

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Here are the key questions addressed in this book.

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What do I believe?
What style faith do you have?
What's an example of searching faith?
What is my story?
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How do we spot fake spiritual sources?

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6-How Do I Walk with Jesus?

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Introduction

"Where there is no God, there is no man either."

--Nicholas Berdyaev.

Please, would you let me challenge you? I have put together a range of insights from different perspectives and time periods, to help you achieve a **successful search for faith**.

My intent is a starting challenge for the new searcher and a useful set of workshop or class ideas for the teacher. I believe faith is an essential ingredient for a meaningful life.

A seeker. Yes, along the years I have found and studied the "truths" of several faiths. But right now, I have found one that I experience as true and fully so – being Christian. Unless a faith is tested personally, it cannot be of much value nor useful in the lows and highs of life. I believe we all need a strong faith to survive.

When we are alone, lost, or broken – we need faith. Even if it is only faith in ourselves and our friends, we need hope to carry us through difficulties. We live by trusting and having faith in the institutions and people around us.

This is a time of distrust and discouragement. If we don't give up on ourselves or others, we prevail and hopefully thrive. We all live by faith because we cannot live without trust.

I believe that faith is about life giving, though, and not life taking. As Viktor Frankl, the famous writer and Holocaust survivor, points out: a meaningful or fulfilling existence is one where one looks for **what life expects from us**, and not **what we expect from life**. This may run counter from what we most often hear from our culture.

Our culture says it's all about the gusto and the grit; OK, yes but what about recovering. The Bible's assumption is that we all arrive and all live through this world as broken.

The world teaches us we must go out and do it or get it for ourselves. We have to fight. In all the faith traditions, it is about seeking and finding the higher power. We are not in this alone!

But the real fight in our journey is in the spiritual realm, not the worldly one. Our journey can take one of two paths. **It is in our soul's quest and in the faith's embrace that life's victories take place.**

My goal is that you can use the tools in this book to find a strong, robust, truthful faith that you can live by and thrive by. My Christian faith is personal because I have experienced the realness of it and have lived the reality of its statements. I will reveal some of them.

By searching, you can find and test the truth statements of the faith you are examining. I use my Christianity as the example. This testing can be done with any faith.

What Kind of Faith is a Searching Faith?

SECTION 1: How Do I Question Myself?

What do I Believe?

Are you trying to test and challenge any faith right now? Your faith? Your parent's. Your friend's? Are you curious or uneasy about the future and wish you had a faith? What do you tell your children or partner about their chances in this world?

Do you have faith that *"things will work out?"* or are you *"doing the best I can despite the circumstances?"*

This book will help you in your faith walk – to find if your belief about life or your chosen faith is strong enough to sustain you and your family.

I am talking about core beliefs and worldview. These are **the statements you tell others in trying to describe how the world works**. And why it works.

I am talking about a belief in a higher power, in God. Seeing the wonder, the unexplained, and knowing there is infinitely more than what we can see. This leads us to worship. And many try to find out more about this object of worship.

Whether a worshipped God or a conviction about the best way to proceed, **what we believe matters**. What you believe influences what you value in life and your values drive your behaviors.

If I believe that no one cares and people like me are discarded by society, then I will be driven by fear, anger and caution, which means I will respond to situations as threats.

Faith. What lets you sleep at night? What gives you peace during a major illness? Are you able to reach out and love others? You must first come to conclusion that faith matters.

Each of us makes a lot of different faith claims. More than you think. Some are little and some are big. See these examples of what it means to operate in this world from vantage point of having faith.

"I am sure we will get there," said the man on the plane.

Restated it means: "I have faith in the integrity of this airline, its pilots, and its fleet of planes. We will fly well above the clouds, going above the wicked thunderstorms, and get to our destination on time. So, I feel safe about getting on board."

"Uncle Ron will find us that car."

Restated it means: "We trust in Uncle Ron and have faith in his promises. He has always come through for us in the past. When he says he knows where to find a used car for us that we can afford, he will. Let's plan on it."

"I'm sure our neighbor will keep our house safe while we are away."

Restated it means: "I have faith in people. People are basically good and act out of the goodness of their heart. We certainly can trust our good neighbor, Arlene, to watch the house for us while we are away."

"I know that my child will get into a good college."

Restated it means: “I have faith in my child, in her abilities and her hard work. I think she will continue in her good study habits and will continue to strive and to embrace the vision that will lead her to success in education.”

What Style of Faith do You Have?

Some in leadership roles or in psychological circles express the faith journey as a maturing process. They point to early exposure to faith as a relational experience within family and one’s faith community.

At some point we become our own person and we move into a searching faith. **A searching faith** is one where we examine what we had adopted or inherited, what we had experienced in community, and then **test our faith and make it our own.**

- 1- Experienced Faith- earliest exposure to people of faith; and experience with those of faith who show love and acceptance. This opens us up to claiming faith for ourselves
- 2- Affiliative Faith- when we belong to an accepting community of faith; activities and experiences around a community of faith and its activities.
- 3- Searching Faith- as we mature, we have a desire to commit to others and to meaningful causes; a time of discernment when we move from our community-based to a more individual understanding of faith. This can be a time of testing and exploration.
- 4- Owned Faith- we finally decide and own our faith, living it out in action and communications with others

Adapted from Westerhoff’s *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

What is My Story?

In the NPR radio series “This I Believe,” the hosts read short essays from people who share their faith stories. The program allows people to share their faith in something important. The show provides a space for everyday people. The purpose is:

“Declaring one’s own personal philosophy of life by telling a story about how those beliefs were formed. When people strip down their beliefs to their core principles, they might find that the longest-lasting beliefs are those based on a moment when something they have learned stays with them forever.”

Certainly, it’s about story, at its core, and is about transmitting a person and their essence. Just as a nation’s story and a world religion’s story reveals their purposes. Jesus taught through story and much of God’s character is revealed in story.

Faith stories reveal life lessons as their root and reveal essential human truths such as loving your neighbor or knowing oneself. And we also keenly feel and react to these lessons wherever they are found in children’s stories, fairy tales and other folklore.

We listen. We learn. We gather in. We observe the behavior of our friends and family. We ponder the stories from the Bible. Without knowing it, we all are absorbing and learning about faith journeys.

Example of Searching Faith

A number books have been written by our Gen X and Millennials young people about their faith journey. Much has changed in the traditional faith landscape in America. The pluralistic culture, constant turmoil, and more liberal society have challenged all of us.

In the book, *Faith Unraveled* by Rachel Held Evans, describes her faith journey. A powerful testimony of a searching faith. She discovers, uncovers, and reclaims her childhood faith to make it her own.

A few of her powerful statements:

[A searching faith] "means being okay with being wrong, okay with not having all the answers, okay with never being finished."

"When we require that all people must say the same words or subscribe to the same creeds in order to experience God, we underestimate the scope and power of God's activity in the world."

"At first God was something I agreed to, not someone I followed. But Jesus rarely framed discipleship in terms of intellectual assent to a set of propositional statements. To Jesus, faith was invariably linked to obedience. I need a Jesus who requires more from me than intellectual assent and emotional allegiance. Being a Christian, it seems, isn't about agreeing to a certain way ; it is about embodying a certain way."

Life's Expectations: What is Meaning?

What Does Life Expect from Me?

In Viktor Frankl's world-renowned book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes the thoughts that kept him alive in the Holocaust camps of WWII. This is one of the most read books about faith of all time. In a circumstance where most of us might expect to experience the absence of hope, he found hope.

One of the key thoughts he expresses in the book is about expectations. He says that life is not a question of "*what does life have to offer me?*," but rather "*what do I have to offer life?*" Despite what the world tells us, it does not really matter what we expect from life. The much more important question for us to conclude about is: what is life, at this moment, expecting from me?

He says we need to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead think of ourselves as **one who eagerly responds to the demands of life**. Are you one of those individuals? We can live as someone who is willing to be questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answers must consist, not in talk or meditation, but in right action and in right conduct.

For Frankl, life ultimately is most meaningful when it is a means for taking responsibility, for finding the right answer to its problems and to "fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each of us." Uniquely our questions and our tasks.

In fact, we get the vast majority of our “integrity opportunities” among the small, mundane circumstances in life, the projects we lead, the commitments we make, and the level of honesty we are willing to uphold. Building up the local food pantry; living with my wife; and tell my boss the truth about the difficult project results.

This lets us living in an intentional way moment by moment.

This is about having faith. Think about it.

What's a Golden Rule?

Am I Really a Good Person?

Man is basically good. Man is basically bad, i.e. evil. Evidence on both sides. But throughout time, the debate is uneven. The one factor that us in one direction or another is that slim impulse, that inkling there's more, that feeling that something is missing, and that thought of one "should be..."

The earliest of the good impulses has been captured, crystallized in the "Golden Rule." Although ancient, this faith principle is still quoted today. Let's look at it; the classical quotation goes:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

What does it mean; and why has it been held up as good? What faith assumption undergirds it?

The statement can be found in various forms back to various ancient cultures, as well as in the Bible, and has been quoted in recent centuries. In ancient India around 400 BC, we find it in the *Mahabharata*. "One should never do something to others that one would regard as an injury to one's own self."

In ancient Greece, the philosopher Isocrates, who died in 338 BC, said, "Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you."

In the Bible's Old Testament book of Leviticus (19:18). *"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself."*

And in our day, the most famous comes in the New Testament, Matthew (7:12) and Luke (6:31) *"Do to others as you would have them do to you."*

Without this principle, the world would certainly be a meaner place. The assumptions reveal a powerful and realistic view of life. It assumes that our first impulse is to care for ourselves, but with a higher impulse, with a commitment to community in others that same impulse could elevate the needs of others. We can place faith in two things:

- We are able, and can find a willingness in ourselves, to apply the care that we give ourselves to others.
- We can have faith that others are worth it and will benefit from this same care.