Not a Blind Faith

The law inside us, the witness of John, and a Man who lived at a real place and time — Disciple Guide — Discipleship Class, Pleasant Springs Church

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Open — "You just have to have faith"

Let me start with a sentence you have heard, maybe at a funeral, maybe from a friend who does not believe: **"You just have to have faith."**

What do people usually mean by that? Most of the time they mean: *believe it even though there is no reason to.* Close your eyes and jump. Faith as the opposite of knowing.

Today I want to show you that this is **not** what the Bible means by faith. We will take it in two steps. First, a man who was an atheist, C. S. Lewis, will show us that the evidence for God starts **inside you.** Then the apostle John will show us that the evidence continues in **a Man you can place on a map and on a calendar.**

Two kinds of law

Lewis begins somewhere very ordinary: **a quarrel.**

Listen to people argue. "That's my seat, I was here first." "You promised." "How would you like it if somebody did that to you?" Notice what is going on. The person is not just saying *I don't like what you did.* He is appealing to a **standard** he expects the other person to know already. And the other person almost never answers, "Who cares about fair?" He says, "That's not what happened," or "I had a good reason." **Both of them assume the rule is real.**

People used to call that rule *the law of nature*, meaning the law of **human** nature. Lewis then sets it beside the other laws of nature, the ones science studies, and shows how different they are.

Laws of nature	The law of human nature
Gravity, heat, motion	Fairness, keeping promises, not betraying a friend
Tell you what **does** happen	Tell you what **ought** to happen
A stone cannot disobey gravity	A man **can** disobey, and does
Learned by watching from the outside	Known from the **inside**, by every one of us

Drop a stone and it falls. It never *ought* to fall. It just does. But you and I live under a law we are **free to break.** Lewis says two facts sit underneath all clear thinking about ourselves:

1. **People everywhere know they ought to behave a certain way.**
2. **People everywhere do not actually behave that way.**

Keep those two facts in mind. The whole lesson stands on them.

The two easy answers

Lewis takes on the two easy answers people give.

"It's just instinct, like a herd animal." But think about what happens when you hear someone shouting for help in the water. You feel two instincts: one to help, and one to stay safe. Then a **third thing** tells you that you *ought* to follow the first and not the second. That third thing cannot be one of the instincts. It is the thing that judges between them. Lewis compares it to a piano. The instincts are the keys. The moral law is the sheet music that tells you which key to strike.

"It's just what society taught you." Society does teach it to us, the way it teaches us multiplication. That does not make multiplication made up. And here is the giveaway: we all say some societies were **better** than others. We say ending slavery was *progress*. You cannot say one idea is better than another unless both are measured against a **real standard** outside them both. You can't say a ruler got closer to twelve inches if there is no such thing as twelve inches.

Scripture said it first

None of this would surprise Paul. He wrote it down nineteen hundred years before Lewis was born.

> **Romans 2:14–15 (ESV)** — "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them"

"The work of the law is written on their hearts." That is Lewis's first fact. People who never heard of Moses still know what fair is.

> **Romans 7:18–19 (ESV)** — "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."

And that is Lewis's **second** fact, from an apostle's own mouth: *I know what is right, and I don't do it.*

> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)** — "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

Scripture speaks of two books God has written. One is **outside** us:

> **Psalm 19:1–3 (ESV)** — "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard."
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> **Romans 1:19–20 (ESV)** — "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

The other is **inside** us:

> **Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)** — "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

What lies behind the law

Now Lewis makes his main move. Science looks at the universe **from the outside.** It can tell you what happens, but it cannot tell you **why** there is anything at all, or whether anyone is behind it. Science is not built to answer that.

But there is **one** thing in the whole universe we know from the *inside*: ourselves. And when we look inside, we do not just find facts. **We find a command.** We find that we are under a law we did not invent and cannot get rid of.

A law means a lawgiver. A command means **Someone** who commands. And this Someone cares about right and wrong, about fairness, and about truth. Lewis says this is a **clue** to the meaning of the universe. It is not yet the whole answer.

And it is not comfortable news. If there is a real law and I have broken it, then I am not a neutral observer. **I am in trouble.** Lewis says Christianity makes no sense until you have felt that.

God promised He would deal with exactly that:

> **Jeremiah 31:33 (ESV)** — "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Here is where Lewis's argument stops. It can bring you to the door: there is *Someone* behind the law. **It cannot tell you His name.** For that we need a witness.

The Lawgiver steps into history

Turn to John. Listen to how he begins:

> **John 1:1–5 (ESV)** — "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
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> **John 1:9 (ESV)** — "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

"The true light, which gives light to everyone." That is the light Lewis found in every human heart, the law every one of us already knows. John says it comes from **the Word.** And then he says the most important sentence in the book:

> **John 1:14 (ESV)** — "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

"The Word became flesh." The Someone behind the moral law did not stay a clue. He became a Man. And John adds: **"we have seen."** Not "we have felt." Not "we have imagined." **We have seen.**

A Person, a Place, a Time

Now watch how John writes. He keeps putting his story where you can **check** it.

A Person. Not an idea, not a feeling. A man from a real town, with a real father's name, that a skeptic sneered at:

> **John 1:45–46 (ESV)** — "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Notice Philip's answer to the doubter. Not "just have faith." **"Come and see."** And John remembers the very hour he first met Jesus:

> **John 1:38–39 (ESV)** — "Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour."

“About the tenth hour.” About four in the afternoon. That is not how legends are written. That is how an **old man remembers the day his life changed.**

A Place. John names spots in Jerusalem with their details:

> **John 5:2 (ESV)** — “Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.”
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> **John 9:7 (ESV)** — “and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.”
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> **John 19:13 (ESV)** — “So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.”

For years critics said John's five-colonnaded pool at Bethesda was invented. Then excavations beside the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem uncovered a large double pool with colonnades, just where John put it. The Pool of Siloam from Jesus' day was uncovered by workers repairing a sewer line in **2004.** And John gives the Stone Pavement its Aramaic name, Gabbatha. That is the kind of detail a man who never walked those streets would not think to add.

A Time. John ties his story to the calendar and to the men in office:

> **John 2:19–21 (ESV)** — “Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.”

“Forty-six years to build this temple.” Herod began rebuilding the temple about 20 BC. Forty-six years later puts this conversation around **AD 27 or 28.** That is a detail you can date.

> **John 11:49 (ESV)** — “But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all.”

Caiaphas was high priest from about AD 18 to 36. In **1990** workers building a road south of Jerusalem broke into a burial cave. Inside was a bone box inscribed “Joseph son of Caiaphas,” which many scholars believe belonged to this very man. And Pontius Pilate's name was found carved on a stone at Caesarea in **1961**, giving his title as prefect of Judea.

> **John 19:19–20 (ESV)** — “Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.”

Three languages on a sign nailed up in public, where many people read it. **This did not happen in a corner.**

Here is something Lewis said near the end of his life, as a literary critic. He had spent his whole career reading legends, myths and romances. He said that whatever else John's Gospel is, **it is not a legend.** Legends do not read like that. Either it is reporting, or someone in the first century invented the modern realistic novel, eighteen hundred years early, and then never used it again.

One more fact. The oldest piece of the New Testament anyone has ever found is a scrap of papyrus the size of a credit card. It is kept in Manchester, England, and is usually dated to the second century. It is from John chapter 18, Jesus standing before Pilate:

> **John 18:37–38 (ESV)** — "Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."

"To bear witness to the truth." The oldest scrap of our New Testament says *witness*.

Witness — not a blind faith

That word is the key to John's whole book. Here is something we counted in the Greek New Testament. The verb **testify**, to bear witness, appears **2** times in Matthew, Mark and Luke put together. In John it appears **33** times. Count the whole word family, *witness, testimony, testify,* even *false witness,* and the other three Gospels together have 32. John alone has **47.** John is building a court case.

And here is the other count. John uses the verb **believe 98 times**, more than Matthew, Mark and Luke combined. But the noun **faith**, John never uses once. **Zero.** For John, faith is never a *thing* you have. It is always something you **do**, and you do it toward a **person.** 34 times he writes "believe," followed straight away by a little word that means *into*: believing **into Him.**

John is the witness, and he says so, under oath, twice:

> **John 19:35 (ESV)** — "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe."
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> **John 21:24 (ESV)** — "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true."

And Jesus Himself does not ask for a blind faith. He calls witnesses, like a man on trial: John the Baptist, His works, the Father, and the Scriptures.

> **John 5:36–39 (ESV)** — "But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,"
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> **John 14:11 (ESV)** — "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

"Believe on account of the works themselves." Jesus points to evidence.

Now the passage people use to prove that faith is supposed to be blind:

> **John 20:24–29 (ESV)** — "Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." People hear that as *blessed are those who believe without evidence*. **Read the very next two verses:**

> **John 20:30–31 (ESV)** — "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

"These are written so that you may believe." Thomas believed because he saw. We believe because **Thomas and John saw, and wrote it down.** Not seeing is not the same as not knowing. You have never seen George Washington. You believe he lived because of witnesses, records and places you can visit. That is not blind. **That is how anyone knows any history at all.**

And John is not the only one who says so:

> **1 John 1:1–3 (ESV)** — "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life —the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."
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> **2 Peter 1:16 (ESV)** — "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."
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> **1 Corinthians 15:3–8 (ESV)** — "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

"Most of whom are still alive." Paul is saying: **go and ask them.** And then Paul stakes the whole faith on it:

> **1 Corinthians 15:14 (ESV)** — "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."
>
> **1 Corinthians 15:17 (ESV)** — "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

No other faith in the world puts it like that. Paul says that if the event did not happen in history, **throw the whole thing away.** You do not talk like that about a feeling. You talk like that about a fact.

Even the verse everyone quotes about faith says the same:

> **Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)** — "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

The word translated **"conviction"** is a courtroom word. It means **evidence that brings something into the light** and settles the case. It is the same word family as *reproof* in our lesson on correcting one another. Faith is not the absence of evidence. **Faith is resting your weight on evidence for what you cannot see yet.**

And Lewis would add one more thing. Faith is not deciding to believe without reasons. Faith is **holding on** to what your reason has already accepted, on the days your feelings say otherwise.

Reflection — why do we settle for a blind faith?

So why do so many good, sincere people hold their faith in Jesus as a blind faith? Be honest with yourself as you read a few reasons:

- **We inherited it.** We believed what we were raised to believe, and nobody ever showed us *why*. That is a good start. But it is a borrowed faith until it becomes our own.
- **We are afraid questions are disloyal.** But Philip said *come and see*. Jesus showed Thomas His hands. **God is not afraid of your questions.**
- **The world told us faith is a private feeling,** and facts are for the public square. Without noticing, we agreed. So we talk about Jesus as if He were a mood, not a Man who had dust on His feet.
- **We were handed a Jesus without a place and a time.** A picture on a wall instead of a carpenter from Nazareth who stood before Pilate in about AD 30.

Here is why it matters. **A blind faith breaks when it is tested,** at a hospital bedside, in a college classroom, on the day prayer seems to go unanswered. A faith resting on a real Person, in a real place, at a real time, has something underneath it. You can come back to it on the bad days and find it is still there.

So where does that leave us? Inside every one of us is a law we did not write and cannot keep. Lewis was right about that. That law points to a Lawgiver. And John says the Lawgiver came, walked into Jerusalem, stood before Caiaphas and Pilate, died, and rose. Then He was seen, by men who would rather die than deny it.

Close

> **John 17:3 (ESV)** — "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Eternal life is not a leap in the dark. It is **knowing** Someone. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, You wrote Your law on our hearts, and we have not kept it. Thank You that You did not leave us with a clue but sent us Your Son. He is the Word made flesh, born at a real time and crucified in a real place, and He rose from the dead. Make our faith more than a feeling. Let it rest on the witness You have given us, and hold us fast on the days our feelings fail. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

If you only remember three things

1. **The law inside you points to Someone.** Everyone knows they ought to be fair, and no one quite is. A stone obeys gravity. A man can break the moral law. A law like that needs a Lawgiver.
2. **John tells us His name, His town and His dates.** The Word became flesh: Jesus of Nazareth, at Bethesda and Siloam, under Caiaphas and Pilate, about AD 30.
3. **Biblical faith is trust in witnesses, not a leap in the dark.** "These are written so that you may believe" (John 20:31).

The numbers in this lesson

Counted in the Greek New Testament (SBL edition), by dictionary form:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
believe (the verb)	11	14	9	**98**
faith (the noun)	8	5	11	**0**
testify (the verb)	1	0	1	**33**
the whole *witness* word family	12	11	9	**47**

In John, *believe* is followed directly by the word *into* **34** times: believing into a Person.

Discussion questions

1. Think of the last argument you heard. What standard were both people appealing to?
2. Why can't the law of human nature just be an instinct? What does the piano picture help you see?
3. Which detail in John, a person, a place or a time, did you find most striking? Why?
4. How would you answer a friend who says, "Blessed are those who have not seen" means faith is supposed to be blind?
5. Which of the four reasons for a blind faith do you recognize in yourself? What would it take to move from a borrowed faith to your own?
6. Who in your life needs to hear "come and see" this week?

Notes

The Scriptures — Author and Audience

- **Romans 1–3; 7** — *Paul, about AD 57.* Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome. He argues that Gentiles without the Law of Moses still carry a law "written on their hearts."
- **Psalm 19** — *David.* Israel at worship: God speaks through the sky and through His law.
- **Ecclesiastes 3:11** — *The Preacher, in the wisdom tradition of Solomon.* Israel, wrestling with what life under the sun means.
- **Jeremiah 31:33** — *Jeremiah, before and during the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC).* Judah, promised a new covenant with the law written on the heart.
- **John's Gospel** — *John, son of Zebedee, "the disciple whom Jesus loved".* Believers late in the first century, most of whom never saw Jesus in the flesh. He wrote "so that you may believe" (20:31).
- **1 John 1:1–3** — *John, as an old man.* Churches he calls "little children."
- **1 Corinthians 15** — *Paul, about AD 54.* The church at Corinth, where some were saying there is no resurrection of the dead.
- **2 Peter 1:16** — *Peter, near the end of his life.* Believers being told the gospel was a story.
- **Hebrews 11:1** — *An unnamed teacher of the early church.* Jewish believers under pressure, tempted to turn back.

For further reading

- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book One ("Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe") and Book Three, chapter "Faith."

- C. S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Fern-seed and Elephants* / *Christian Reflections*.
- On this site: the Historical Jesus series, ps-church.com/discipleship/historical-jesus (six weeks on the evidence for the resurrection).

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