Christian Psychology for Everyday Life

Carried by God + Carrying Others = A Meaningful Life

"What exactly is fail." We believe much more than we think!





Editorial

No doubt you have heard this statement at one time or another: "I do not believe in any God!" And probably you would most like to have replied with: "Then you do at least believe, you believe `in no God'."

This little play on words reflects the fact that we humans cannot get by without faith. There is much of which we are convinced, even if we cannot provide the final proof.

The present issue of Christian Psychology For Everyday Life aims not only to make us aware that we believe much more than we think, but also to show how faith develops, how the content of faith can change, and where it is worthwhile to stretch out for faith. Wishing you peaceful reading and reflection.



Werner May, Christian Psychologist, Germany



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The astonishing number of things I believe

I believe of many of my fellow human beings that they have honest intentions.

I believe that I will never learn 10-finger typing on the computer keyboard.

I believe I have a sense of humour.

I believe that I may yet dive from the 10-meter board at the swimming pool.

I believe that God really loves me.

I believe that I have forgotten the bulk of my life and now remember only a small excerpt.

I believe that my car mechanic knows where the fault in the car is.

I believe that God, the Holy Spirit, is in me.

I believe that it is healthy to consume as little sugar as possible.

I believe that what Jesus says in the Gospels is the truth. I believe him, but I am not sure

about whether I have understood him correctly.

I believe the satnav in my car.

I believe that I really was born in Germany.

I believe that the food I buy is not poisoned (although things of that kind have happened.)

I believe that one of the highest things is to forgive one another.

I believe that the rail ticket I bought at the machine is in fact valid.

I believe that I may yet learn Spanish well enough to enable communication in everyday life in Spain.

I believe...

An introduction

Heb. 11:32ff

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight."

Great

..., performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises,... from weakness were made strong; ...

I would like to have that too: performing acts of righteousness, obtained promises – wow! - and from weakness coming to strength! How did they achieve this?

I have to confess that I left out one phrase in this Bible passage, the one which explains to us how they achieved it:

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight..."

... it was by faith that they managed all this!

But what do we mean here by "faith"?

That's what we intend to focus on in the following pages.

We all believe!

The ability to believe is a fundamental capacity of every human being. Faith in the sense of trust.

Trust means:

• A certain person is on my side.

• A person is indeed whom I think him or her to be.

• The person stays on this track, that is, is constant.

Things and events, too, deserve our trust.

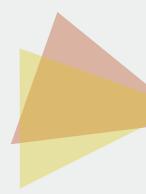
And I do not doubt, even though I am not experiencing it at this very moment!

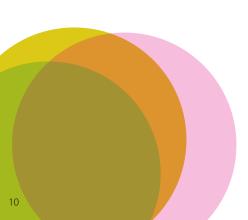
We find a key verse in Heb. 11:1 "Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen. For by it the people of old gained approval."

I therefore suggest the following definition: Faith is not doubting what one does not see.

In other words:

Everything that we do not see, i.e. that we do not perceive with our senses, is ours in faith!





The astonishing number of things we do not see, but believe

I am currently sitting at the computer and want to write down some examples of what I cannot see at this moment, but believe:

I believe that:

- ... Our car is still the front of the house door.
- ... We will soon have our evening meal.
- ... The highest mountain in the world is in the Himalayas.
- ... In a couple of months, Spring will begin here in Germany.

In all these examples, one can think out conditions which would lead to the opposite result, that is, which call into question a 100% certainty, a certainty without faith: it is possible that our car has just been stolen; an urgent telephone call causes me to miss out the evening meal...

A number of examples appear to be "certain". Any arguments suggesting that spring may not happen are going to be tenuous, to say the least (e.g. all the data in my diary, on the Internet etc. have been falsified).

Nevertheless, even here, faith is necessary ..

The great panorama of our faith:

- In our visible world:
- \rightarrow Matters of fact: I believe that in Germany the euro will still be valid next week.
- → Persons: I believe that Cristiano Ronaldo is still playing soccer
- \rightarrow Relationships: I believe that my grandchildren are glad to see grandma and grandad.

• Significance, consequences of something:

- → I believe, when I now pay a bill online, that the money arrives in my business partner's account.
- Existence and nature of God:
- \rightarrow I believe in a triune God.
- God's statutes:
- \rightarrow I believe that it is God's will that I ask someone to forgive me.
- God's presence:

→ I believe that, while I am typing this text, God is by me, watching me and supporting me.
 ● ...

Being provocative:

Most of the things that occupy us we hold in faith.

Many of our thoughts and reflections on why something has happened are without a sure, empirical and objective basis – but we believe all these thoughts, i.e. we do not doubt. Our lives are more faith-based than we think! Even the chair, on which you are probably sitting while reading this magazine, requires you to invest in faith. You believe that it will hold and not collapse ...

But, in case a chair does at some point ...

We asked friends:

Have you ever sat on a chair that collapsed?

Did this experience change anything when you sat down on chairs after that?

Did it take some time before you were able to sit down 'innocently' again?

'Yes, actually a lot has changed: As I'm overweight, I check mentally, but also sometimes by carefully feeling around, whether the seat structure is likely to hold me. There have been several situations where I've crashed into chairs, the last one was in a pub where I didn't fall off directly, but the metal chair cracked. I told the owner and he said that it had happened to lighter people too. That comforted me. The strangest situation was certainly the one where I was sitting on a plastic garden chair while operating an electric piano, because we were doing a street evangelisation with music. I led the music group. Right at the crowning final chord, which I had specially worked out, my plastic chair collapsed. It must have looked funny if it hadn't been a bit of a shock at the same time. Whether it contributed to the success of the evangelisation or not, I don't know.' (Christian)

'On our honeymoon, I really crashed into one of those plastic garden chairs.

That was a shock. It really hurt, with pain. And it took a long time before I was able to sit unsuspectingly on a chair like that again. Probably a few

months. With normal dining table chairs, I was able to sit down again without any problems. But on patio chairs like that, that took a while.

It must have looked really funny at the time, because my husband could hardly stop laughing, even though I was in so much pain. We have to think about that today and smile when a chair wobbles or someone else's chair crashes, which I've experienced two or three times.' (Mary)



The exercise with chocolate outside the door

Faith begins where I no longer doubt, even though I cannot see.

At my seminars on the subject of faith, I like to do the following exercise (even though it probably won't work as well now because of this publication):

After about 10 minutes of speaking, I say to the participants that there is a bar of chocolate outside the seminar door. Whoever can grab it owns it. Nobody jumps up immediate-

ly. After a few seconds, the first cautious laughter because they have recognised the connection to the topic.

Then the first person jumps up, goes out and soon comes back waving the chocolate.

Now I ask the participants who



had doubts and why? And who didn't, and why?

Those who have not doubted say that I have always told the truth so far. The doubters usually argue that I like to make jokes.

Again, after about 10 minutes, I say that there are three bars of chocolate in the next room waiting to be picked up.

This is followed by a similar

process as before, except that now several people get up and some go out.

Then we analyse again as we did the first time.

Again after 10 minutes: This time there are 10 bars of chocolate in the stairwell. Usually someone runs out immediately, but some people still have doubts.mer.

A touching sequel:

the chocolate bar among the vineyards

touching sequel:

the chocolate bar among the vineyards

A few years ago, after using this exercise at the weekend, I was annoyed that I hadn't managed, or had forgotten, to lay out the 100 chocolate bars. What would happen if everyone stormed off to search?

I shared my annoyance with my wife, who was with me.

It was October. As we drove home by car on Monday evening to our home in Würzburg in Germany, it was already getting a bit dark. Suddenly I suggested we stop and enjoy one of the last bright days here in Germany with a short walk in the vineyards. My wife immediately agreed, I braked, pulled off the motorway and we were soon walking along a vineyard path that we had never walked before. After a while, I spotted a bench in the distance and suggested we walk to it and then turn back.

When we got to the bench, what did we see?

In the middle of the bench was a bar of chocolate, the same kind I always put out during the chocolateoutside-the-door exercise.

Nobody, except our Heavenly Father, could know that we were walking there. And it was also extremely unlikely that someone had intentionally or unintentionally placed this chocolate on this bench, this exact brand. There was no-one to be seen for miles around. And it wasn't a well-known footpath either.

Doesn't God have a sense of humour?



And faith also works transcendentally

It seeks to go hand-in-hand with God

Faith is not only a constant and daily feature of our lives, but can also allow a spiritual dimension to become real.

Matthew 8:13

And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

James 1:6-7

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.

Jesus in his home town – Matthew 13:58

And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Jesus in Mark 11:24

"Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted to you."

James 5:15

"... and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him."



Three honest questions about our relationship with God

Do we believe too little?

Do we believe there?

Do we believe differently?



The five dimensions of our Christian faith

The nature of our faith is to be discovered in five dimensions.

Faith experiences: How God speaks, acts, leads.

Experiences in faith are among the valuable gifts in our relationship with God, although they will always retain a certain interpretative, subjective element.

Faith convictions: What is right in God's eyes, what we should do. We need convictions and faith so that these can guide our behaviour, so that, for example, we do not doubt that we have been given for-giveness of our sins and eternal life. **Faith concepts:** Teachings or opinions, for example on the Trinity or on the inspiration of Holy Scripture.

Faith concepts are located more on the level of knowledge than on the level of behaviour, and we will grow more or less according to our developing understanding of these theological foundations.

Faith practice: Forms of encounter with God, alone and in fellow-ship.

Each of us has certain private or public spiritual practices, such as, for example, forms of praise music or the liturgical structure of a church service.

Faith consequences: What I do in concrete situations and what I do not do.

Part of faith is being prepared to face the consequences of our faith in questions of life, in ethical responsibility, in our relationship to family, work or leisure.

These five dimensions encompass a vast area, and even after years we have probably only traversed a small part of it. We can spend our lives awake, discovering new things bit by bit, overcoming one-sidedness and developing in all five dimensions, not only alone but also in community with other Christians.

Three test-questions on this:

We Christians believe in a triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Can you explain this to someone who doesn't believe this and doesn't understand what we mean by the Trinity?

Can you name three differences between the faith practice of your congregation and a congregation of the Orthodox Church?

Have you ever commanded a disease to go away in Jesus' name?



Faith as a charism

1 Cor 12:7-9:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit,...

Paul describes faith, or the power of faith, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, as a charism, as a gift from God for a specific situation.

Where have I experienced this?

A long time ago. An employee was looking for a house to rent for himself and his family. In his search, he was walking through a housing estate. And then he had the impression he should simply ring the doorbell of a house and ask if it happened to be for rent. He plucked up his courage and actually rang the doorbell. And sure enough, the person at the door said 'yes, it was for rent, he would have to go to that address. But there were already a lot of applicants.' When he told us this, we prayed together for this house, that he would get it. We - there were three of us - had barely started praying when we all knew he would get it. Then we just stopped praying, because each of us was at peace that he would get this house. No one had any doubts.

And that's how it was. It was a charism of faith.

John Wimber (1934-1997), the founder of the Vineyard movement



distinguishes between universal role, charism and ministry with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit. What does he mean by this? What does this mean in relation to our topic of faith?

Universal role means that every Christian can count on the work of the Holy Spirit and can therefore ask for it: Lord, grant me faith, strengthen my faith, my conviction that it can succeed, that you can bring it about.

Charism, as described in the example above, is a gift from God, a gift for a very specific situation. We didn't actually strive for it, we experienced it more as a coincidence. And if this gift occurs regularly in a person and is confirmed by others, then we can speak of a ministry.

Another example:

You are to take over the leadership

of a house group. Through prayer, you can expect God to help you with this so that you can tackle this task with trust in God and that the evenings will be blessed. That is the level of the universal role. That's great.

But sometimes you realise that an evening was very special, you have the impression that something had to do with your leadership impulses: then you can speak of a charism.

Mark 9:22-23

"...If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Jesus said to him, "If You can?' All things are possible for the one who believes."

Godly faith is a gift, a trust that one places in God

Opinion survey

Faith like a grain of mustard seed?

What is your understanding of this?



Luke 17:5-6

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you..."

"Faith like a grain of mustard seed? What your understanding of this? Can you write a few lines about it?"

'The only thing I can think of on the subject is that someone once said that we don't need a big faith, but a small faith in a big God. That's how I would see it too.' (*Anne*)

"When I read the text, I feel like a person of little faith: I haven't yet caused any mulberry trees to wander or mountains to fall into the sea. The disciples ask Jesus: 'Strengthen our faith!' I can only agree with that. Why does Jesus reply with a reproach: 'If you had faith as big as a mustard seed'? Is it the case that if I just believe enough, all prayers will be answered, that whatever I want will happen? Wouldn't that be magic, that I can bring God round with my faith?

When I was hiking in the mountains once, I was quite happy that they all stayed in place and didn't fly through the air because someone had prayed. I don't think Jesus was saying that it's up to us. Can we make faith at will, through our efforts, or is faith a gift, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. I can't seriously believe what God doesn't want. Faith is a two-way street, like a love relationship. The text is provocative: Why doesn't God answer my prayer and heal the one I prayed for? Does God allow suffering because he has a greater plan, or is my faith too weak? How can I recognise better what God wants from me and for others? How can I see more clearly? Lord, I believe - help my unbelief.' (John)

'Even if your faith is small, your God is great! Even a small faith like a mustard seed can achieve a lot. The important thing is to believe in God, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and that nothing is impossible if you believe.' *(Andrea)*

An honest check: What am I expecting?

When I tackle a task, e.g. preparing a seminar or planning and organising a church event, I should honestly ask myself what I expect, whether I will be able to do it, how well I can do it.

And I should realise that I don't need or want to do anything without God's help.

Years ago, I created a formula to describe my service as a follower of Jesus, which I still use today.

Any success in anything I do is 100% grace, which means the free, undeserved, working of God.

But this 100% grace includes: 1% my actions + 1% the actions of others + 98% the work of the Holy Spirit

One example of this is the feeding of the five thousand, when Jesus took a few fish and loaves, blessed them and then gave them to many to eat. That sounds quite relaxed, just a few fish bones and crumbs of bread, as a friend put it even more drastically, nothing more, that's enough.

"...And ordering the crowds to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looked up toward heaven. He blessed the food and breaking the loaves, He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces: twelve full baskets."

But my formula goes even further: I make my small contribution with 90 per cent, which means with all my strength and dedication, i.e. as well as I can. Nobody manages or needs 100 per cent.

For me, this means, for example, preparing thoroughly for a lecture, but then releasing what I have completely into God's hands.

Doesn't this formula unlock the secret of how God and man interact? In principle, it is a realisation of the thought of Ignatius of Loyola (1491 -1556): 'Act as if everything depended on you, and at the same time be aware that it is God who works everything.'

This should be our daily check: Do I believe that God is working with me?

An honest check: What am I expecting?

Doubt: 'Nothing will happen.'

Unbelief: 'God is not with me, not for me.'

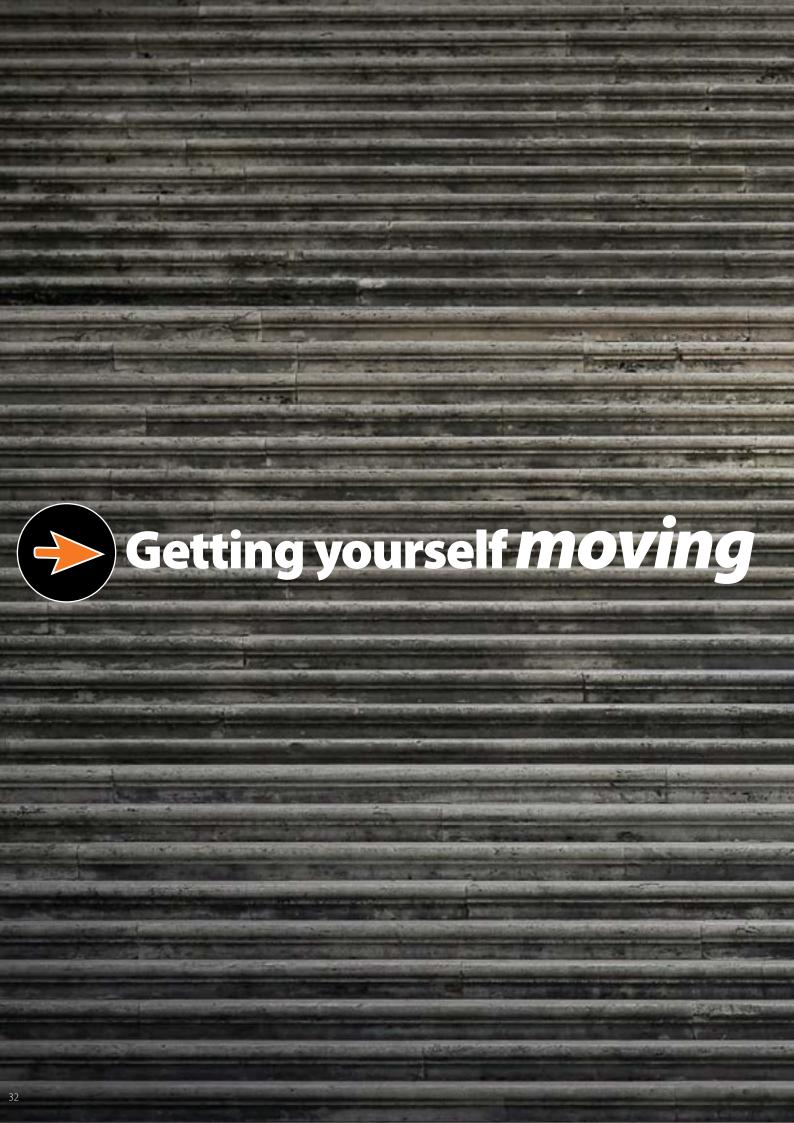
Misconception: 'I have to make more of an effort, it depends on me alone.'

Hope 1: There is a 'maybe', 'Maybe God is with me?'

Hope 2: A 'probably', 'God could be with me.'

Faith, reaching conviction: 'It will happen.'

Faith that honours God: 'Abba, my Father, everything is possible for you, ... yet not as I will, but according to your will.' (Jesus in Matthew 26:39)



Where you need faith, set yourself in motion: Take the first steps, pray, draw up plans, correct, learn and pray for faith.

And then open your eyes! Receive progress and first fruits. And then give thanks. And keep praying: 'Strengthen my faith.' (See Luke 17:5)

But!

We do not believe in a great faith, but in a great God.

Do not remain fixed in your chair. Do not stay planted. Set yourself in motion with faith.

Isn't doubt ultimately more honest than faith?

Alongside the 'elevated song' of the importance of the phenomenon of faith, of being convinced of something, which is sung in this issue of Christian Psychology For Everyday Life, it must of course be added, or rather emphasised once again, that we can not only have a weak faith, but also a belief in wrong things. But does this now mean for us: Watch out! Be careful with faith! It is better to doubt!?

Nevertheless, I choose to believe, because my faith is not simply based on my perceptions, wishes and thoughts. It is a gift of faith.



Gifted faith is above doubting! Gifted faith comes from someone, from God.

This is a faith with clear hope, but nevertheless with open expectations: Yes, this is how it is or this is how it will be - and if it doesn't turn out that way, then even more suitable for me or the other person.

And this is not an expression of doubt, but of deep trust in God.

God is love. I trust this love and his greatness, while I, even with strong, reliable and concrete faith, remain limited - in my understanding of God and this world. God is with me and for me, and we will arrive at our destination together.

I have had two experiences in this regard.

- I have often been mistaken in my expectations of the timescale in how something should happen: preferably everything immediately. No, it usually took longer and often involved several partial steps.

- And in hindsight it repeatedly became clear that this way turned out to be better than what my faith expected at the beginning.

... and experiential **Called** for

Theological truths also deepen through experience!

Experiences of faith strengthen our faith!

The Holy Spirit uses shared experiences of faith to touch other people.

Of course, every experience of faith is an interpreted experience, which then undergoes further processing when it is told. It is therefore essential that experiences are an aid to faith, but not proof. Experiences need a theological foundation.

But God makes himself tangible, becomes present in concrete, eve-

ryday life. Let us allow ourselves to be touched.

'It took some time before I plucked up the courage to ask God for a prophetic impulse at a prayer meeting. I suddenly had the thought that a man was there who was worried because his son was ill. I also had the impulse that God wanted to tell him that he could relax because God would take care of the boy. However, I didn't have the courage to say this publicly, but told the event organiser in private. However, he immediately grabbed the microphone and announced what I had received. At that moment, a man entered the room who had just been on the phone to his family in the foyer and had learnt of his son's illness.

How great is the love of God! This man came into the room worried and heard that God was taking care of him!'

'I had recently started working at a rehabilitation centre when we found out that a young, disabled man had run away from home and travelled to us in the city. However, he had not arrived at the rehab centre. So we had no choice but to go out and look for him. The moment I got up from my chair, I suddenly and surprisingly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit physically, something flowed through me (a so-called energetic phenomenon, as religious psychologists call it). This presence stayed with me, guiding me through the streets as long as - it seemed - I was on the right path, disappearing



again when I turned in the wrong direction and leading me to the first floor of a large department stores' where the young man was standing.'

'In 1987, I was suddenly plagued by severe pain in my right knee, on the very evening before we were due to move house and I was urgently needed. My wife prayed for me, my knee became very hot and in one fell swoop the pain was gone.'

'In the early 1980s, my job required me to draw up a schedule for around twenty meetings twice a year, involving employees from very different departments and hierarchies who also worked different hours.

My routine for this was that the first draft of the plan went out and

came back to me with many requests for changes. The second, corrected version had slightly fewer comments, which I incorporated before issuing the final plan. The result of this positive routine was that, in the end, some sessions had to be cancelled and someone was absent from time to time. However, everyone had already got used to this procedure and, in principle, it did not hinder day-to-day operations. As I was once again working on this plan, I had the thought of asking God to give me the perfect plan straight away. I then immediately gave my first draft to everyone as the final plan. And the miracle happened: no meeting was cancelled and only once did someone arrive a little late, otherwise

everyone invited was always present! (I have to admit that this remained a one-off event and I went back to my old routine afterwards).'

In conclusion: Believe in who you are

My self-image also has to do with faith.

I am amazed at what I was forced to recognise as an untruth in my selfimage decades later, even though it had accompanied and guided me for years.

Until the age of 30, I believed that I was unmusical and avoided all situations where this could have become apparent.

It was only after my change of faith, when I simply sang along in worship because it was more important to me than anything else to praise and glorify God, that I discovered that singing was good for me and that I was normally musical.

At the age of 10 I had to realise, often very painfully, that my grades in English lessons usually consisted of the two worst grades and for the following 50 years I was convinced (= believed) that I was not gifted in foreign languages. What a load of rubbish, all that was missing was practice, encouragement and experience in English-speaking countries. Today I have regained an innocence to simply speak or teach in English, with mistakes of course. But why not?

We are allowed to shed misbeliefs and be given new faith in the various identity issues.

Natural authority: I am a human being

If I hold up a pen and then drop it, I am able to catch it again with the same hand. Simple, right? Yes, but unique. First of all, my natural authority: I decide to drop the pen and then catch it again. Only humans can do that! And catching the pen again is actually a great achievement, even though most people can do it.

Who do I think man is and therefore who am I? Man is made a little lower than God (Psalm 8). Do I believe that?

Individual authority: my uniqueness

I am the only person on this earth with my outward appearance, my inner self, my life story. Nobody can act like me, even if similar, but never identical. I am unique. Do I believe that?

Factual authority: my competences

Yes, I am limited in what I can do. It's easy for me to list a lot of things. But I can also do certain things that no-one else in the world can do, and I have many skills like others that I can use to make a difference and whose combination is sometimes unique. I am competent, I can make a difference. Do I believe that?

Status authority: My positions

I also have authority because I occupy a certain position, sometimes privileges (I a car parking space in the employees' car park behind our office building), sometimes responsibility (as head of department, I decide whether or not to grant leave). My position in life (professional, family, social) has consequences. Do I believe that?

Relationship authority: people who are part of my life

I am not only unique, I am also connected to many others. That's how it should be. And these relationships shape my life and I help shape them, also thanks to these relationships. Do I believe that?

Spiritual authority: God stands by me

And through my connection with the triune God, my identity and my person are fundamentally renewed. I receive prayer authority. When I pray, something happens! Do I believe that?

I am blessed and will bear abundant fruit where I do something with trust in God's will. Do I believe that?

And streams of living water flow from me, even if I don't realise it. Do I believe that?

Do we have to mention this expressly?

What is said here applies, of course, for every person. Yes, for everyone! "Lord, strengthen my faith!"

Believe in who you are

