

Faith Is Like Skydiving
And Other Memorable Images for
Dialogue with Seekers and
Skeptics

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Rick Mattson is an apologetics specialist for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, where he has served as a staff worker for over thirty years. Based at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, he is a frequent speaker on college campuses across the country.

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Hell is Like An Empty Pub

“Christians are often unprepared for apologetic conversations with seekers and skeptics,” says Rick Mattson, author of *Faith Is Like Skydiving*. “They have trouble coming up with abstract arguments on the spot around issues such as the problems of suffering and evil, religious pluralism, the reliability of the Bible and science-faith integration. So they ramble in their responses or remain silent altogether.”

What distinguishes *Faith Is Like Skydiving* from other apologetics works is that it provides “handles and hooks.” That is, it goes beyond traditional case-making to inform readers how to verbally *illustrate* the case for Christian faith. Instead of abstractions like “intelligent design,” you can say that the wonder of the universe is like getting dealt a royal flush over and over and over again. Hell isn’t a party with all your friends; hell is more like an empty pub, and that’s no fun. Experienced evangelist and apologist Rick Mattson has collected dozens of easy-to-use images for explaining Christianity. Chapters include:

- Faith Is Like Skydiving: Look Before You Leap!
- The Telephone Game: Why the Bible Is Not Full of Errors
- Religions Are Like Books: Images for Discussing Religious Pluralism
- Miracles Are Like a Hole-in-One

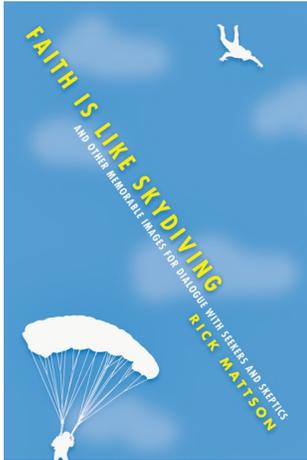
Mattson says, “*Faith Is Like Skydiving* is a book of easy-to-use images for apologetic conversations: elephant traps, the telephone game, a royal flush, a novelist, a bricklayer, skydiving. These and other illustrations help Christians present their case for faith in a manner which is organized, crisp and memorable. No more rambling!”

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“Many books on apologetics do well with the arguments, but have little on how to present them. Faith Is Like Skydiving combines reason with rhetoric, clarity with intellectual depth. It provides a vast array of arguments and a host of images to make those arguments clear and compelling. Intellectually sound and amazingly practical, this terrific book deserves widespread reading.”

—James Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* and *Apologetics Beyond Reason*

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How Faith Is Like Skydiving

Certain stories have incredible staying power in my mind, such as an account told to me many years ago by a woman whose husband died in a skydiving accident. I don’t even remember her name (or his), but I’ve no problem recalling the details of the tragedy. It was in Florida. He leapt from a plane on a windy day, spiraled downward, pulled the ripcord, dangled under a full chute, appeared to be coming in for a soft two-point landing — but got entangled in power lines.

The image of skydiving illustrates the evidential stage of faith for several reasons. One is the risk of failure, as the above story illustrates.

How could faith possibly fail? Easy. If you place your faith in the wrong thing, it fails. After all, it’s logically possible that Christianity is false and another worldview, such as Judaism or atheism, is true. And even though I may affirm the person whose faith comes naturally without much evidential support, it’s only fair to acknowledge that such faith could in fact be misplaced.

I once asked a Mormon missionary how he knew his faith was true. He replied that when he was reading the Book of Mormon, God spoke to his heart, and he thus came to believe in the Mormon religion. This is sometimes called a “burning of the bosom,” a sense that God is revealing himself through the Mormon scriptures. I pressed the matter further. How did he know it was actually God speaking to him and not some other spiritual being or even his own imagination? He just knew. But how? He’d simply opened his heart to the truth of the scriptures and now he was one hundred percent convinced. But —

You see the dilemma of a faith-only approach to truth, which is sometimes called “fideism” by scholars. Choosing the correct object of faith is the crucial thing. I’ve met people of all different religions (not to mention the irreligious) who hold their beliefs in a natural, organic, almost effortless way. It hardly occurs to them that their views could be false. Yet they cannot all be true. Religions such as Christianity, Mormonism, Judaism and Buddhism make statements about reality that are in direct conflict with each other. For example, the Christian understanding of God as Trinity disagrees with the other religions just mentioned. Logically, someone (or everyone) is off base here.

But it’s not just fideism that can fail. Those of us who work hard at the evidential part of faith have no guarantees that our cognitive pursuits will pay off. We can be tragically caught in the power lines of intellectualism. We can mishandle arguments, misinterpret data or cave in to our prejudices and wishful thinking. The supposed objective “court of law,” which is our mind’s judge and jury, may not function properly. When we jump out of the airplane of faith, faulty thinking can land us in the wrong spot.

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BOOK EXCERPT

Still, I'll take my chances with the evidence. To me there's nothing like thoroughly investigating a case for something before believing its claims. That's why I've spent the last three-plus decades asking the question of whether Christianity is true, digging through its historical, philosophical and experiential arguments. It's been a fantastic course of study! Again, I absolutely do not want to hold to a position that is false.

And hey, did you know that skydiving is relatively safe? It's easy to focus on the risk of failure, but what about the probabilities of success? Well, according to the U.S. Parachute Association, in 2010 only twenty-one fatalities occurred in its members' estimated three million jumps. That's a 99.993 percent safety record.

Before I'd ever jump out of an airplane, I'd read all the safety statistics and interview seasoned jumpers and check out every single piece of high-tech gear twice. That process is what I call the evidential part of skydiving. You look before you leap. You calculate the risks. And even though the evidence falls short of the high standard of proof, it's still pretty convincing.

– From chapter one, "Faith Is Like Skydiving: Look Before You Leap!"