I recently had a conversation with a person whom I had not seen in many years. I remember this person as being “on fire” for Jesus. The person lives in a different state and when I asked about what church they were attending, the response was that they no longer attended church and had disengaged with the whole Jesus thing… Awkward! At that point, I was dealing with two competing emotions:1) change the subject and avoid any further awkwardness in the conversation, and 2) press in to find out what happened to provoke such a drastic turn-around, because I care for the person and their current state of spiritual danger.

As I reflect on conversations I have had with hundreds, if not thousands, of people over four decades of ministry, I see patterns as to what causes people to stumble over barriers, get tripped up over potholes, or get off course to become functionally lost or even wander into hostile and dangerous enemy territory. This is, most often, not an intentional plan, but is a reaction to complex and intertwined emotional and intellectual issues that ultimately lead to unwise choices. Affections for people, pleasure, or power (or any combination of those three) can drive a decision-making process that is often contrary to logic and truth. You may have heard the saying, “the heart wants what the heart wants,” and while this is true, too often, the heart wants the

WRONG things. When feelings DICTATE decisions, it is a recipe for disaster.

In the other direction, barriers and potholes that negatively impact an individual's spiritual journey are rooted, not in confusing or hurtful emotional experiences, but in intellectual questions that undermined the foundations of one's faith. In a very real sense, THIS issue is the easiest issue to address. The problem is that while there are excellent answers to tough intellectual questions, a person's faith can be crushed by doubts before those questions get answered or before they are even aware that there ARE good answers. As Christ-followers, we need to make sure that we don't "just believe." The 19th century Danish, Lutheran, theologian and religious philosopher, **Soren Kierkegaard**, wrote about faith as an existential "leap" based on risk and appropriation rather than objective evidential proof. 20th century theologian and author, **Francis Schaeffer**, criticized Kierkegaard's view, about a blind leap of faith being separated from rationality, as being in conflict with biblical faith. A biblical faith is not blind, but rather, it is informed. Sometimes, as people mature and face life challenges and attacks against the Christian faith (scriptural authority, core doctrines about the Person and Work of Christ, and our physical world as seen through the sciences) they need more than the simple

Sunday school answers… and we have them. We can, and should, know WHY we believe. *Science Speaks*, *History, Law &* Christianity, and *The New Testament Document: Are They Reliable?* are just three of many books that I use to train Christians in apologetic defense of the faith. In spite of the overwhelming evidence for the rock-solid foundation of our faith, it ultimately comes down to one's volition, a choice of the will. Sometimes, our emotions are not there and we continue in our faith walks by choosing believe based on the evidence. Other times, our minds do not have the answers or cannot counter the slick arguments of opposing worldviews, but we continue in our faith walks by choosing to embrace the peace that flows from experiencing that undeniable relationship connection with Jesus, Who loves us!

You may be wondering, "how did the conversation with that person end?" Well, I acknowledge the awkwardness of my question, expressed by surprise and care, then briefly said, "whatever bad experiences you may have had, or whatever intellectual questions may have arisen, look to Jesus because the overwhelming evidence is that He loves you and is worthy of your trust"…. and I let it go.

If you are dealing with doubts, let me know, I want to help. If you know someone dealing with doubts, walk with them through those doubts with kindness,

compassion, and truth (even if they resist it). May the Holy Spirit give you wisdom as you apply biblical principles in your own life and also help others.

Blessings! Jeff