puzzle developed by the early Christians after working through their faith (the framework of our Christian faith).