

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Belief:

Readings on the Reason for Faith

by

Francis Collins

1. *Belief* is a collection of readings from writers and thinkers who influenced the author and convinced him that faith in God was the most reasonable position. If you were to put together a collection of writings that shaped you, what would make the cut? What writer, thinker, or preacher has been the most influential either in your conversion or in your continued conviction?
2. Francis Collins begins his collection with a stirring excerpt from N. T. Wright's *Simply Christian* in which Wright argues that our cry for justice and our inherent spirituality as humans are two key components that speak to the presence of God. Which calls to you most

strongly—the desire for a just world or the recognition that there is more to life than the corporeal?

3. The selections in the section “Classic Arguments for Faith and Reason” show not only how long God’s existence has been debated but also that these questions transcend time and modernity. What did you take away from these early works? Did any of the selections prompt you to seek out other writings from these authors?
4. Collins states, “At the dawn of the twenty-first century, and in direct reaction to the rigid assertions made in the twentieth century, truth in our time is finding it difficult to survive. We feel cagey admitting to anything with passion and resolve, and yet, what about the necessity for it? Does truth, both objective and non-relativistic, have a place in our world?” (p. 71) How would you answer these questions?
5. After reading the excerpts from John Stott, David Elton Trueblood, and Keith Ward, what do you think it means to “love God with all your mind,” as this section is titled? Does the faith you see displayed in the world today tend toward the emotionalism that John Stott argues against, or toward the rationality-based faith that he favors? How might you encourage your community to adopt a more rational faith?
6. Any book arguing for belief must tackle the subject of evil, and Collins does so in “Faith and the Problem of Evil and Suffering.” How can we see suffering through the eyes of God, as Desmond Tutu urges in this pas-

sage: “If we are to be true partners with God, we must learn to see with the eyes of God—that is, to see with the eyes of the heart and not just the eyes of the head. The eyes of the heart are not concerned with appearances but with essences, and as we cultivate these eyes we are able to learn from our suffering and to see the world with more loving, forgiving, humble, generous eyes” (p. 155)?

7. In selections from Tim Keller and Martin Luther King Jr., Collins returns to the concept of justice first touched on in N. T. Wright’s opening piece. Unfortunately, the church is often blamed for perpetuating injustice, both historically and currently. Has there ever been a time when you were ashamed to be called a Christian because of the actions of the church? How might we stand firm in our beliefs in the face of a church that sometimes loses its way?
8. A physician and scientist himself, Collins includes a section on how we might discover harmony between science and faith. Yet the beautiful selection from Paul Brand on how we must be God’s hands in the world is not a philosophical treatise or an argument for design; it is the story of our humanness. How did his story strike you? When you read the statement “Christ has no hands but ours” (p. 197), do you feel called to take action?
9. It is not a surprise that C. S. Lewis makes an appearance in these pages. And yet rather than including a selection from Lewis’s pivotal and influential *Mere*

Christianity, Collins takes a selection from *Miracles*. Do you believe in miracles? Why do they play such an important role in religious belief? Why do you think Collins included this selection rather than one from *Mere Christianity*?

10. Writings from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Viktor Frankl, and Mother Teresa are combined in one section. These three confronted some of the greatest hardship this world has ever seen, and yet their lives were a testament to love and forgiveness. How can suffering, either witnessed or experienced firsthand, lead to love and compassion rather than anger and bitterness? Have you seen examples of both reactions?
11. Collins includes writings by Gandhi, a devout Hindu. Have you ever found writings from another religion to inspire your own faith?
12. What is the difference between an atheist and a naturalist (p. 300)? Do you agree with Alvin Plantinga's claim that naturalism and evolution are in conflict? If that is the case, is there a way to believe in evolution without believing in God or some sort of creator?
13. After reading *Belief*, did you find yourself more compelled by the Christian faith? What questions did it answer? Did it raise any new questions?