

Os Guinness says, “ If ours is an examined faith, we should be unafraid to doubt....There is no believing without some doubting, and believing is all the stronger for understanding and resolving doubt.”

Doubt could also be called

- unbelief
- scepticism
- confusion
- misunderstanding
- lack of conviction
- despair
- worried questioning

Now I know that there are those who parse meanings of words and make nuanced differences between the words I’ve mentioned, and that’s fair; however, for this evening, let’s understand that words sometimes have different meanings to different people.

Three kinds of doubt; we’ll focus on two of them.

1. Willful doubt. (.....and the cynical, “I don’t want to believe because it will cramp my lifestyle”, my business life, my sex life, how I treat others, what I make my priorities....) (Aldous Huxley upon deciding to be an atheist said that Meaninglessness leads to liberation)

This is a topic for another time.

2. There is also intellectual doubt. (I need to understand things rationally, logically.)

3. It can be spiritual doubt (I need to have an emotional and spiritual understanding)

Intellectual doubt and spiritual doubt are different from Willful doubt in that they lead to curiosity and questioning, and a deeper, closer walk with God. That’s what we’ll focus on this evening.

If you have confusion, doubt, unbelief, my prayer is that this evening’s message is of practical help to you.

And if you are relatively free of doubt about your Christian faith , I have a call to action for you as well!

Just before we read our first passage of scripture together, let's set the scene:

(Prior to this, Peter had confessed Jesus as the Christ, the disciples had seen Jesus feed the 5 thousand, the 4 thousand and heal many people, they saw him walk on water, and Peter James and John had just witnessed the Transfiguration,) Pretty convincing, right?

Mark 9:17-29 English Standard Version (ESV)

17 And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. **18** And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, **and they were not able.**” **19** And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” **20** And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. **21** And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. **22** And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. **But if you can do anything,** have compassion on us and help us.” **23** And Jesus said to him, “***If you can!*** All things are possible for one who believes.” **24** Immediately the father of the child cried out[a] and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” **25** And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” **26** And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” **27** But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. **28** And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” **29** And he said to them, “**This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.**”[b] **(unbelief)**

Three things in this passage:

1. Disciples couldn't heal the boy. A lack of conviction?
2. The father expressed his unbelief and Jesus addressed it.

3. Jesus explained to the disciples that only prayer could drive out unbelief

My story, briefly

- conversion at 8 years old; frightened
- lost my dad at 14; no one could give me satisfactory answers
- was angry at God and the church
- was spiritually and emotionally immature

Platitudes from well meaning but inept Christians didn't help.

- “Just have faith”. “It was God’s will your dad died so young; just trust that it’s part of his plan” “Maybe your family didn’t pray enough”
- My grandfather pounding the table when I was 16, declaring the wrath of God, I think mostly because I had long hair!

None of these were helpful to a young man who was spiritually and emotionally immature.

- left the church as a young adult I was looking for answers.
- dabbled in New Age ideas and played with the idea of Atheism.

But knew instinctively that God existed and needed a rational understanding of who God is, what the Bible is, and how I could believe it was true. (God gave us intellect and not as a “gotcha” to trip us up but to better understand)

*****CR: God doesn't waste hurts!**

Discovered the world of Christian Apologetics

- (C.S. Lewis, the McDowells, Dr. William Lane Craig, Dr. Frank Turek, Dr. John Lennox, Greg Koukl et al) [Tim teaching next week!](#)

Watched videos, read lots of books, started reading the Bible again with more focus and concentration, looking for answers.

At a certain point, I understood intellectually that the Christian path was the one and only way to salvation and that the Bible was God's inerrant word. But I had to get it from my head into my heart! From my intellect into my emotions as well.

For many, that's the hard part, and the part that continues for many of us throughout our Christian walk. This is the level of spiritual doubt you can have even when you've been a long time Christian. Sometimes you may find it difficult to acknowledge the confusion or misapprehension you may be feeling about your spiritual understanding and walk with God. Denial stops you from confronting your misapprehensions. And pride get you to think that everyone else has it all together! (Christian starting at a new church but not meeting others or getting involved "What if they see how mixed up I really am?") **Ron's story about coming to CCC.**

Take John the Baptist.

It's important to note that John knew Jesus, knew him as the Messiah, (behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29) had baptized him and seen the Spirit of God descend as a dove and heard God the Father proclaim, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased!"

Yet John was doubting; he was imprisoned, certainly expecting that his physical life was coming to an end and he needed reassurance. He was, no doubt, frightened, confused, unsure. So he sent his followers to question Jesus!

Luke 7:18-23 English Standard Version (ESV)

Messengers from John the Baptist

18 The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, **19** calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" **20** And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" **21** In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. **22** And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers[a] are cleansed, and the

deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. **23** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

In both of these accounts we’ve read so far, Jesus was open and understanding of the doubt or unbelief that was expressed. He was strongly reassuring. He took the time to explain and teach frankly and compassionately.

Doubt can be paralyzing if you allow it to be.

Again, John, in spite of his doubt and imprisonment, sent men to ask Jesus if he truly was the One! **He asked the question!**

So Doubt, if acted upon with curiosity can lead to asking the significant questions that can lead us to a deeper, more meaningful, more joyful walk with Jesus.

Let’s take a closer look at impetuous Peter. There are many examples of Peter’s spiritual struggles but we’ll just look at one!

Peter had been present at the Sermon on the Mount, had witnessed many miracles and had, just the same day that our final scripture describes, seen the feeding of the 5 thousand! Keep that in mind as we read this!

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus Walks on the Water

22 Immediately he (Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24** but the boat by this time was a long way[a] from the land,[b] beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. **25** And in the fourth watch of the night[c] he came to them, walking on the sea. **26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

28 And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, **command me to come to you on the water.**” **29** He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. **30** But when he saw the wind,[d] he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”

31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Peter asked for Jesus’ command and he followed. But just like you and me, sometimes our fear or apprehension distracts us from the miracles God can do in our lives, and we start to sink, overwhelmed with doubt. And Jesus, when we as, “Lord, save me” is eager to take us by the hand and lift us up into new life with Him.

So in conclusion:

Take aways for new believers or struggling ones:

1. Jesus welcomes your doubt. Doubting Thomas, Impetuous Peter, John the Baptist, the father of the boy in our earlier scripture passages - all had doubts or questions? These passages are examples of Jesus’ compassion , mercy and power and grace. They are there for you, so don’t make yourself an exception and live in denial or secrecy; express your confusion to the Lord. Pray without ceasing; cast your doubts and burdens upon him. Let them go; surrender.
2. When you are struggling with doubt or unbelief, reach out to Christian friends; do your best to express your doubt with curiosity; ask questions with a sincere desire to understand. Listen and consider what you hear. Seek ways to apply the gospel in your life.

If you want support in a nurturing, loving, caring, and encouraging environment, attend the Alpha program and learn more about your Christian faith. Join us at Celebrate Recovery!

(By the way, one of the things I deeply appreciate about that program is the openness and frank expression of spiritual doubt and confusion and the opportunity to get encouragement, guidance, and prayer.

And for you mature Christians:

1. Reach out to those who are struggling and offer to help. Ask questions. Listen, engage, don’t preach or hold forth. Make sure you

understand the issues the other person is dealing with. Pray with them; explore scripture with them.

2. Stay in contact with the person if you can; hold them up in prayer; call them or send them encouraging messages and suggestions for ongoing learning. **You will be amazed at how this strengthens your own conviction and belief.**

And for all of us:

Remember, in Mark 9:29, Jesus said to his disciples, **“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”**[b] (unbelief)

We are called to serve and to grow. There are opportunities to do that all around you.

In closing, you can be a critic or a comforter; a discourager or an encourager; a stumbling block or a stepping stone.

This is true whether we are speaking with unbelievers, new Christians, with our families, with our social group, even with our pastors! They in particular need our encouragement. (Send a card, write an email, send a text. It will make their day!)

Christ calls us to do what he did and that we can do these things through his strength and power and might that resides in us through the Holy Spirit when we surrender to his will.

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Be a Seeker!