

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black compass. The compass face is green with white markings and a red needle. A thick red horizontal band is superimposed over the middle of the image, passing behind the compass. A large white number '7' is positioned on the left side of the red band.

7

FAITH

STARTING POINT



SECTION ONE: EVERYDAY FAITH

Faith is not a religious concept. It's a *human* concept. It's arguably the most powerful tool we have. The ability to believe something and act on it has launched everything from life-saving medical developments to genocide. Faith—or belief—fuels good and evil every day in every segment of the population. Everything that has been done, for good or bad, was done because somebody believed it could be and should be done. Every problem that has been solved was solved because somebody believed. Mountains have been moved by faith—medical mountains, scientific mountains, financial mountains.

Belief fuels anticipation and imagination. It enables us to picture a preferred future for us and the people around us. For all these reasons, and more, it is impossible to imagine life without faith.

Our ability to believe can work for us or against us. We all have a propensity to look for evidence to support what we already believe. It's easier for us to see that propensity in others, but we're all guilty. The problem is that when we adopt a belief that isn't true or isn't helpful, that propensity makes it difficult to change course. It can even cause us to actively resist what is true and helpful.

We're more open to data that substantiates what we already believe than information that conflicts with our viewpoints. Have you noticed how quickly you become defensive when information that contradicts your beliefs is presented? You may have experienced a bit of that during this study. Most participants do.

We are born believing. A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples.

🗨️ **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

If you don't have solid beliefs, you cannot build a stable life. Beliefs are like the foundation of a building, and they are the foundation to build your life upon.

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 **Alfred A. Montapert**



SECTION ONE:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 How is everyday faith, or belief, similar or dissimilar to religious faith?
- 2 How do your environment, family, and friends impact what you believe?
- 3 Have you ever changed what you believe? How did that happen?

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Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

 Martin Luther King, Jr.

SECTION TWO: BELIEF THAT VS. TRUST IN

Religious belief has the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gather enough people who believe the same thing about anything and the next thing you know you have a movement. Or a new religion. Put a persuasive leader out front and the next thing you know, the world begins to change. This dynamic explains the rise of most popular religious movements. But it does not explain the rise of Christianity.

Throughout history, when leaders of popular movements died, their followers would band together to keep their messages and their missions alive. This was the case with the prophet Muhammad, who died of natural causes in AD 623. This was the case with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated for his beliefs in 1968. But when Jesus was crucified, the movement he began came to a screeching halt. The mission died with him because he was the mission. Jesus did not launch his movement around a new list of *believe thats*. At the centre of his teaching was a single *believe in*. Jesus called upon his followers to believe in him. Not his ideas. *Him*. This theme is reflected in what is arguably the most popular statement in the New Testament:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever *believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16

Toward the end of his life, it was evident to everyone that Jesus was claiming to be one with God. He even said as much.

"I and the Father are one." - John 10:30
"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." - John 14:9

Statements like these gave his enemies grounds to convict him of blasphemy. But many of Jesus' followers believed he was exactly who he claimed to be. When Jesus questioned his disciples regarding his identity, Peter blurted out,

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." - Matthew 16:16

Jesus' response?

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." - Matthew 16:17

Jesus allowed others to bestow upon him the title "Son of God." He did not resist John the Baptist's description of him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" When his friend Lazarus

died, Jesus announced to the dead man's sisters,

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." - John 11:25

Jesus didn't claim to know the truth about resurrection. He claimed to be the resurrection. He didn't ask Mary and Martha to believe a *that*. He asked them to trust *in* him.

From start to finish, the mission of Jesus was *Jesus*. He did not come to leave his followers with a collection of insights and parables to pass on to the next generation. He went too far for that to be the case. He claimed too much. So it should come as no surprise that when his disciples watched him die, they watched the movement die with him. Messiahs don't die. Sons of God can't be killed. It's impossible to crucify "the resurrection and the life." But there he was. Nailed to a Roman cross. And there he died.

When Jesus died, no one believed he was who he claimed to be.

When Jesus died, there were no Christians.

His followers fled. There was no discussion about how to keep his teaching alive. There was nothing to discuss. His life and his teaching were inseparable, and he was dead. His followers were left to choose between two explanations. Either he was confused or they had been duped. Yet, these were the very people who would later sacrifice their lives for their crucified leader.

This is where the story of Christianity parts ways with every other religious tradition and institution. This is where the story becomes both unexplainable and

undeniable. It's unexplainable because there is no good explanation as to why Jesus' disciples later risked their lives to reengage. It's undeniable because here we are about two thousand years later discussing it. What's most important for our purposes is to understand that the hinge, the thing that made all the difference, was not something Jesus *taught*. It was something Jesus *did*.

He came back to life.

Jesus rose from the dead and nobody was outside his tomb waiting. Not even his most loyal followers believed Jesus had come back to life until they saw him. And upon seeing him, *they believed*. *They trusted*. In a moment, they went from unbelief to belief.

Luke, who wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, records what happened in Jerusalem when Jesus' followers went into the streets proclaiming his resurrection. Thousands gathered to hear the news. Peter was the appointed spokesman. His message was painfully direct. He didn't call to mind the teachings of Jesus. He didn't repeat his parables. Instead, he pointed into the crowd and summarised:

You killed him.

God raised him.

We've seen him.

Say you're sorry.

Peter's willingness to stare down the very people who supported Jesus' trial and execution is impossible to explain apart from his own explanation. He had seen, touched, and conversed with his risen Messiah and Lord. With the resurrection of Jesus, there was a resurrection of faith.



SECTION TWO:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 How do Jesus' statements about himself make him unique? What do they tell us about him?
- 2 Why was Jesus' death particularly devastating for the continuation of his message?
- 3 How does the disciples' behaviour lead credibility to the claim of Christianity?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way.

 Karl Barth



SECTION THREE:

FAITH ISN'T BLIND

Following Jesus requires faith. Specifically, it requires one to place his or her trust in Jesus. Not the teachings of Jesus—the person of Jesus. Christianity does not require blind faith. Christianity is an informed faith. At the centre is an event attested to by eyewitnesses who, by their own accounts, lost faith when Jesus died, but regained it when he rose from the dead. The foundation of Christianity is not a list of *believe thats*. It is a single *trust in*.

Christians don't believe Jesus rose from the dead because the Bible says so. Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead because Matthew and John, eyewitnesses, said so. Christians believe because Luke, a first-century doctor, claimed to have thoroughly investigated the events surrounding the life and crucifixion of Jesus and concluded that Jesus rose from the dead. Luke spent the second half of his life traveling throughout the Roman Empire telling that story. We believe Jesus rose from the dead because Peter believed he did. Peter, who on the night of Jesus' arrest denied knowing him, became the leader of the church in Jerusalem, the city where these events took place. Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead because James, the brother of Jesus, claims it was true. James trusted

in his brother as his Saviour.

Christians believe because Mark, a friend and companion of Peter, testified to the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Last, and by his own account least, Christians believe because the apostle Paul believed. Paul, who stepped into history as a persecutor of Christians, came to believe Jesus was the Son of God and that he physically rose from the dead.

These witnesses paid a high price for their faith. Most were martyred. Throughout history, courageous men and women have given their lives for what they believed. This group was different. They gave up their lives for what they said they saw — *the resurrected Jesus*.

Like every religion, Christianity requires faith. Specifically, Christianity requires faith in a person. This is why for anyone investigating Christianity, the first question that must be answered is, *Who is Jesus?*

Faith is not intelligent understanding; faith is deliberate commitment to a Person where I see no way.

 Oswald Chambers

 Abraham Lincoln

BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 7

- Faith is one of the most powerful tools at humanity's disposal.
- The thing that makes Jesus different from other religious leaders isn't something he taught; it's something he did. He died and came back to life.
- Christianity requires faith in a person. This is why for anyone investigating Christianity, the first question that must be answered is, *Who is Jesus?*

Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at His word and taking the next step.

● Joni Eareckson Tada

