



Bible Class: Faith and Life

What if faith could be seen as involving living as well as believing?

Margaret's Bible class was about to have a some visitors come in to be interviewed about their faith. Margaret wanted to expand the class's understanding of faith before they wrote questions for the visitors.

"I introduced the idea of the 'faith-cake,' which has three ingredients: beliefs, attitudes, and a way of life. Beliefs affect our attitudes, which affect our actions, and vice versa. I used the image of a pound cake, which needs sugar, eggs, butter, and flour; it is incomplete without all those ingredients. In a similar way a 'faith cake' needs all three ingredients to be an accurate representation of a Christian understanding of faith.

"Once the students understood what 'beliefs, attitudes, and actions' meant, we used worksheets with writing spaces shaped as mixing bowls to record our questions for the visitors. These included the headings 'Beliefs,' 'Attitude,' and 'Actions.' I gave them some examples to get them started:

- What do you believe about God making the world?
- Does that change how you feel about the world?
- How does your belief in God the creator change what you do and how you live?

"We used some of the questions in interviews with Christians from the local community. As a result of the interviews the students were able to create a 'faith-cake' recipe for each person interviewed that gave a fuller picture of their faith."

What's going on here?

Margaret saw Bible class as an opportunity for her students to expand their understanding of faith beyond beliefs alone and to see it in the context of a more holistic view of people.

She engaged students in using a new image to think about faith, interacting with visitors who were people of faith, and thinking about how best to represent the faith of others.

She reshaped her practice by introducing a new image to focus their thinking and connecting it with the resources used (faith-cake, mixing-bowl worksheet with headings), and by bringing in visitors and guiding student questions and interaction with them.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Faith is not an abstract set of beliefs that are held only in the mind. Faith is beliefs, attitudes, and a whole way of life centered on trust in God and belief in Christ.

Christian love, for example, is not truly believed in until it changes how we feel about God, our world, and others and affects what we do. Beliefs cannot be split from attitudes and a way of life, since the three are connected in complex ways. The influence does not go in one direction only. A change in what we do can make us rethink our attitudes and beliefs.

What difference does it make?

Deliberately focusing on the students' understanding of faith in this way not only expands their understanding but helps build the mindset that beliefs and what we learn are about life are not just for holding in our heads. This opens up questions about beliefs we would not want practiced, such as toxic beliefs fueled by hatred. Discernment is needed. The constant linking of learning, beliefs, and practice might help to keep us from playing with dangerous ideas if they are seen in the light of what they might look like in practice.

Where could we go from here?

Students, as they get older, could begin to look at the different connections between beliefs, attitudes, and way of life using different starting points. For example: How might a change of attitude affect beliefs and behavior? What happens to our beliefs if we don't connect them to our living? Do we ever revise our beliefs to fit behaviors that we have become comfortable with?

Digging deeper

For Christians, faith is about trust in Christ and a close relationship with God (John 1:12). Faith also has a cognitive aspect—it is what is believed about that relationship (cf. the beliefs and creeds such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed). Faith lived out is about a lifestyle faithful to the relationship with God and what is believed about him.

Unless he obeys, a man cannot believe. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Talk what we will of faith, if we do not trust and rely upon Him, we do not believe in Him. Antony Farindon

Faith, for a Christian, is about assurance, confidence, and trust. It is putting a growing faith in God that is based on evidence of God's character and our experience of him (1 Corinthians 1:9; Psalm 22:5).

Faith cannot be limited to a cognitive activity. The way the Bible talks about people as whole beings—body, soul and spirit—means that any activity tends to involve the whole person, even if there are different emphases. People are not just minds or bodies. The Bible sometimes refers to people as “body and soul” or “body, soul, and spirit,” with soul and spirit including the will, emotions, and thoughts, and our relationship to God (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Psalm 31:9).

People are not like hand puppets, with the soul inside the body. The different aspects are intricately connected and affect each other—they describe different facets of what we are as whole people. The human spirit is the part that makes us aware of a spiritual dimension of life and helps us to connect with God; but it too is intricately connected with our bodies and minds. We perceive the spirit through our physical senses, minds, and emotions, and express it that way. This understanding means that faith can never be just a mental assent to doctrines and love can never be “just an emotion.” Faith, hope, and love involve the whole being.



