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Faith Paper

Faith is many things, takes many forms, and has many applications. For me, faith is the belief that something is, without the proof to know it is. In this paper I want to show how my belief in God has evolved over the course of my life, and how these have formed my personal definition of him. My personal definition of God at this point in my life is this: I believe that God omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; I believe that God is the judge when it comes to determining where our eternal soul will rest; I believe that God is eternally merciful; I believe that God made the choice of giving us free will deliberately; and I believe that we are all part of a greater plan of God that can only be truly understood when (or rather, if) we reach heaven. I also want to discuss my feelings about everyday faith and how it is essential to our everyday lives. The final topic that I wish to discuss in this paper is my belief in the importance of striving for excellence.

I have come to the conclusion that the act of striving for excellence is what produces uniqueness and uniqueness is what produces great achievement. One of the best examples of this is the life story of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln grew up in a log cabin and received no education. However, despite the difficult circumstances that he grew up in, he still strove for excellence and taught himself to read and write. He even became a self-taught lawyer. This striving for excellence produced uniqueness in him, and he went on to become president, where he achieved many great things, notably abolishing slavery from the United States.

Therefore, he is remembered to this day. Now, how does this relate to my personal faith? This relates to my personal faith because I believe that many of the great achievements that different people have made over time (all of which came from striving for excellence) have been achievements that have ended up giving back to and contributing to the human race as a whole. I also believe that many of the truly great achievements, such as the Emancipation Proclamation were made by people who put the greater good before their own well being (just as Lincoln felt that the freeing the slaves was more important than securing his own welfare). I believe that putting the common good before one's own well-being is one of the best routes to a solid relationship with God of all. I therefore believe that striving for excellence can lead to one of the best and most direct relationships with God possible.

I would first like to discuss how we use faith in our everyday lives. Faith is by far the most important aspect of them, in my opinion. It is very difficult to imagine a world without faith. If we did not have faith that packages of food had accurate labels, we would not buy labeled food because we would never think that the labels were accurate. Imagine for a moment, a world where we did not have faith that other people driving on the road would follow the traffic laws. We would be terrified to drive, because we would spend every moment fearing for our lives. Think of a world where we had no faith in our police force. Would you ever go outside at night, or for that matter, any time at all? Without faith, we would never leave our homes or speak to anyone outside of our immediate families, due to fear for our lives. In conclusion, the faith that a can labeled as a can of carrots, is in fact a can of carrots, is in fact a faith that is strong, profound, and surprising in its intensity.

I have been raised as a Roman Catholic and as member of St. Patrick's Parish in Malvern since birth. I was baptized at six months old and attended CCD (short for Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) until the age of 11, at which point I had received the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Communion, and Confirmation. I am now a full blown Roman Catholic, attending church nearly every Sunday. However, the religious background of my family is somewhat complex. On my dad's side, his ancestry is 100% English, so his ancestors all came to New England in the early 1600's as Christians, mostly Protestants. However, this has slowly morphed into a diverse collection of Born-Again Evangelicals, Catholics, and various other denominations of Christianity. My dad was baptized a Roman Catholic, but was not part of one particular denomination as a child. He was married to my mom in the Roman Catholic Church, and is now a member of St. Patrick's Parish, exactly like the rest of my family. However, he does not attend church with us on a regular basis; he usually comes to the Christmas service only. Therefore, my mom has always been the religious figure in my life. Her father's side is 100% Irish, and exclusively Roman Catholic. However, her mother's side is more religiously diverse, and most of that part of her lineage is Methodist. My mom was raised in the Methodist Church, and was confirmed in the ninth grade. Interestingly enough, she decided to attend an all-girls Roman Catholic high school, Villa Maria Academy. She then, in her mid twenties, was a part of the RCIA program (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), and then became a baptized and confirmed member of St. Patrick's Parish. She is now a devout Roman Catholic, who even teaches a class of CCD at our church every week. Both of my parents' religious lineages gives me a wide variety of Christian perspectives from which to base my religious beliefs.

Although I have been raised as a Roman Catholic, I have never had a true experience with God. Therefore, I am not fully able to know for certain that God exists. However, I do believe in God and hope that he is real. But, I lack the evidence (or proof, in some cases) that is necessary to know if God exists. I have faith that he is real due to the evidence that I have. Much of this evidence has come in the form of events that have occurred over the course of my life. There are multiple events in my life that have affirmed my belief in God. There are three major events that have taken place in my lifetime that have strengthened my belief in God. The first of these is occurred on 9/11/2001.

9/11 was very hard on my parents, especially my dad. He had known and was good friends with many people that were working in the Twin Towers when the planes struck. So, when he learned that the World Trade Center was hit, it was very, very hard for him to comprehend the fact that he had just lost many of his closest friends forever. The news of the plane crashing into the Pentagon also hit him hard, just like it did for all Americans. But the news that hit my entire family, especially him, the hardest, was the news that United Airways Flight 93 had crashed. This news was so devastating to my grandfather on my dad's side that he actually passed out from shock in the middle of teaching a class. The reason that this news hit him so hard was because my dad had a ticket for, and was scheduled to board Flight 93 that very morning. It was only because of the cancelation of a meeting that he was to have had that day in San Francisco, that he was able to miss that flight. I have interpreted this event as basically a miracle of God where he intervened to save what he sees as good. I do not believe that there is any other way to interpret this, besides the interpretation that God used his omnipotence to cancel the meeting that my dad was to attend that day, in order to save his life.

For me, this is also an example of God's mercy. God used his mercy towards my dad by saving him from what was certain death. God's saving of my dad's life on 9/11 is one of the events that have shaped my belief in God.

The other two events that have shaped and strengthened my belief in God came in the form of a disease: cancer. Two major figures in my life have survived cancer, and have had no long-term effects from it. My mom survived a fight with cervical cancer that lasted about a year (while I was in kindergarten), and she has had no long term side effects from the treatments she received at all. She then went on to amaze the doctors by having a child (my youngest sister, Isabel), which they said was impossible. The other major figure in my life that has survived cancer is my grandfather on my mom's side. He has survived two battles with prostate cancer. It was caught fairly early the first time around, about six years ago, but he still had to go out to Ohio, where they had the latest technology, to have the tumor removed. After this procedure, the cancer disappeared for four years, until it showed up again on a routine screening that was looking for this exact occurrence. It was also detected very early this time, but he still had to go through radiation therapy. However, he turned out fine, and is doing better than ever. The complete recovery of these two important figures in my life has dramatically influenced my belief in God. At first, looking back on these three times of my life, I was angry at God for allowing this to happen to people I loved. What did they do to deserve this punishment? After some deep reflection, however, I realized that this was not punishment at all; but rather, it was a test. It was a test to see what the reactions of those who loved him, including me, would be to bad things happening to him. I then realized how well this had worked and how much closer it had drawn me to God. The discovery that my grandfather had

cancer (the second time around) was what spurred me to pray every night, a practice that I have continued ever since. This praying has really helped to secure my belief in God, because, as I prayed, my grandfather made a full recovery, and has had no long-term issues from the treatments he received. In conclusion, it took some pretty bad things to help secure my belief in God.

There is also an event which initially damaged my relationship with God. On December 24, 2007, my mom's brother (my uncle and godfather) passed away after a long battle with addiction issues. This hit my entire family very, very hard. I had not seen him in a very long time, but it was not uncommon for my parents and grandparents to talk about him, so I knew a great deal about him. At the time, this seriously hurt my relationship with God. I was very angry with him for allowing this to happen. I knew that my uncle had made some bad choices, but he had also made multiple attempts at rehab. So why didn't God help him, instead of allowing him to die? Was his inability to successfully recover his responsibility, or God's? Was his death a punishment to him or to those that loved him? It has taken me many years, but I believe that I have finally come to understand the answers to these questions. I believe that all of these problems are God's fault, but only indirectly. I believe that all of these problems are a direct result of God's decision to give us the power and responsibility of free will. My uncle made the choice, exercising his free will, to open himself to the possibility of becoming addicted to harmful substances. God then made the decision to simply step back and to stay out of the way. These realizations helped me to accept what happened to my uncle, but did not really reduce my anger at God. After more contemplation, however, I realized that this was no reason to abandon God. He had given me many more things than he had taken away, and

breaking away from God was no way to get my uncle back. In fact, the only way I would be able to see him again would be in heaven, and I believe that God controls that. It also secured my belief that God had a plan that we would never be able to understand unless we reached heaven. Why would God save my dad on 9/11 but not save my uncle? I came to the conclusion that the only way to answer these questions was to have faith in the righteousness of God's plan for us and to believe in heaven so that I may one day understand that plan. So, in the end, my uncle's death damaged, but did not destroy my relationship with God. These are the experiences that have shaped my relationship with God. There is, however, something that has shaped my relationship to God that is not based on experience.

This other fundamental issue that has helped to shape my belief in God is creation. There are two popular theories concerning how the human race was formed. One is based on the writings of Charles Darwin. The other is the story of creation as written in Genesis, in the Bible. It has taken me quite a while to figure out what I really believe, but I think that I finally have it. I believe in evolution with one caveat. I believe that God was the force that created the universe at the very, very beginning. I believe that God was the one that caused the Big Bang to happen in the first place. However, after that the process of evolution took over. I think that it makes the theories of evolution and the Big Bang much easier to accept if one can believe that God started it all in the first place. It makes it much easier to think about the universe being condensed into a marble if one can believe that it was all part of the plan of a higher power. It is, in my opinion, also easier to believe that God simply started the universe, and therefore be able to also believe in evolution, rather than the biblical theory that God made the Earth perfect in only six days. I believe that evolution is simply a process whose

purpose is to complete what God stated billions of years ago, by initiating the Big Bang. So, I thus believe that God created the universe through the Big Bang and once God created life on this planet, he naturally let it evolve over the course of millions of years.

I do not however, simply wish to throw the Bible out the window. I do believe in the bible, but in a specific way. I believe that the book of Genesis is meant to be taken as a parable, not literally. This is shown mostly by the many contradictions between Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25. However, these two passages seem to be unconcerned with the contradictions they make. But, if these passages are taken as parables teaching us about our relationship to God and each other, these contradictions can be accepted, as contradictions can be found in many other parables. I believe that the two stories of creation as found in Genesis are intended to be taken as parables.

At this point in my life, I believe in God, but I am still waiting for a direct interaction with him in order to develop a true conviction about God. At this point in my life, I have only had indirect experiences with God, which is preventing me from developing a true conviction about God. My faith has a major effect on my everyday life. Most notably, in spurring me to strive for excellence. By believing that the act of striving for excellence is what brings uniqueness and, thus great achievement into the world, it helps to establish long-term goals for myself. It does so by giving me something to shoot for in the long-run, excellence. Another way it does so is through prayer. Personally, I use prayer mostly as a time of asking God for help. Therefore, for me, God is first and foremost a source of comfort. I pray to God if I am nervous about something (a test or presentation), and I pray to him for help with general things (sports, school in general). Admittedly, I will occasionally attempt to abuse this power of God by asking for

things to happen that are not particularly likely to happen (not that those attempts are ever successful), but I feel that I tend to call upon this power of God in reasonable ways (most of the time). I also tend to use God as a witness a lot. It helps keep me you in check if I can believe that there is someone who is watching me every second of every day of my life. It also makes me feel better about myself if I am doing something that I feel is right, but is unpopular, because I can know that there is at least one being that is sympathetic towards me. Therefore, my faith helps me on a daily basis by giving me both checks and balances, and things to shoot for in the long-run. These two things help me in my daily life by ensuring that I know that what I do not only affects my life on this earth, but also the life and health of my eternal soul.