

Faith Isn't an Argument

By Jason W. Triplett

My friend loves to argue. He is the type of guy who will argue about things he doesn't even believe in just so he can "defeat" someone's line of thinking and expose their foolishness compared to his line of thinking. Sad, I know, but to him it's all about winning. I was invited to a party with him and some other friends. He connected with me ahead of time; told me that he was glad I was coming to the gathering because he was looking forward to having a "conversation" with me. Knowing him, it was a red flag that he wanted to debate with me because I am a pastor and he is a humanist who believes God was created in the mind of man. He is educated, he has a graduate degree, is an avid reader of history and follows popular culture closely. Truthfully, he is a worthy adversary with a great deal of knowledge.

As I considered what my conversation might be like with him at the party, I saw us battling away at one another point/counterpoint. He gets angry if he loses. I imagined what his reaction would be like when I convinced him of the existence of God and the foolishness of *his* thinking. It would be so gratifying for me. I thought about studying up (I know, *sick*) to be prepared for my encounter with him. I didn't take it that far, but I did go over scenarios in my mind and what I would say. I felt like I was preparing for an epic battle, like a gladiator, Super Bowl quarterback or a soldier cleaning his weapons and equipment. I was gonna bounce this guy if he tried to debate with me. After all, I am educated too. I have two degrees, undergraduate and graduate. I have been in ministry for more than a decade with loads of experiences that prove the existence of God.

The date of the party drew closer. It was the day before, when I got a text message from my friend. He wanted to meet for coffee at a local cafe. A few hours later I sat across from him at a table with cups in front of us. I was nervous. I was prepared for what I thought was coming. We exchanged small talk and pleasantries for a few minutes, then he put both hands on his cup and looked down, he seemed like he was preparing to say something and mind kicked into overdrive. *Here it comes*, I thought. He began to pick at the decal on his coffee cup with the nail of his thumb. He spoke to me without looking at me.

"I guess you heard that Tracy was pregnant?" He looked up at the me. His eyes were sincere, searching mine. I was taken by surprise. This wasn't the hard theological question followed by a forgone conclusion on his part. This wasn't an argument at all.

I responded simply, "No, I hadn't heard." I waited for what he would say next. Then I realized, "*was pregnant*"?

I cut in before he could say anything else. "What happened?" I said.

His eyes welled up with tears. He explained how they weren't gonna tell anyone except close family because it was the first tri-mester. His parents and her parents were really excited at the news. They couldn't help making plans and dreaming about the life growing inside Tracy. Then

he explained that one morning his wife started to struggle. As he explained he became more emotional and the tears started to flow.

"She lost it," he said and he looked away from me again, "She lost the baby." My mind reeled. Here he was, a man I was ready to theologially trounce, pouring out to me that their first child had died in utero. Was he turning to me for care and counsel as a pastor? I didn't know what to say. Then the question came.

"Where is our baby?" His eyes were back on mine his posture inclined forward. "I mean, you seem to think there's something else after death, what do you think? What do you believe?"

The question was huge. I couldn't believe he asked me where I thought their child would spend eternity. Why did he want to know? After all he didn't believe in God at all. We talked some more. I explained to him my feelings about his loss not so much focusing on the "where" or "why" but the nature of God and faith. It wasn't an argument. It wasn't point-counter point. It was a reaching appeal from one friend to another.

Faith cannot be argued. Theology? Sure. Politics? Sure. But faith is something we cannot pour into a glass or measure with a ruler. If I say that I have faith. You cannot refute or argue that. You can weigh or size up my behavior, but take away the Bibles, Pews and Service Projects and my faith still remains. My friend didn't have a crisis of faith. He had a crisis where he had nothing to turn to but faith. At the end of the conversation, it turned out only to be a baby step in the direction of God. But it was a step nonetheless.

I almost got suckered into a trap in regard to the Christian faith. When faith is reduced to contention and division amongst people it robs us of the hope and love it is meant to produce.

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." No matter how hard we try, we can't argue with that.