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From Ask the Clergy Column

**Question:**

It's been said that those who hold a religious belief or faith do so only to have something to hold on to in order to be happy in this life. Do you believe a person's religious beliefs or lack thereof affect their life's joys, sadness, successes or failures? Why? How has your faith affected your life?

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I've heard this argument many times from non-believers. It's true that some people hold to religious beliefs because they need or want to believe something. History has shown us repeatedly that there will always be someone to take advantage of these people. A true believer in Christ, however is not someone that just wants to believe in a set of religious rules, but someone who has been convinced that Christ is the Son of the one true God. It is impossible to live a successful life as a Christian without being completely, utterly, absolutely, and irrevocably persuaded of this fact. Anyone certain of this cannot live the same. So, of course, this resolution affects their joy, sadness, success and failure, because these now have new meaning.

The simple truth is that having faith in anything will impact your life's experiences. Having faith your dog will come running when you get home can change the way a person feels about the totality of their day. The fundamental meaning of faith makes it so that whatever we put confidence in will affect us in some way, either positively or negatively.

I've heard it said that Christians are simply weak-minded people, in need of hope, who give credit for their coincidental victories to a man-made system of commandments. My response is that I wasn't looking for God when I was born-again. I was not at my wits end, nor at rock bottom in need of a lift. I was simply enjoying life when God and his Truth interrupted. I became convinced of his sovereignty, as much as I was convinced that one plus one equals two. I then began to seek him not out of hope, but in search for truth – and that's what I found. My confidence in God does not solely compel me to give him credit for my successes, but to rely upon him for the directions that lead to the success. In short, my journey of faith has not been driven by a need for hope on a dark road,

but by reliance upon the source that illuminates my path.

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Life is not a continuous cycle of high points for any of us. The question isn't, "Will life go sideways?" The question is, "When?"

And, when life gets all jacked up, where will you turn? If you were all-powerful, you could turn to yourself and make everything all better again. Yet, the reality is that life is ultimately out of our control, and anything can happen at any point in time. When you get down to it, it is impossible to manage every aspect of our lives. In fact, the first step in the 12 Steps is admitting that I am powerless and my life is unmanageable.

Think about it – can ensure that your family, job, health, and finances will remain intact this next year? Nope, you can't.

Anything can happen at any point in time.

So, what is stable in this life? What won't change? Who will always be there and never leave you no matter what? If you answered "God" – ding, ding, ding, ding. You answered correctly! "Jesus, tell them what they've won..."

When I finally come to a place of trusting that God has a plan for my life, I can relax and simply do my part – trusting that God is doing his part. My part is listening for his direction and responding with a life of obedience, faithfulness, trust, love and hard work.

When life goes sideways, my character is refined, my trust in God is deepened, and my relationships with friends and family are strengthened. That sounds like a great life to me. How about you?