



FAITH AND BELIEF

As Christians, we believe

Christianity is true. We also have faith that Christianity is true. Does this just mean the same thing? Are there any important differences between faith and belief?

Many things that we believe, we have no desire at all to be true. I believe that I missed my flight; I believe that there's a global pandemic. I don't have *faith* that either of these are true. Similarly, it makes no sense to say that I have faith that you will win your upcoming basketball game if I hope you lose.

These examples show that one of the important differences between faith and belief involves desire. If I have faith you will win your game, I want you to win; if I have faith that God exists, I want God to exist. Therefore, one key difference between this understanding of faith and belief is that faith involves desire, while belief does not.

James 2:19 says "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." This suggests a difference between belief and faith. One difference is that demons have no desire for God to exist—they don't think God's existence is a good thing. The person of faith, on the other hand, doesn't merely believe that God exists—she also *desires* God.

What does this mean for us? First, it shows that belief is important for the Christian walk, but not the full story. We shouldn't aim to merely believe in God, but we should also cultivate desires and affections for God. We should remind ourselves of the beauty of the gospel, and why God's story of sending Jesus is such a wonderful thing. It's not just true—it's good.

Second, this affects the way we share Jesus with others. As Christian philosopher Paul Copan says, when sharing their faith, the Christian has two tasks. The first is to show that the Gospel is beautiful, so that the unbeliever wants it to be true. The second is to show that the Gospel is true.

Finally, we might sometimes go through periods of doubting God. It's hard to know why God would allow suffering in our lives, and sometimes God seems hidden. If experiences like these lead us to doubt, we can remember the importance of desire. In the midst of doubt, desiring God can keep us grounded and pursuing God.

"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1)



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Hi! I'm Liz (Jackson) Withorn and I grew up as an MK in Budapest, Hungary. I recently finished my Ph.D. in philosophy at Notre Dame, and now teach philosophy at Ryerson University in Toronto. I love sports, cooking, podcasts, avocados, the beach, and helping my husband Alex fix up houses. One of my main areas of research is on the nature and rationality of faith.

For more of Liz's work on faith, check out <http://liz-jackson.com/public-philosophy/>.