

Welcome, leaders

An introduction to Where Is Your Weight?

What this series is about

Thank you for leading this. Seven weeks with a small group is a real gift of your time.

The whole series rests on one word. When the New Testament says “faith” or “believe”, the Greek word underneath is *pistis*. In the first century it wasn’t a religious word. It was an everyday one, and it meant putting your full weight on someone. Chapter 5 of the book puts it like this:

A soldier had pistis in his commanding officer. Not ‘I think he’s probably competent’ but ‘I will follow his orders into a battle that might kill me’.

Somewhere between then and now, “believe” shrank. For many of us it now means agreeing that something is true. This series gives the bigger picture back to your group, one image at a time: a roof that gave way, the word Amen, a bus you rely on, a child falling asleep in her father’s arms, a seed in good soil, a title deed, and a hymn written in grief.

Each week comes back to one question: *Where is your weight?* Not where we hope it is, or where it was years ago, but where it is today.

The seven sessions

- 1 **The Roof.** We all stand on something, and we rarely check it until it gives way.
- 2 **Amen.** Not a full stop at the end of a prayer, but “I’m standing on that.”
- 3 **Believe Into.** The difference between believing *that* and believing *into*.
- 4 **Daddy Holds.** Trust as a child letting her full weight rest on her father.
- 5 **Good Soil.** Faith is not about how much you have, but where it is planted.
- 6 **The Title Deed.** Faith is not a leap in the dark, but the evidence you stand on.
- 7 **It Is Well.** The Foundation that holds when everything else gives way.

How to run a session

Each session takes about 75 minutes and follows the same rhythm, so your group will settle into it quickly:

- **Open (10 min).** A light question to get everyone talking.
- **The idea (15 min).** The picture for the week, in your words, with a short line from the book.
- **Read together (10 min).** One or two Bible passages, read aloud.
- **Talk about it (25 min).** Four or five questions. You don’t need to get through them all.
- **This week (5 min).** One small practice to try before you meet again.
- **Pray (5 min).** Simple and unhurried.

Each leader guide fits on a page or two. Read it, and the chapters it points to, a day or two before you meet. Print one participant sheet per person. It has the big idea, the passage, the main questions, and room to write.

The times are a guide, not a rule. If a conversation is going somewhere good, let it run and drop a question. If your group meets for an hour, shorten “The idea” and choose three questions.

Tips for good discussion

- **Ask, then wait.** Silence after a question feels long to the leader and normal to everyone else. Count to ten before you rephrase.
- **You are a host, not a lecturer.** Your job is to help people talk to each other, not to have the best answer in the room. The leader notes give background; you don’t need to read them out.
- **Draw out the quiet ones gently.** “Anyone who hasn’t spoken yet?” works better than naming someone.
- **Welcome honest doubt.** Some people will say they aren’t sure where their weight is. That is exactly the point of the series. Thank them.

- **Finish on time.** People come back to groups that respect their evenings.

Caring for people carrying heavy things

This series asks people to look at what they are standing on, and sometimes that thing has already given way. A lost job, a marriage under strain, illness, grief, a faith that feels like it collapsed: these may come up, especially in sessions one and seven.

When they do, you don't need to fix anything. Listen. Thank the person. Don't rush to a verse or a lesson. If it seems right, offer to pray with them afterwards, or check in during the week.

If someone shares something that worries you, such as thoughts of self-harm or a situation where they aren't safe, follow up privately and talk to your pastor. In Australia, Lifeline is available 24 hours a day on **13 11 14**, and in an emergency call **000**.

Getting copies of the book

The guides work on their own, but the series is much richer when each person has a copy of *The Weight of*

God to read along the way. One book per person is ideal; one per couple works too.

Order copies at **weightofgod.discernable.io**. If your church would like a stack for its groups, email **support@discernable.io**. And if you're a pastor or church leader who would like to read it first, I'll gladly post you a free copy.

Everything in this series is free to print and copy for your group. No sign-up, no fees.

Before you start

You don't have to be a Bible scholar to lead this, and you don't have to have every question settled in your own life. I certainly don't. You only need to be willing to ask the question with your group, and to answer it yourself.

As Chapter 1 says:

Don't wait for a collapse. Ask the question now.

Thank you for asking it with your people.

Matthew Wong

The Roof

Everyone puts their weight on something, and the question that matters is whether what we're standing on can actually hold us.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTER 1

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 1 of *The Weight of God*. It's short, and the roof story is the image for the whole series.
- Bring one sturdy chair for a quick demonstration at the start of "The idea", plus a few spare Bibles, pens and a copy of the participant sheet for each person.
- Read Matthew 7:24–27 yourself beforehand so you can introduce it in a sentence.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 min to settle in, Open 10, The idea 15, Read together 10, Talk about it 25, This week 5, Pray 5.
- This first week, nobody needs to have read anything. Hand out the sheets and point people to Chapter 2 for next time.

OPEN

10 min

Have you ever climbed up a ladder, onto a roof, or out onto something you weren't sure would hold you? What did you do with your first step?

THE IDEA

15 min

Quick demo first (1 minute): put the chair in the middle and ask someone to sit on it. Then ask them, "Did you check it first?" Almost nobody does. Leave that hanging and go on.

The author of *The Weight of God* opens his book with two sentences most of us would rather not be able to write: "I fell through a roof. It collapsed under my weight."

He'd gone up to clear the summer leaves off the roof, which is close to a national pastime here. Anyone who's done it knows the rule. Don't walk in the middle of the metal sheet. Walk along the line of screws, because the screws show you where the timber is underneath.

So that's what he did. His first step was careful. He eased his weight onto one foot until he was sure it would hold. A little way along he stopped testing and just walked, his mind on the leaves.

The problem was the screws. At one point the line of screws kept going straight, and the joist underneath didn't. His foot sank, the sheet peeled away, and he fell

a full storey onto the concrete slab below. He ended up in hospital, and he still lives with pain and physical limits from that fall.

He puts it plainly: "I didn't know where the joists were. I knew where the screws were." He wasn't being reckless. He trusted something that looked trustworthy and wasn't.

Here's why that matters for the rest of us. We all put our weight on things, all day, mostly without noticing. A job we've built a mortgage around. A relationship we've built a home around. Our health, our savings, our own ability to cope. When one of those gives way, the hurt isn't measured by the thing itself. It's measured by how much of our life we'd stacked on top of it.

The roof shows one more thing: we stop checking. You test the first step, and after that you just walk. Most of us only inspect a foundation after it's failed.

The New Testament word usually translated "faith" or "believe" is *pistis*. Over these seven weeks we'll see that it was never mainly about agreeing with ideas in your head. It's about where you actually put your weight. When the author walked along that roof, he had faith in it in exactly that sense. His whole body was trusting it.

Jesus told a story about two builders and two foundations, and we'll read it next. But here is the question this whole series keeps coming back to, and it's worth asking before anything collapses:

Where is your weight?

READ TOGETHER

10 min

Matthew 7:24–27 (the wise and foolish builders).

Notice that both houses face exactly the same storm. The only difference is what's underneath, and in fine weather you can't see it.

- 1 Think back to the chair. When did you last check something before putting your weight on it? What made you check, or not bother?

LEADER NOTE *Keep this light and quick. You're listening for the idea that we only test things when we feel unsure, and once something has held a few times, we stop thinking about it.*

- 2 The author knew where the screws were, but not where the joists were. What are some "screws" in everyday life, things that tell us something is solid?

LEADER NOTE *Expect answers like a steady pay packet, a good reputation, a full calendar, feeling healthy. These aren't bad things. The point is that a good sign on the surface isn't the same as a structure underneath.*

- 3 In Jesus' story, both houses look fine until the storm arrives. Why do you think we tend to inspect our foundations only after something gives way?

LEADER NOTE *Listen for busyness, "if it isn't broken", or fear of what we might find. You could mention the book's point that nobody questions their career while they're being promoted.*

- 4 Think of a time something you relied on gave way: a job, a plan, a friendship, your health. Was the hurt bigger than the thing itself? Why?

LEADER NOTE *The book's answer is that the pain matches how much we'd stacked on top. Let people share at whatever depth they choose, and be ready for someone who is in the middle of a collapse right now.*

- 5 If you're honest, what is this week resting on?

LEADER NOTE *Gently steer away from the "right answer" ("God, of course"). This is an honest look, not a test, and someone new to faith can answer it just as well as someone who's been in church for fifty years.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

List what your week is resting on. Early in the week, take five minutes and write down the things you're counting on to get through it: income, people, your health, a plan, your own energy or competence. Beside each one, jot down what would happen if it gave way. You don't need to fix anything yet. Just look at where your weight is.

PRAY

5 min

Thank God for the things that have held you up. Ask him, honestly, to show each person where their weight really is this week, including the parts they'd rather not look at. Pray for anyone in the group whose floor has recently given way.

Amen

Amen doesn't mean "I agree"; it means "that is solid, and I'm standing on it."

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTER 2

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 2 of *The Weight of God*. Note that the back-seat story in the book includes some adult detail; the talk below tells it in a version that's fine for any group.
- Read Deuteronomy 27:11–26 and Nehemiah 8:1–6 beforehand so you can set the scene for each in a sentence or two.
- Bring spare Bibles, pens and a copy of the participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 min to settle in and check in on last week's list, Open 10, The idea 15, Read together 10, Talk about it 25, This week 5, Pray 5.

OPEN

10 min

Have you ever made a deal on a handshake, or said "yes" to something and really meant it? What made your word count that time?

THE IDEA

15 min

Amen. Most of us have said it thousands of times: at the end of a prayer, at the end of a song, as a signal that someone has finished talking. Ask what it means and most people will say "I agree" or "so be it".

The book starts somewhere you might not expect: the back seat of a car. In the late 2010s the author was driving for Uber in Sydney. One passenger, a club owner, used the ride to cut a deal with his associate as if the driver wasn't there. The details aren't for reading aloud in small group (they're in Chapter 2 if you're curious), but the gist was this: the owner would pay for a big night out, and in return his friend had to get a local councillor to drop her opposition to the club's renovation. The friend's answer was one word: "Amen!"

He wasn't finishing a prayer. And he wasn't just saying "sounds good". He was saying: done, I'm in, I'll deliver my end. His Amen had weight behind it, and probably consequences if he didn't follow through. The author's point is that this man understood something about the word that a lot of us in church have forgotten.

Amen comes from the Hebrew root *aman*. It describes something structurally sound, something you can put

your full weight on without it giving way: a load-bearing wall, or a parent holding a child firmly. So the book suggests, "A better translation of Amen would be 'I am placing my weight there.'"

That's a long way from "I agree". You can agree that exercise is important and never get off the couch. In the book's words, "Agreement costs nothing." An Amen puts you on the line. If the thing you said Amen to turns out to be unreliable, you go down with it.

The Israelites knew this. In Deuteronomy 27, Moses had the tribes stand on two mountains while the Levites read out a list of curses for breaking God's covenant. After each one, the whole nation answered "Amen". Twelve times. They weren't nodding along. They were binding themselves to it.

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the Law aloud and the people lift their hands and shout "Amen! Amen!", then bow down with their faces to the ground. You don't put your face in the dirt over an opinion.

And in Revelation 3:14, Jesus himself is called "the Amen". Not the one who agrees. The one who holds.

So here's the question for tonight. When you say Amen, are you commenting, or are you standing on it?

READ TOGETHER

10 min

Deuteronomy 27:11–26; Nehemiah 8:1–6; Revelation 3:14. In each passage, notice what saying Amen costs or commits the people saying it, and in Revelation, notice who the word now describes.

TALK ABOUT IT

25 min

- 1 Before tonight, what did you think Amen meant? When do you most often find yourself saying it?

LEADER NOTE Expect "I agree", "the end", "so be it". There are no wrong answers here; most people have simply never been told.

- 2 The man in the back seat meant his Amen more seriously than many of us do in church. What's the difference between "I agree" and "I'm committed"?

LEADER NOTE Listen for the idea that agreement costs nothing while commitment has skin in the game. Wedding vows, signing a contract or a handshake deal are good everyday examples.

- 3 In Deuteronomy 27 the whole nation says Amen twelve times, out loud, to a list of curses. What would that be like? How would it change the way you listened?

LEADER NOTE *Most people say it would slow them down and make them listen harder. That's the point: Amen was a serious, binding word, not a reflex.*

- 4 Revelation 3:14 calls Jesus “the Amen”. What difference does it make to think of Jesus not as someone who agrees with things, but as someone solid you can stand on?

LEADER NOTE *Let people put it in their own words. Some will find it comforting; others may find it raises the question of whether they've actually stood on him. Both are good responses.*

- 5 Is there anything you've been saying Amen to (in prayers, songs, sermons) without really putting your weight on it?

LEADER NOTE *Keep this gentle and honest; it isn't a guilt exercise. "I'm not sure I could say Amen to that yet" is a valid and useful answer, and worth making room for.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Say Amen only when you mean “I’m standing on that.” When you pray, sing or hear the Bible read this week, pause for a second before you say it. If you can mean it, say it and mean it. If you can't yet, notice what made you hesitate, and bring that honestly to God (and to the group next week, if you like).

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that Jesus is the Amen, the one who holds. Give people space to be honest about the Amens they've said on autopilot, without turning it into a guilt trip. You might close by inviting the group to say “Amen” together at the end, and only if they mean it.

Believe Into

Believing that something is true about Jesus is not the same as believing into him; saving faith moves your weight onto him.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTERS 3 AND 6

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of *The Weight of God*. Chapter 6 is the most confronting chapter in the series, so read it with your own group in mind.
- Read John 3:16, Acts 16:31 and James 2:14–19 beforehand.
- Be ready for the question “So can you lose your salvation?” The book says plainly that this isn’t the point it’s making (see the leader note on question 4), so you can park it kindly rather than debate it.
- Bring spare Bibles, pens and a copy of the participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 min to settle in and ask how the Amen practice went, Open 10, The idea 15, Read together 10, Talk about it 25, This week 5, Pray 5.

OPEN

10 min

What’s a bus, train, car, tradie or friend you’d say you “believe in”: something that has come through for you so often you don’t even think about it any more?

THE IDEA

15 min

Think about the phrase “I believe in you”. When the author says it to one of his daughters before something she’s nervous about, he doesn’t mean “I accept that you exist”. He means: my confidence is resting on you.

Now compare two sentences. “I believe that the bus will come.” And “I believe in the bus.”

The first is a forecast. You’ve checked the timetable, the traffic looks fine, it’ll probably turn up. If it doesn’t, you shrug and call a taxi. The second is different. It says you’ve got history with this bus. It’s come through before. You rely on it, and you’ve built your plans on top of it.

The New Testament makes the same distinction. In Greek, “believe that” is the verb *pisteuo* followed by *hoti*: you look at a claim and decide whether it’s true. Your weight doesn’t go anywhere. “Believe in” is often *pisteuo* followed by *eis*, which literally means “into”. *Eis* is a direction word. It’s about moving: off where you’re standing, and onto someone else.

The author knows the gap between those two first-hand. He grew up in a medical family and could explain keto, fasting and insulin in detail. Over the years he lost a lot of weight and put it back on, five times over. His own verdict: “I had a perfect but inert knowledge.” Knowing was never his problem.

James makes the same point with a confronting example:

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” (James 2:19, NIV)

The demons’ theology is better than ours. They don’t need faith; they’ve seen. They give an accurate verdict about God, and it doesn’t move their weight an inch. As the book puts it, the real question isn’t whether your theology is correct or whether you’re sincere. “The question is whether your weight has moved.”

Then there’s John 3:16. Most English Bibles say “whoever believes in him”. The Greek is *eis*: whoever believes *into* him. And the verb is in a continuous form, describing someone who keeps on believing. The book’s restored version reads: “everyone who is continuously repositioning their weight into Him will not perish but have eternal life.” Acts 16:31 says it again with another word: believe *upon* the Lord Jesus. Stand on him.

One caution the book itself gives. Believing true things about Jesus isn’t the problem; knowing who he is matters. The problem is knowing and never leaning.

So tonight’s question isn’t “What do you believe about Jesus?” Most of us could tick every box on that. It’s this: is your weight on him?

READ TOGETHER

10 min

John 3:16; Acts 16:31; James 2:14–19. Notice the small words: believe *in* (literally “into”) and believe *upon* in John and Acts, compared with believe *that* in James 2:19. Ask what each one asks of the person believing.

- 1 Who's someone you'd say "I believe in you" to, and what do you actually mean when you say it?

LEADER NOTE Listen for words like backing, confidence, relying on, being on their side. Nobody ever means "I think you exist", and that's the point.

- 2 Think about the bus. Is there something in your life you believe *that* about, but wouldn't actually put your weight on?

LEADER NOTE Examples might be knowing exercise is good but not doing it, or knowing a friend is reliable but never asking them for help. The aim is to feel the gap between knowing and leaning.

- 3 James says even the demons believe there is one God, and shudder. Why do you think he picked such a confronting example?

LEADER NOTE He wants to show that correct belief on its own isn't what saves. Keep the focus on us rather than on demons; if the conversation drifts into speculation about the spiritual realm, bring it gently back.

- 4 Try reading John 3:16 as "whoever keeps putting their weight into him". What does that add or change for you?

LEADER NOTE Some will find it freeing (it's about where your weight is, not about getting everything right); some may feel unsettled. If someone raises "can you lose your salvation?"; say the book is clear this isn't a debate about once saved, always saved, and offer to talk about it afterwards.

- 5 Where is there a gap for you between what you believe about Jesus and where your weight actually goes on an ordinary Tuesday?

LEADER NOTE Allow some silence, and let people answer privately on their sheet if they'd rather. Someone newer to faith may say they're not sure their weight is on Jesus at all. That's an honest and good place to be, not a problem to fix tonight.

THIS WEEK

5 min

Read John 3:16 each morning, and read "whoever believes in him" as "whoever keeps putting their weight into him". Then ask yourself: is that what I'm doing today? At the end of the day, notice one moment when your weight shifted back onto yourself, and one moment when you leaned on him.

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that he is someone you can put your full weight on. Make room for honesty about the places where we know the right answers but haven't leaned. Ask for help to shift weight one step at a time, and pray for anyone in the group who is still working out whether they want to put their weight on Jesus at all.

Daddy Holds

Trusting God is less like feeling confident and more like a sleepy child letting their full weight land on a parent they know will hold them.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTER 4

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 4 of *The Weight of God* (“Childlike Faith”). If you only have ten minutes, read the opening story about the author’s daughters and the section on Abraham.
- Read Proverbs 3:5–6, Genesis 15:1–6 and Habakkuk 2:4 so you’re comfortable with the flow of each passage.
- Bring Bibles (any translation), pens and a printed participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 arrive and settle, 10 open, 15 the idea, 10 read together, 25 talk, 5 this week, 5 pray.
- This week brings in three Hebrew words. Nobody needs to memorise them. The picture of the sleeping child does the heavy lifting.

OPEN

10 min

Who has fallen asleep on you lately: a child, a grandchild, a pet, a mate on a long drive? Or where’s the strangest place you’ve ever dozed off?

THE IDEA

15 min

The author of *The Weight of God* has two daughters. One of his favourite things as a dad is carrying them once they’ve fallen asleep. He describes the exact moment it happens. They fight it for a while: heads bobbing, still talking, insisting they’re not tired. Then something gives. The neck goes soft, the arms drop, and in his words, “Their full weight arrives all at once, like a decision their body made without consulting their brain.”

These aren’t babies. They can walk and look after themselves. They simply stop holding themselves up, because they know who is holding them. There’s no backup plan. If he drops them, they fall.

The Old Testament has three Hebrew words that together describe what’s going on in that moment.

The first is *aman*, the root of our word Amen. It means solid, weight-worthy, like a load-bearing wall. Aman is the recognition: *this holds*. The girls aren’t weighing up the evidence. They’ve been carried before, and the

arms held every time. As the author puts it, “They just know that Daddy holds.”

The second is *batach*, the word for trust in Proverbs 3:5. It means to throw yourself down on something and let it take your full weight. “With all your heart” isn’t about how strongly you feel. It’s about not holding any of your weight back. The second half of the verse, about not leaning on your own understanding, uses a word for propping yourself up on a support. The verse isn’t against thinking. It’s against making your own thinking the thing your whole life rests on. “Your mind is a powerful tool but a terrible foundation.”

The third is *emunah*: the same trust, kept up over time. Not landing once, but staying landed, day after day. Habakkuk 2:4 says the righteous will live by it, and the New Testament quotes that line three times.

Abraham shows all three. In Genesis 15 he is old and childless, and God takes him outside at night and tells him to look at the stars: that’s how many descendants he will have. Everything Abraham can see says this is absurd. Yet he believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. The Hebrew word there is *aman*. Abraham looked at the One making the promise, decided he was solid, and let his weight follow.

When the New Testament writers needed one Greek word to carry all of this, they used *pistis*, the word we translate “faith”. Recognise who is holding you. Let go. Stay there.

READ TOGETHER

10 min

- **Proverbs 3:5–6.** Notice the contrast between two places you can put your weight: on the Lord, or on your own understanding.
- **Genesis 15:1–6.** Notice that Abraham’s circumstances don’t change before he believes. What changes is where his weight goes.
- **Habakkuk 2:4** (optional, if time allows). Notice the word “live”: this is about a whole life, not a single moment.

- 1 Think of a child falling asleep on someone they love. What's the difference between a child who trusts a parent and a child who has actually let go?

LEADER NOTE *Listen for the idea that trust can be real but still partial. The child on Dad's chest already trusts him; falling asleep is the moment the last bit of weight lets go.*

- 2 The girls let go because they've been held before. How does a person come to know that God holds? What has shown you that, or what would?

LEADER NOTE *Some people, especially those newer to faith, may not have that history yet, and that's fine to say out loud. Stories from others in the group can help here.*

- 3 Proverbs 3:5 isn't anti-thinking, but it warns against propping yourself up on your own understanding. What's the difference between using your mind and resting your whole life on it?

LEADER NOTE *Steer away from the idea that only clever people struggle here. The point is about what we lean on, and practical people, planners and worriers all do it too.*

- 4 Abraham's circumstances and God's promise pointed in opposite directions. Have you had a time when what you could see and what you hoped about God pulled against each other? What happened?

LEADER NOTE *Let people share at the level they're comfortable with. Resist tidying up anyone's story with a quick answer.*

- 5 Where in your life are you keeping one foot on your own platform, just in case? What might it look like to let a little more weight go this week?

LEADER NOTE *This is the personal one. Model it by going first with something real but not raw, then give people the option to answer in pairs.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Notice where you prop yourself up on your own understanding. Each evening, think back over the day and name one moment when you leaned on your own figuring-out: a worry you kept rehearsing, a backup plan you clung to, a decision you made without asking God. Don't beat yourself up about it; just notice it, and then hand that one thing over in a short, honest prayer.

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that he is solid, the kind of foundation you can put your full weight on. Pray for anyone in the group whose circumstances feel like Abraham's, where the promise and the evidence don't seem to match. Ask for help to let go of the one foot each person is keeping on their own platform, and to stay landed through the week.

Good Soil

Jesus doesn't ask us for bigger faith; he asks where our faith is planted, because a seed in a jar does nothing and the same seed in good soil takes over.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTER 7

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 7 of *The Weight of God* ("Good Soil"). The farm stories at the start and the section on the mustard seed in the cupboard are the heart of it.
- Read Matthew 17:14–20 (and glance at Matthew 10:1, where Jesus first gives the disciples authority over unclean spirits).
- Optional but worth it: bring a small jar of mustard seeds (from the spice aisle) and, if you can, a pot of soil. Hold up the jar during the talk.
- Bring Bibles, pens and a printed participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 arrive and settle, 10 open, 15 the idea, 10 read together, 25 talk, 5 this week, 5 pray.

OPEN

10 min

What's the best or worst thing you've ever tried to grow? Anything counts: tomatoes, a lemon tree, a pot plant you forgot to water, a sourdough starter.

THE IDEA

15 min

The author of *The Weight of God* is a farmer. He says the leaves on a plant are its mood ring: they curl in the heat and perk up after a feed, reacting to whatever happened this week. The roots tell you more. But the real secret of farming is the most boring thing of all: soil. "What we plant things into is more important than what we plant."

At the top of his driveway is one sad tree. Same sun, same water, same care as its neighbours, and it just won't thrive. It turns out a line of gum trees nearby once spread over that spot, and eucalyptus roots reach far underground, drinking up the water and giving off compounds that hold back other plants. Ten metres down the hill, everything flourishes. Same plant, different soil, different result.

Now to Matthew 17. A father brings his son, who is suffering terribly, to the disciples. They try to drive out the demon, and nothing happens. This shouldn't be. Jesus had already given them that authority, and they'd done it before. They knew the procedure.

Jesus arrives, frees the boy, and the disciples ask him privately: why couldn't we? His answer uses a Greek word, *oligopistian*, that the book says appears nowhere in Greek writing before Matthew's Gospel. It's usually translated "little faith". Then, in the same breath, Jesus says faith like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed they knew, can move a mountain.

So which is it? Is small faith the problem, or is small faith enough?

New Testament scholars D.A. Carson and R.T. France help here. The problem wasn't the size of the disciples' faith but its quality. They had started treating their authority like a technique that works because it worked last time, the way a tradie trusts his tools. Their weight had slid off Jesus and onto their own track record and method.

And mustard, as any farmer knows, is not polite. A seed a millimetre or two across can grow taller than a person and take over a garden; Jewish law later banned planting it in gardens for exactly that reason. Jesus isn't praising tininess. He's describing a seed with explosive character.

The author has a jar of mustard seeds in his kitchen cupboard, sitting between the cumin and the garlic. They're no threat to anyone. Drop a handful into good soil, though, and within a season they'd take over. Same seeds. One difference. "Soil. Someone has to plant them in soil."

The soil, in this story, is Jesus himself. Not our technique. Not our track record. Him.

READ TOGETHER

10 min

- **Matthew 17:14–20.** Notice the two different diagnoses: Jesus calls the crowd unbelieving (in Greek, without faith at all), but tells his own disciples their faith is little or poor. Some English translations say faith "as small as" a mustard seed; the Greek simply says "like" a mustard seed, a comparison of character rather than size.

- 1 The author says leaves are a plant's mood ring, but soil is what really matters. In everyday life, what's something that looks impressive on the surface but tells you very little about what's underneath?

LEADER NOTE *Keep this light and broad (houses, cars, social media, job titles). It sets up the idea that the visible stuff isn't the foundation.*

- 2 The disciples had done this before, and it had worked. Why might past success make it easier to lean on the method rather than on the Person?

LEADER NOTE *Listen for examples from work, parenting or sport. The drift is usually gradual and unnoticed, which is part of the point.*

- 3 Jesus says the issue isn't how much faith you have but where it's planted. How does that land if you've ever been told, or told yourself, that you just need more faith?

LEADER NOTE *This can be a relief for some and a puzzle for others. Let both reactions stand; you don't need to resolve every question tonight.*

- 4 Prayer, Bible reading, serving, coming to church, knowing the right words: these are good things. When might a good habit quietly become the soil, the thing we're actually relying on?

LEADER NOTE *Keep this personal rather than critical of other people or other churches. The question is about our own hearts, not anyone else's practices.*

- 5 Where is your faith planted right now: in technique or in the Person? Is there any hard, compacted ground in your life that might need breaking up first?

LEADER NOTE *Chapter 7 links breaking up the soil with metanoia, the New Testament word for repentance, meaning a turning rather than a feeling of guilt. Offer pairs for this one if the group is quiet.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Pick one regular part of your faith life: prayer, reading the Bible, serving, Sunday church. Each time you do it this week, pause for a moment first and ask: am I leaning on this, or on him? If it helps, carry a mustard seed (or any small seed) in your pocket or wallet as a reminder.

PRAY

5 min

Thank Jesus that he is the good soil, and that we don't have to manufacture a bigger faith. Pray honestly about the places where our weight has slid onto our own track record or technique. Ask him to break up any hard ground, and to make the small, real faith in the room take root in him.

The Title Deed

Faith isn't a leap in the dark; the Bible's own definition makes it the foundation under your hope and the evidence you stand on.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTERS 5 AND 8

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 5 (“The Drift”) and Chapter 8 (“Something You Cannot Prove”) of *The Weight of God*. Chapter 8 is written for sceptics, so it’s a good one to read with a doubting friend in mind.
- Read Hebrews 11:1–12 and Romans 4:18–21 so you can introduce each in a sentence.
- Bring one contract of any kind: a phone plan, a lease, a car loan, the papers from buying a house. Black out anything personal. You’ll hold it up at the start of “The idea”.
- Bring Bibles, pens and a printed participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 arrive and settle, 10 open, 15 the idea, 10 read together, 25 talk, 5 this week, 5 pray.

OPEN

10 min

What’s the biggest thing you’ve ever signed: a lease, a loan, a job offer, a mobile phone plan you regretted? Did you actually read it first?

THE IDEA

15 min

Quick prop first (1 minute): hold up the contract and ask, “Would anyone here sign this blind?” Leave it there and go on.

Here’s an objection most of us have heard, and some of us have held: isn’t faith just believing something without evidence? Switch your brain off, take a leap in the dark and hope for the best. Critics such as Richard Dawkins put it bluntly: belief without evidence sounds a lot like delusion.

The author of *The Weight of God* surprises people here. He agrees that if faith really meant deciding to believe something without good reason, the critics would be right, and reasonable people should walk away. But that isn’t what the word meant. As he puts it, “His accusation is based on a mistranslation.”

In the first century, *pistis* wasn’t a churchy word. It lived in army camps, courtrooms and markets. A soldier had *pistis* in his commanding officer, enough to follow him into a battle that might kill him. A merchant signing a

contract had *pistis* in the other party: he was staking his livelihood on their reliability. Nobody did that blind. You trusted someone because of their proven character, and there were consequences if that character failed.

Over the centuries, through Latin and then English, the word drifted like a message whispered down a long line, until “faith” became what we say when we don’t have evidence: a polite word for a guess.

Hebrews 11:1 is the closest thing the Bible has to a definition: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (NIV)

Two Greek words carry that verse. The first, *hypostasis*, is a building word. It literally means “that which stands under”: the foundation. In old Egyptian papyri it turns up in legal papers meaning a title deed, the proof that the land is yours. The second, *elegchos*, is a courtroom word: proof, evidence that holds up under cross-examination.

So faith isn’t the leap you take once the evidence runs out. In the author’s words, “Faith is not what you resort to in the absence of evidence. Faith is the evidence you stand on.”

The rest of Hebrews 11 shows what that looks like. Noah built a boat for years under clear skies. Rahab risked her life. None of them switched their brains off. Abraham looked squarely at his age and Sarah’s, even raised it with God, then put his weight on the one who’d made the promise.

That’s a fair answer to the sceptic, and a fair question for us: what is your faith actually standing on?

READ TOGETHER

10 min

- **Hebrews 11:1–12.** Notice how many of the verbs are actions: offered, built, obeyed, went, lived. These are people building something costly on a foundation they trusted.
- **Romans 4:18–21.** Notice that Abraham doesn’t pretend the facts away. He faces them, then weighs them against the one who made the promise.

- 1 Think back to the contract. Where have you heard faith described as the opposite of evidence: “blind faith”, “a leap of faith”, “you just have to believe”?

LEADER NOTE *Keep it open and honest. Some people will have been told at some point to stop asking questions. Don't argue with anyone's experience; just let the group notice how common that picture is.*

- 2 The soldier and the merchant trusted someone because of a track record. Who in your life has earned that kind of trust, and how did they earn it?

LEADER NOTE *Listen for time, consistency and promises kept. That's the whole point: pistis grows from proven character, not from a decision to stop thinking.*

- 3 Hebrews 11:1 uses a building word and a courtroom word. Which helps you more right now: faith as the foundation under your hope, or faith as evidence? Why?

LEADER NOTE *There's no right answer. Some people find the title deed picture steadying; others like knowing their questions are allowed in the courtroom.*

- 4 The author agrees that faith as “belief without evidence” should be rejected. How does it feel to hear a Christian say that? Does it make faith easier or harder to talk about with a sceptical friend?

LEADER NOTE *Welcome honest doubt here. If someone in the room is the sceptic, thank them. The series is for people who aren't sure, too.*

- 5 What evidence of God's reliability are you actually standing on: something in Scripture, in history, in your own life? And where does your faith still feel more like a guess?

LEADER NOTE *Offer pairs if the group is quiet. Remind people that the book's answer isn't to be more certain, but to look at what's underneath.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Keep a track record. Each day, write down one piece of evidence that God can hold your weight: a promise in Scripture, a prayer answered, a time something held when you expected it to give way. If you're not sure about God, write down instead what your current view is standing on. At the end of the week, read your list back and ask: is this a guess, or something I can stand on?

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that he doesn't ask us to switch our minds off, and that he has a track record we can examine. Pray for anyone in the room who is carrying honest doubt, and for friends and family who think faith is blind. Ask him to show each person what their weight is really resting on.

It Is Well

Real faith shows up in a changed life, and when our weight slips back onto ourselves, as it will, the foundation hasn't moved.

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTERS 9 AND 12

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 9 (“Faith That Works”) and Chapter 12 (“How to Believe”) of *The Weight of God*. Chapter 12 includes the author’s own story of a very dark season; read it before you lead.
- **A pastoral note:** some members may be carrying heavy things, so go gently, follow up privately with anyone who seems affected, and know where to point people: Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 (24 hours).
- Read Romans 7:15–8:1 and James 2:14–26. Optional: play the hymn *It Is Well with My Soul* as people arrive.
- Bring Bibles, pens and a printed participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 arrive and settle, 10 open, 15 the idea, 10 read together, 25 talk, 5 this week, 5 pray and wrap up the series.

OPEN

10 min

Is there a song, hymn or line that has stuck with you through a season of life, good or hard? Keep it light if you like: the song from your wedding counts.

THE IDEA

15 min

Christians have long puzzled over an apparent contradiction. Paul says we are justified by faith, not by works. James says faith without works is dead.

The tension only bites if “faith” means agreeing with the right ideas. If faith means *pistis*, putting your full weight on God, the two fit together. Paul is saying you don’t earn your place on the foundation by performing well enough; you step onto it. James is saying that if your weight has truly moved, your life will show it, the way a tree in good soil can’t help producing fruit. As the book puts it, they’re standing back to back, facing different problems with the same answer.

But here’s the honest part. Our weight doesn’t stay put.

The author describes a season years ago when, from the outside, everything was going well. He had sold a business he’d built, his first daughter had just arrived, and he had a home and no money worries. Yet the thought crept in that there was nothing left to live for,

and it became so dark that he thought about ending his life. (Chapter 12 tells it in his own words.) He’s clear that the way out wasn’t quick and wasn’t a formula. His weight would land on God for a day, a week, sometimes a month, and then he’d find himself standing on his own competence again.

Paul admits in Romans 7 that he keeps doing the very thing he doesn’t want to do.

Through that season one line kept coming back to him: *It is well with my soul*. Horatio Spafford wrote that hymn in 1873, after losing much of his wealth in the great Chicago fire and then his four daughters in a shipwreck at sea. The author says the line felt untrue at the time, yet it wouldn’t let him go, “Until it became true.” His reflection: “Spafford lost everything and found the Foundation. I had everything and couldn’t find it, because everything was in the way.”

So what do we do when our weight slips? Paul’s answer comes straight after Romans 7: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

The New Testament word for repentance, *metanoia*, isn’t mainly about feeling bad. It’s turning: lifting your weight off old foundations and back onto God. And 1 John 1:9 gives the daily pattern. Confessing means telling God the truth: my weight slipped. And he is faithful, the one you can lean on, and receives you back. Not because you confessed thoroughly enough, but because of who he is.

“The foundation has not moved. It does not move.”

READ TOGETHER

10 min

- **Romans 7:15–8:1.** Notice how honest Paul is about his own struggle, and how quickly chapter 8 turns to “therefore”.
- **James 2:14–26.** Notice that James’s examples, Abraham and Rahab, are people whose trust in God showed up in what they actually did.

- 1 Before tonight, had you ever noticed the tension between Paul and James? Does the idea of faith as putting your weight on God help hold them together for you?

LEADER NOTE *Some will find this neat and others will still have questions. That's fine; the aim is a useful lens, not a final verdict.*

- 2 James says real faith shows. Without naming names, what changes have you seen in someone whose weight genuinely moved onto God?

LEADER NOTE *Steer gently away from scorekeeping or judging other people's faith. Look for stories of quiet, real change rather than dramatic ones.*

- 3 Paul admits he keeps doing what he doesn't want to do. Where do you notice your weight slipping back onto yourself, and how do you usually notice?

LEADER NOTE *Normalise this. If the leader admits it first, others will feel free to be honest. Keep the focus on noticing, not on guilt.*

- 4 The author says Spafford lost everything and found the foundation, while he had everything and couldn't find it. Why might good things, even very good things, get in the way?

LEADER NOTE *Someone in the room may be living through real loss right now. Don't present suffering as a lesson or a shortcut; let the hymn story be a comfort rather than a formula.*

- 5 *Metanoia* means lifting your weight off an old foundation. What's one thing you've been resting on that you could stop making load-bearing this week?

LEADER NOTE *Invite, don't press. Offer pairs or silent reflection, and be ready to follow up privately if anything heavy surfaces.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Lift one weight off an old foundation. Name one thing you've been standing on, such as a career, a plan, a relationship, your reputation or your ability to hold it all together. You don't have to give it up; just stop making it the thing your life rests on. When you notice it sliding back, use the pattern from 1 John 1:9: tell God the truth, my weight slipped, and let him receive you back.

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that he is faithful, the foundation that holds when we don't. Pray for anyone carrying something heavy tonight, by name if that's appropriate, and for those for whom *it is well* doesn't feel true yet. Give thanks for these seven weeks together, and finish by pointing the group to "Keep going" on their sheet.