

N U R T U R E
F A I T H
with
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The following is from Doug Hood's Heart & Soul, Vol. 2

Feeling. Understanding. Believing.

READ: Hebrews 11:6 (Common English Bible)

"...the one who draws near to God must believe that he exists..."

REFLECT:

This seems quite simple. How can someone approach a God who has no real belief that God exists? Would anyone think of coming to God unless they first thought there was such a being? Why would Hebrews make such an obvious observation? Yet, even the most faithful among us confess to moments of uncertainty. Odd, isn't it? There are moments in life when the existence of God seems highly unlikely. Yet, even in the midst of doubt and uncertainty, there are people who pursue God.

Henry Sloane Coffin offers help.ⁱ He suggests that we pay closer examination to precisely what claim Hebrews is making. The author of Hebrews does not say, "The one who draws near to God must 'feel' that he exists." Each of us has those moments when we feel the presence of another in the room, even if the room is dark and the other person cannot be seen. But such feelings fluctuate and can be unreliable. They are not always accurate. Sometimes that feeling of the presence of another is only our imagination. Couldn't the same be true for feeling the presence of God - our imagination?

Nor does the author say, "The one who draws near to God must 'understand' what he is." Few reach God with their minds. Any search for truth only results in the discovery of fragments of truth, often unrelated to one another. Any one of us may desire to explore the unknown with reasonable thought but often the result is that God becomes unreal to us. Let us not make the mistake of trying first to understand before we begin our exploration. As Coffin puts it so clearly, we must first touch the shore and land before we can explore the continent and chart out the mountains and rivers and plains.ⁱⁱ

What does the author say? He writes, "the one who draws near to God must 'believe' that he exists." The question is one of belief. And this chapter begins with the author's definition of belief; giving substance to that which is hoped for. Belief in God begins with "hope" that there is God and then continues by rearranging one's whole life in a manner to live as if that hope is sure. This is what Hebrews means by 'giving substance' to our hopes. Whereas the reasonable person often begins with evidence first, followed by belief, Hebrews contends that living as if something is true - believing that God exists - produces the evidence. Living the promises of God before there is any proof that they can be trusted is what draws us near to God.

ⁱHenry Sloane Coffin, "Religious Prepossessions," *University Sermons*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914) 19-35.

ⁱⁱCoffin, pages 24, 25

