Faith, confidence and the Bible

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14 March 2024
Bishops Study Day, Craven Arms
What is faith?
“Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion …”

RICHARD DAWKINS, “IS SCIENCE A RELIGION?” THE HUMANIST, 1997 – EMPHASIS ADDED
The Bible on Faith…

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

Hebrews 11:1-2

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.”

James 2:19

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Hebrews 11:6
The Promise of Faith
The Promise of Faith...

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

Matthew 21:22 (ESV)

“For our life is a matter of faith, not of sight.”

2 Corinthians 5:7 (GNB)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction..” Proverbs 1:7 (NIV)

“For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith.”

Ephesians 2:8 (GNB)

“…take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)
The Challenge of Faith
Our context is exile
The Bible: the Story that held us together

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." C.S. Lewis
Western societies are fragmenting

“All the [spheres of knowledge] move like planets round the sun of God’s truth, and if they left their course they would soon be hurled back into chaos.”

E. Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, c1854
Exile

*Exile* – to be separated from one’s place of belonging

*Cultural Dissonance*

– the experience of refugees, migrants and exiles
– an uncomfortable sense of discord, confusion, or conflict experienced by people in the midst of change in their cultural environment
The Temptations of Exile

• Assimilate to the culture
• Withdraw to the ghetto
• Participate as a visitor or tourist
What does it feel like to be …
... a church leader?
44% of leaders thought their churches were effective in discipleship and mission

EIDO RESEARCH
Barriers:

• **Lack of people**
  ‘there’s not many of us, and we’re stretched and tired’

• **Apathy**
  ‘general sense of apathy, lack of commitment, and reluctance’

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**EIDO RESEARCH**
… to be a Christian in contemporary society?
Can the Church recover a proper confidence in the gospel in the midst of contemporary culture?
There are several different ways of being a stranger in a foreign land.

- **Alien** - feels resentful and trapped - prone to anger and fear. This is the culture of the ghetto.
- **Visitor or tourist** - feels detached from the issues of contemporary culture. This keeps us aloof from being involved.
- **Ambassador** – knows that this experience is no accident because you feel commissioned – sent on purpose knowing that God is with us and for us..”
Belief in God – shift away from unbelief

Which one of the following best describe your belief?

- There is definitely a God/gods or some ‘higher power’
- There is probably a God/gods or some ‘higher power’
- There is probably NOT a God/gods or some ‘higher power’
- There is definitely NOT a God/gods or some ‘higher power’
- Don’t know
% interested in finding out more about the Bible (average = 38%)

- Bible Dismissive (31%)
- Bible Indifferent (23%)
- Bible Conflicted (5%)
- Bible Uncertain (7%)
- Bible Nostalgic (8%)

% believe in a God (average = 38%)

- Bible Loving (5%)
- Bible Infrequent (8%)

Mission Audiences are getting warmer...

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<th>Percentage of population</th>
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Legend:
- Red: Isaiah 2018
- Green: Summer 2020
- Purple: Jan-21
- Orange: Isaiah 2022
- Pink: Oct-22
The Challenge of Faith
What words do people use to describe the Bible?
We have fought over the Bible...

...and then forgotten it
Why does it matter? – Humanity’s Spiritual Superfood

Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ (Matthew 4.4)

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119.103)

Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’ (John 6.35)
Recommended Resources....
The Challenge of Faith
Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

PSALM 73: 13-14
How do we grow faith?
Context – “If the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first.” (John 15:18)

Bible – “Did God really say…?” (Ge 3:1)

Suffering – “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)

Faith is relational - “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17)

Relationships need time – Prayer and Bible meditation are vital

Faith acts! – “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6b)

Address doubts - “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)

Ask for more! - The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5)
Thank you