

W2 | D6

AN INVITATION TO BELIEVE

BARNABAS PIPER

is a pastor at Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of several books, including *Help My Unbelief* and *Belong*. He is married to Lauren and has three children.

When I was 27, my faith fell apart. To be more accurate, the house of cards I had carefully constructed to look like faith fell apart.

For years I had hidden certain doubts and hypocrisies behind theological knowledge and articulate arguments. I gave the impression of confidence in Christ while actually grasping at confidence in myself. And then it all blew up. I was fired from a job for dishonesty and theft. My sin was exposed, and the damage it caused was deep. Worst of all, though, I was forced to confront the question “What do you actually believe?” Not “What do you profess?” or “What do you assent to?” but “What do you stake your life on?”

And I couldn’t very well answer. All my previous professions of faith had brought me to this place. I was staring into the chasm of unbelief, on the brink of falling in completely, and realizing I didn’t know how to believe or whom to believe in.

Amid this crisis, an elder from my church who was patiently caring for me and offering guidance urged, “Go back and read the Gospels and look for Jesus. Try to forget all your preconceptions.” That’s not an easy thing for a pastor’s kid, Sunday schooler, sword-drill champion, memory-verse A-lister, Bible trivia ace, and flannelgraph aficionado. Preconceptions were, in many ways, all I had.

But I did my best. Starting in Matthew 1, I read stories and passages I’d read a hundred times. I read through Jesus’

teachings and about his miracles. I muddled and trudged my way into Mark. Then I got to Mark 9 and the account of a desperate father bringing his demon-possessed son to Jesus for deliverance. I knew this story. It barely registered as significant in the moment, except for one interaction:

“It has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:22–24, ESV)

This grabbed my attention. When a struggling doubter brought those doubts to Jesus and asked for help, Jesus didn’t reject or condemn him for his struggles. The man could look Jesus in the face and say, “Help my unbelief” and Jesus would. This offered a paradigm for real faith: belief with struggle, belief with dependence.

The words I had so often skipped over began to take on flesh in the living person and reality of Jesus. Whereas I had been unmoved by reading of Jesus’ birth, I now discovered another sort of advent—when Jesus comes alive in a soul.

These discoveries weren’t immediate. Yet seeing those verses that day was the spark that caught the tinder of my heart. Over the ensuing months, the flame flickered, then crackled, then roared into heat and light in my heart. Jesus invited me into belief and showed me he is indeed the life who is the light for men’s hearts (John 1:4). ✨

WHEN A STRUGGLING DOUBTER
BROUGHT THOSE DOUBTS TO JESUS
AND ASKED FOR HELP,
JESUS DIDN'T REJECT OR CONDEMN
HIM FOR HIS STRUGGLES.