

In Search of a Confident Faith: Overcoming Barriers to Trusting in God

by J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler,
InterVarsity Press, 2008

Chapter Summaries (cf. pp 163-165)

Part 1: FACING CHALLENGES TO OUR FAITH IN GOD

JP Chapter 1: What Faith is ... and What it Isn't

In *Chapter 1* we explain that faith is actually rooted in knowledge, it is never opposed to reason or evidence. Biblical faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It is trusting what we have reason to believe is true. To remind us of these factors, we suggested the use of synonyms such as God-confidence, reliance, or trust. Reality makes something true; never can our believing something make it true. Yet our trust does come in degrees, that in believing something, we may have a 51% to 100% belief that something is true. Doubt is not really problematic; we need to provide safe places for further exploration. But unbelief is problematic. To increase our confidence in a belief, we have indirect control of the process, but never direct control. We can intend to change a belief over time, for example, through meditation, study, etc. Trust is fundamental to all personal relationships. Effective cooperation requires trust. Of course, our confidence in God is the most fundamental relationship. The more we grow in trust in God, the greater our relationship with God can flourish.

JP Chapter 2: Dealing with Doubts: Distractions of the Head

Christianity is a knowledge tradition. Knowledge is either an accurate experiential awareness of reality or a true belief about reality based on adequate grounds. Knowing plays an absolutely essential role in the Christian life. In fact, according to one study, Evangelicals tend to be more educated than non-religious people. In *Chapter 2*, we make clear that the popular notion of faith as “a blind leap in the dark” or “a private choice to believe something in the absence of evidence” is false and harmful. Instead, faith is confidence and trust in what we know. Yet doubts still surface and these can become a barrier to trusting God is from doubt. The chapter addresses two kinds of doubt: a) doubt that stems from seeing the world through Western cultural plausibility structures and b) doubt regarding specific intellectual issues. Regarding the first kind of doubt, some intellectual doubts arise, not from specific problems, but from vague, background assumptions from our culture that are seldom brought clearly to mind. The challenge is that we're basically unaware of these plausibility structures we have imbibed from our culture. We list seven particular assumptions are identified (e.g., science is the only way to know reality, most experts, such as university professors, are not Christians since they are not easily duped as Christians area). To combat this way of perceiving the world, we suggest a four-step process to question the doubt. Furthermore, we need to participate in a counter cultural Christian community that includes as a part of its regular life, concern for cultivating a Christian mind, addressing Christian alternatives to secular ideas. Regarding the second kind of doubt, we propose eight steps for dealing with specific intellectual doubt. Christians need not feel intellectual embarrassment. We can be encouraged that there are other believers in the body of Christ who have diligently studied these matters and there are answers.

KI Chapter 3: Dealing with the Past: Distractions of the Heart

Chapter 3 examines barriers to trusting in God within, from our heart. Past emotional wounding can hinder our openness to trust others, including trusting God. We may think we mainly run our life from our thoughts and cognitions, but in actuality, our strongest desires usually tend to guide us in all that we do. We need to discern the subtle ways we follow our heart, since there are only two fundamental movements: either toward God, or away from God. Our desires do play a key role in our life. Ps 37:4 teaches that by delighting ourselves in God, God will give us the desires of our heart. The Spirit of God moves us affectively (e.g., in love, in joy, in peace—fruit of the Spirit). Yet our desires are also the place of attack, where Satan wishes to lure us away from God. Furthermore, due to our emotional wounds, we have deep love deficits that only the unconditional love the Father can fill. Yet we often succumb to temptations to fill this deep need for love in wrong ways. [Ed Piorek story pp. 82-83] We give over territory and footholds to Satan, imprisoning us in sinful places. Healing can come through honesty with God and with others within healthy Christian relationships. As we open up the hidden places in our life to the Father, it opens the way for Father to overwhelm us with his forever love, and slowly heal these deep wounds. This inner healing process can move us toward trusting God more and more.

Bruce Walke, “One way I know God’s will is by the desires of my heart. . . . When God is in control of your life, He is also in control of your desires. The things you long for in your heart are put there by the Holy Spirit.” *Finding God’s Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 86-87. [p. 67 in our book] [story: Vineyard member, George, physical/inner healing, p. 64-65]

Part 2: EXPANDING EXPECTATIONS FOR OUR FAITH IN GOD

KI Chapter 4: Making Sense of Jesus’ Incredible Promises

[opening question—What is the “normal” Christian life? Too low a view? P. 95

Chapter 4 presents a NT study of God-confidence, highlighting four main points:

- 1) Personal/relationship component (trust *in* God/”belief in”);
 - 2) Content component (“the faith;” our understanding of reality/”belief that”),
 - 3) Action component (“faith without works is dead; our view of reality affects how we live),
- and
- 4) Progression component (our God-confidence can increase and Jesus urges us to).

Furthermore, Jesus thought it was possible that if a believer even exercised a small measure of God-confidence that God would still come through, for God can do the impossible. Jesus became convinced that this is a God-bathed world. Our view of reality must expand. That is, our idea of God and of his kingdom needs to match the full reality of what it actually is, how Jesus viewed reality. One picture of biblical trust is Peter walking on the water. Jesus expected Peter to step out and walk on the “solid” water. Likewise, Jesus expects us to rely on God’s truth and promises—to take a risk by moving beyond our comfort zones. As we do so, we can live more by “faith/trust” than by “sight.” Jesus himself is our example in this, he learned trust in God. So he teaches us as an insider, living in his humanity relying on God to show us how it’s possible. As Jesus was lead by the Spirit, we can we live. Learning to live more in God-confidence is like learning to ice-skate or swim—it’s like getting comfortable acting within a new environment and enjoying what this new environment offers.

[**tension between suffering and miracles—time for each; mourn with those who mourn, but rejoice with those who rejoice, Rom 12:15; p.111-112]

JP/KI Chapter 5: Bearing Witness to God’s Activity in Our Word

According to sociologist Christian Smith the chief source of doubt comes from God’s apparent inactivity in the lives of people in the face of tragedy and suffering. God is perceived as a no-show who is indifferent and impotent to intervene and help in the toil and fatigue of daily troubles. *Chapter 5* addresses these experiential doubts. What has been mainly missing is that Christians don’t often share their supernatural encounters with God—“witnessing” to others about the amazing acts of God in our lives. We think hearing these stories greatly builds our God-confidence, so the chapter is filled with encouraging divine encounters, portraying some of the varied ways God has intervened in the lives of his children.

KI Chapter 6: Learning to Trust in God for Guidance About Life’s Decisions

[opening story of answer to prayer for businessman pp 165-167]

In our final chapter, we provided additional encouraging stories of God encounters, this time focused on the theme of seeking God’s will. We all want to make wise decisions and avoid the disasters of the past. God promises to guide us, but we need to be aware of the variety of means God can use to give us person-specific guidance. After identifying the ways we use the term, “God’s will,” we clarify that what pleases God includes a wide range of options; that in most cases in life there is not one best decision to make. In our decision-making process, God may communicate some personal thoughts to help us. The Bible teaches a range of ways God communicates to us.:

The Spirit can guide through the study and meditation on God’s Word, [p. 178

The Spirit can guide through words given us by others, [p. 184

The Spirit can guide through thoughts within our mind, [p. 186

The Spirit can guide through images and pictures (e.g., some dreams can convey a message for us from God) [p. 192], and

[dream story of moving to another seminary ppp197-198]

The Spirit can guide through our longings. [p.199

For each of these ways, we share encouraging examples so it’s easier to recognize God’s voice the next time he uses a particular avenue and not miss out on divine guidance.

[Concluding story of birth of Sophya and her trust in her father p. 203]

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6

“True faith is never found alone; it is always accompanied by expectations.

The man who believes the promise of God expects to see them fulfilled. Where there is no expectation there is no faith.” A. W. Tozerⁱ

ⁱ A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1970), 37.