



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# SELF-DOUBT: HOW TO OVERCOME IT AND STRENGTHEN FAITH IN HARD TIMES



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## SELF-DOUBT: HOW TO OVERCOME IT AND STRENGTHEN FAITH IN HARD TIMES



# INTRODUCTION

Like many people, I've grown more skeptical with age. Doubt is a frequent visitor, daily checking in on me, weighing nearly everything that goes through my mind. The accuracy of a weather forecast, the claims of an online article, the promises of a politician, the reliability of a co-worker, the health benefits of the latest food craze-these are all questions that are constantly circling in my mind. But I don't think that's altogether unique to me. We all wrestle with doubt, and at times this wrestle becomes self-doubt, where we begin questioning not just circumstances, but our own judgment, value, or ability.

To be fair, many of our doubts are reasonable. Often, they come from years of lived experience. For instance, to doubt the health benefits of a moldy banana is probably a good thing. To question the words of a false teacher is an act of faithfulness. To doubt the integrity of a swindler is prudence. Not all doubt is bad. More times than we realize, doubt can be a form of wisdom.

But Christians aren't meant to be defined by doubt. After all, we're to be people of faith-faith in the crucified, buried, risen, and ascended Savior, King Jesus. Luke, at the very outset of his Gospel, makes clear his purpose in writing: "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). Christianity isn't about drifting endlessly in uncertainty, unsure of where we stand with God. The Christian enjoys an assured union with God through the finished work of Christ. All of which is extended through faith.

At the end of the day, God calls us to find rest by having a steady and unwavering confidence in who he is and what he has accomplished

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through his Son. Confidence in God allows us to rest in hard times, whereas self-doubt and spiritual uncertainty lead to restlessness. Understanding self doubt meaning is important here-not simply a questioning of circumstances, but a questioning of identity, assurance, and competence. Doubt of this type can become heavy, especially when we wonder how to overcome self-doubt in moments where faith feels weak.

To doubt God's work is sinful. Yes, to doubt some things is wise. But to doubt what God says is true is foolish. God says, "the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind" (Jas. 1:6). Throughout Scripture we see profound examples of doubt in the Bible, not to shame believers, but to show that even God's servants wrestle with uncertainty while learning to trust Him more deeply.

So, what happens when doubt creeps in-not about a politician, an old piece of fruit, or a headline-but about God and what he says is true? What do you do when you find yourself questioning what God wants you to hold with confidence? How do you navigate spiritual uncertainty and learn how to overcome self-doubt?

That is where this life skill guide begins.

Part One shines a light on doubt itself-defining it, uncovering its sources, and tracing it through Scripture.

Part Two turns to God's response to our doubt. The goal is for us to clearly see God's patience and mercy and thus be moved to bring our questions to him when they arise.

Finally, Part Three explores the ways God provides to move us from doubt to a stronger faith and a deeper assurance.

Lord willing, these sections will build upon one another, forming a clear path forward for when the fog of doubt settles in.

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# 1

## IDENTIFYING DOUBT

### ***Defining Doubt***

Put simply, doubt can be defined as “a lack of confidence.”

Our English word “confidence” is derived from the Latin “con” (meaning “with”) and “fidere” (meaning “to trust”). To doubt something is for it to be without– or lacking– our trust. When this uncertainty becomes personal, many Christians experience moments of self-doubt, especially during spiritual struggle.

There are various reasons why one might doubt, but in a broad sense, we can group these reasons into one of three categories:

1. Intellectual doubt
2. Emotional doubt
3. Willful doubt

Intellectual doubt questions the truthfulness of a certain claim. The messenger may be trustworthy, but the claim seems unlikely because the facts point another way. For instance, if a friend says, “Dress warm - snow tomorrow!” in the middle of summer, intellectual doubt is sure to follow closely! Or if one family member insists the reunion is next Saturday while several others confirm it’s the following Saturday, logic raises a question. When claims don’t align with the facts, intellectual doubt arises. This is why Christians sometimes look for a bible verse about doubt, such as James 1:6, which warns that “the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind,” offering clarity when the facts feel unclear.

Emotional doubt is at the heart-level and grows out of painful experiences, commonly in relationships. When an abusive husband for the umpteenth time promises he’ll do better, when cancer returns and the patient doubts the effectiveness of more chemo; when an unreliable friend vows he’ll

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change, emotional doubt surfaces. Prior pain produces future doubt. Emotional doubt is often less about needing evidence and more about self-protection. Emotional wounds can also increase self-doubt, making it difficult to trust people or outcomes.

Willful doubt takes its cues from our biases and desires. Our presuppositions and preferences serve as a lens, directing how we interpret information. When the referee penalizes our team, we're predisposed to question the call. We don't want the claim to be true, so we are suspicious and prone to deny it. That is willful doubt. For many Christians, the challenge isn't just intellectual clarity, but learning how to stop doubting yourself when personal desires conflict with what God has revealed. Willful doubt reminds us that surrendering our own preferences to God is an important part of discipleship.

When doubt appears, start by pinpointing its root. Is it intellectual, where the facts don't add up? Emotional-where feelings override evidence? Or willful-shaped by bias and desire? Often all three overlap; that's normal. Your task is to identify which holds the strongest sway. Scripture offers wisdom, and believers can turn to scriptures on doubt as a reminder that God patiently meets us in our uncertainty.

The good news is that all three kinds of doubt appear in Scripture, which tells us God is not surprised by our questions, whatever their source. In the next section, we will look at a few biblical examples and learn what they teach about how God's people-and God himself-respond to our doubt. The Bible and doubt go hand in hand far more than many Christians realize.

### ***Biblical Examples***

One of the most well-known examples of doubt comes from one of Jesus' own disciples. Thomas's hesitation was so notable that history knows him as "Doubting Thomas." Not exactly the legacy most of us would hope for.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples. But Thomas wasn't there, and when the others told him that Jesus was truly alive, Thomas refused to accept their testimony. He declared, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25).

In that moment, Thomas was wrestling with intellectual doubt. He had never witnessed a man resurrect himself. The facts, as he understood

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them, didn't support the claim. He wasn't opposed to believing-he just needed more evidence. Perhaps that's the type of doubt you harbor. You're not resistant to truth; you just can't move forward without additional confirmation. Identifying doubt honestly is one of the first steps in learning how to stop doubting yourself and trusting God more fully.

Consider a financial example. You might not oppose the idea of buying a new home, but you know the state of your bank account. The numbers simply don't support the possibility right now. The information in front of you naturally produces intellectual doubt.

Your struggle might be different. Maybe your hurdle isn't an intellectual one, but one rooted in experience. Returning to the house-hunting scenario-imagine wanting a new home for years, yet every attempt to purchase one mysteriously falls apart. Every time you've gone down this road, something goes wrong. So, when the perfect home becomes available, you hesitate. Not because the facts are unclear, but because your heart has been bruised by repeated disappointment. This is emotional doubt. Past pain whispers, Don't risk the hurt again. You know all too well the reality of Proverbs 13:12, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick..." Avoiding disappointment feels safer than getting your hopes up yet again.

Psalms 22 gives us a biblical window into emotional doubt. David cries out to God continuously, yet there is no answer. Exhausted and discouraged, he begins to doubt whether God is listening at all:

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest" (Ps. 22:1-2)*

The emotional weight of silence is crushing. David isn't doubting facts-he's doubting God's nearness, his care, his willingness to act. Like the house-hunter too familiar with disappointment, David struggles to believe that rescue will ever come. Here again, the Bible and doubt show that God welcomes honest questions rather than hiding them.

Still, perhaps your doubt is neither intellectual nor emotional. Perhaps it is willful.



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This time, your doubt isn't rooted in your understanding of your bank account (intellectual doubt) or the pain of experience (emotional doubt). This time, you doubt you'll purchase a home because you simply don't want to purchase one. Your will isn't aligned with homeownership, so you willfully doubt that you'll be a homeowner.

A biblical example of willful doubt is found in the account of the rich young man in Mark 10:17-22. After Jesus explains the necessity of keeping God's law to inherit eternal life, the young man boldly affirms that he's accomplished that. Jesus, knowing better, exposes the man's idolatry. He tells him to let go of his riches and follow him. Rather than obey, we're told the man was "Disheartened by the saying, [and] he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22).

Presented with a choice between Christ and his treasure, he chose his treasure. His doubt wasn't rooted in logic or trauma. His desire ruled him. Willful doubt says, *I don't want that to be true, so I won't accept it.*

Each of these examples teaches us something crucial: Scripture recognizes that doubt comes from different places. When we identify what kind of doubt we are experiencing-intellectual, emotional, or willful-we are better equipped to examine our hearts, pray specifically, and address our doubts wisely.

The goal isn't to pretend doubt doesn't exist, but to trace it back to its root-so that we can bring it honestly before the God who welcomes our questions and transforms our hearts. Looking to scriptures on doubt gives believers clarity, comfort, and direction when facing uncertainty, and helps us grow beyond self-doubt with confidence rooted in God's promises.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What is your history with doubt? What are you most likely to doubt? Have you ever doubted God?
2. Which of the three types of doubt do you most struggle with?
3. In the past, how have you gotten through doubt?

## 2

# GOD'S RESPONSE TO OUR DOUBT

Before considering God's response to our doubt, let me highlight two foundational truths:

1. God's ways are not our ways.
2. Misrepresentation fuels doubt.

### *God's Ways Are Not Our Ways*

To guide him, I spent hours drafting an eight-page handwritten letter on a legal pad, earnestly recommending what I believed was in his best interest and that of his family. I delivered it with the hope that he would heed my words.

In the following days, it seemed my efforts had borne fruit. He agreed, and I rejoiced at the prospect of a healthier new chapter—a long-term blessing for them all. Or so I assumed.

Yet when the time came for a decision, he chose the opposite path. Despite partial alignment, he ultimately doubted my counsel.

I was hurt.

All our prior conversations, the labor poured into that letter, every word... proved unpersuasive. In my fleshly moments, frustration, annoyance, and confusion surged. In moments of grace, I trusted he had chosen wisely for his family, and that God's sovereign purposes transcended my own.

This experience reveals a core reason we hesitate to bring doubts to God: we fear he will react as I did—offended, irritated, or exasperated by our skepticism toward his Word. After all, if imperfect human counsel stings when rejected, how much more might the perfect God grieve our unbelief? Such thinking often intertwines self-doubt, fear and doubt, and a reluctance to trust that God welcomes honest questions.

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However, such reasoning overlooks a critical distinction.

*Though we bear God's image, we are not God. He declares in Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD."*

- When counsel is spurned, our thoughts veer toward anger or resentment. But God's thoughts are not ours.
- When efforts seem futile, we may abandon the work. But God's ways are not ours.

Precisely because his ways transcend ours, the Apostle Paul assures the Philippians: *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:6). Were God's ways like ours, no such certainty would exist. He might:

- Lose interest in faltering believers.
- Grow irritated with repeated failures.
- Redirect resources to "more promising" candidates.
- Hold sins against us indefinitely.
- Exhaust his patience.
- Deliver the judgment our sins merit.

This mirrors our patterns. Yet God proclaims otherwise: he does not model himself after us. His ways are infinitely higher. Thus, when doubting God, we must resist projecting human frailties onto him. Misrepresentation often intensifies faith and doubt, making us uncertain where we stand, even though bible scriptures on doubt repeatedly show a God who listens patiently and draws near to those who struggle.

As Christians learn how to overcome self-doubt, part of the journey is remembering that God never scolds his children for asking honest questions. Returning to Scripture aligns our hearts with his character and calms the inner fear that our doubts disqualify us.

### ***Misrepresentation Fuels Doubt***

As a pastor, I'm subject to various kinds of criticism. A sermon lands flat, counsel is rejected, a blog post is misread, our missions budget is questioned, the bulletin font is too small-pick any week, and something is under fire. One mentor told me years ago, "If you can't handle criticism,

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you don't belong in the pastorate." He was right. Over time, I've grown thicker skin. Most barbs now bounce off.

But one still draws blood: criticism rooted in misrepresentation.

To misrepresent someone is to become their unauthorized spokesman and get it wrong. Someone else defines my motives, twists my words, or invents beliefs I've never held. I'm left voiceless while a caricature wearing my name is publicly dismantled. That stings because it's personal and false.

Now, follow me. When we believe lies about God, we do the same thing to him. We bear false witness (Exod. 20:16). We craft a sub-perfect god and call it Yahweh. A God who is less gracious, less patient, less sovereign, or less loving than Scripture reveals is a misrepresentation that fuels doubt rather than dispels it.

When we operate with the assumption that God is less-than-perfect, we misrepresent him. This is especially problematic because he is the solution to our doubt. Imagine a physician prescribing diet and exercise, only for the patient to tell his family, "Well, the doc says to crush candy and binge Netflix." The misrepresentation will cause more problems. Likewise, when we project human pettiness onto God-assuming he's offended by our questions-we sabotage the very relationship that resolves doubt.

This is why Scripture-not assumptions, feelings, or speculation-is foundational. When fear and doubt begin shaping how we think, only a renewed picture of God heals that distortion. Returning again and again to bible scriptures on doubt offers clarity, showing that God is near, patient, and strong enough to handle our questions. Scripture does not silence doubt-it redirects it toward a God who welcomes honesty and transforms the heart.

Growing in this confidence becomes a powerful step in learning how to overcome self-doubt, replacing anxious uncertainty with a steady trust in God's character.

### ***The Psalms***

Here's a staggering fact: over one-third of the 150 Psalms are laments. These aren't polite suggestions; they're gut-wrenching cries from believers teetering on the edge of faith.

Consider a few with me:

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### **Psalm 10:1**

*"Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"*

### **Psalm 13:1**

*"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"*

### **Psalm 22:1**

*"Why have you forsaken me?"*

### **Psalm 42:3**

*"My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?'"*

### **Psalm 42:9**

*"Why have you forgotten me?"*

### **Psalm 44:23-24**

*"Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"*

### **Psalm 74:1**

*"O God, why do you cast us off forever?"*

### **Psalm 74:11**

*"Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?"*

### **Psalm 77:9**

*"Has God forgotten to be gracious?"*

### **Psalm 88:14**

*"O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?"*

Many more could be listed, but the point is this: these aren't bubbly, sanitized prayers. They're Spirit-inspired words from people clinging to God in the midst of their doubt.

Their circumstances were painful. They felt lonely, abandoned, condemned, cast off, confused, forgotten, and frustrated. Answers weren't provided as quickly as they hoped. Doubts swirled.

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Yet, notice what they did. They marched straight into the throne room and unloaded. They cast all their anxieties on God (1 Peter 5:7).

Again.

And again.

And again.

Notice what never happens: God never scolds them for honesty. He never sighs, “Not this again.” He never threatens to trade them in for more compliant worshippers. Instead, he canonizes their complaints for the eternal good of all the believers who would come after them and be like them. Why? Because honest doubt hurled at the feet of a trustworthy God is not rebellion—it’s a relationship.

I love having conversations with my kids. They’re one of God’s greatest gifts to me, and I can’t begin to describe the love and affection I have for them. When they have questions about life—as they often do—I’m grateful they come to me. I want them to! Helping them understand the world around them is a joy.

Admittedly, my answers aren’t always sufficient. I’m a deeply flawed father. My patience tank hits empty. My explanations falter. Yet even I delight when my kids bring me their mess.

Oftentimes, they have follow-up questions to my answers. Sometimes those questions are colored with doubt. But I’m okay with that. In fact, I’d be saddened if they felt uneasy bringing those things to me—if they thought they’d be safer taking them to someone else, or worse, bottling them up. I want to hear from my kids, even when what I hear is their wrestle with doubt.

Similarly, God wants to hear from his children. He went to great lengths to purchase and redeem his children. My love for my kids pales in comparison to God’s love for you and me. If I, as a sinful father, enjoy hearing from my kids, how much more does God, as a perfect Father, enjoy hearing from his? The God who spared not his own Son (Rom. 8:32) has secured unbreakable access for his children. He didn’t redeem you to tolerate you from a distance; he redeemed you so you could draw near—even when “near” means you bring your doubts with you.

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Like the Psalmists, bring your “How long?” and your “Why have you...?” Bring your confusion and the questions you’re too embarrassed to ask anyone else. God already knows them, and he bids you to come.

### ***Job***

Perhaps one of the most explicit wrestling with doubt we see in Scripture, Job is a book well worth our attention. He was a godly man who was suffering greatly because Satan was convinced that Job’s love for God was simply the result of his prosperity. Satan believed that if God removed his blessing from Job, then Job would curse God and turn his back on him. So, God permits Satan to attack and take nearly everything away from Job.

Job loses his wealth, his servants, his children, the respect of his wife, his health, his reputation, his possessions, and his friends. In the midst of all this loss, Job spends roughly 29 chapters crying out to God, giving voice to his confusion and his doubts. This shows us that self-doubt can coexist with faith, and Scripture helps us learn how to deal with self doubt by continuing to seek God honestly.

Then, in chapter 38, God breaks his silence and answers Job. “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me” (Job 38:2–3). At this moment, God unleashes a line of questions and statements that leave Job without an answer.

When you read God’s whirlwind response in Job 38–41, it can feel like divine irritation at Job’s relentless questions. Yet, what he’s doing with Job is answering him according to his foolishness (Prov. 26:4). Like a wise father absorbing an angry child’s outburst, God waits, then speaks unflinching truth with tender precision.

The twist in chapter 42 is this: God announces that he’s pleased with Job and angry with Job’s friends (the ones who were trying to defend God!) (Job 42:7–8). The honest doubter is commended, and the avowed defenders of God are critiqued. How can this be?

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Tim Keller's comments on this are helpful:

They were prayers. You see, Job was being angry, and he was complaining, but he was being angry and complaining to God. He never walked away from God.

He said, 'I don't understand you, God. I'm angry at You.' But he never turned away. He stayed with God when he was getting nothing out of it, which means in the end, Satan was defeated. And what's happening here is this man, even though he is not in any way praying the way you ought to pray. He's still praying.

Keller's point is that, even in the midst of Job's doubts, God was pleased with him because he kept bringing his doubts and frustrations back to God. Even in the midst of his confusion, Job knew he could bring his questions to God-and he did! This is a powerful model for learning how to get rid of self doubt: not by suppressing it, but by honestly entrusting it to God.

Yes, Job needed to learn that "God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps. 115:3). And yes, God informed him of that in a precise way. But no, God was not irritated or angry with Job for bringing his doubts to him. On the contrary, he was pleased with Job. When considering what does God say about doubt, Job's story reminds us that God welcomes our honesty and teaches us to move from doubt and trust, not trust instead of doubt.

### ***Israel's Wilderness Wanderings***

Concerning Israel's wilderness wanderings, God does appear to be angry with their consistent doubt of him. But this is where it's key for us to notice at least two things.

First, Israel's response to their doubt was noticeably different than Job's. When Israel doubted God, they acted defiantly. When Job doubted God, he shared his doubts in prayer while still seeking to follow God faithfully. He had questions, yes, but he didn't abandon God. Israel, on the other hand, abandoned God several times. Unlike Job, who laid his doubts before God and continued to pursue righteousness, Israel clung to their doubt and chose to rebel against God. Yes, they both doubted. But their response to doubt was miles apart.



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Even still, God never abandoned Israel. Yes, there were painful consequences that resulted from their doubt. Yes, their doubt hindered their communion with God, just like it does with us when we doubt. But, no, God never turned his back on them. He continued to show them mercy. This shows that Scripture guides us in how to deal with self doubt not by ignoring it but by returning again to God's mercy.

Second, it's important to understand the difference between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant.

In the Old Covenant, God's people were under the Law, which exposed their disobedience by design. You see, the Old Covenant represents a time in redemptive history where God's Law lorded over Israel, forcing them to acknowledge their need for grace because of their failure to perfectly obey. There simply weren't enough bulls and goats to cover all of Israel's sins. Israel couldn't, in their own strength, live up to God's righteous demands.

You should be thinking at this point: "Well, neither can I!" And you'd be right. None of us can. We are all like Israel, unable to fulfill God's law. That's why we need the New Covenant, where members are united to Christ and his perfections. This means that when God looks upon us, he doesn't see our doubt; he sees the perfection of Christ, the One who never doubted. Being united to Jesus means that every one of our failings-including our doubt- is (1) paid for in full by his substitutionary death on the cross; and (2) replaced with his perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). He's taken our filthy, sinful rags and replaced them with his righteous robes.

Therefore, we don't receive from God the condemnation our doubt deserves. Why? Because we're united to Christ, who bore our condemnation for us. God doesn't view us as unfaithful doubters. He views us the way he views his Son: as a beloved child who has done no wrong. He sees the righteous robes that Christ has placed upon us and is pleased with us.

Because of this, we can bring our doubts to God, trusting that any anger or irritation our doubt deserves has already been absorbed by Christ. For believers wrestling with self-doubt, this is profoundly freeing: confidence

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grows not from suppressing questions, but from knowing Christ already carried the burden.

If you're in Christ, no condemnation awaits you (Rom. 8:1).

### ***The Gospels***

During his earthly ministry, Jesus consistently commended faith.

#### **Matthew 9:22**

*Jesus turned, and seeing her, he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.*

#### **Matthew 21:21**

*"Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen."*

#### **Mark 2:5**

*And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

#### **Mark 11:22**

*And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God.*

#### **Luke 7:9**

*When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."*

#### **Luke 17:19**

*And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."*

These passages are a small sampling of the times Jesus spoke positively about faith. But it would be a misrepresentation of the gospels to think he never encountered doubt. The gospels teach us that although faith is the appropriate response to Christ, doubt is a reality.

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The first example to consider is with his chief disciple, Peter. In Matthew 14, Jesus is walking on water. Understandably, the disciples are shocked to see their Teacher walking on the waves and not sinking! In a remarkable sequence of events, instead of stepping into the boat with his disciples, Jesus invites Peter to step out of the boat onto the water with him. Peter agrees, steps out, and walks to Jesus!

Can you imagine?!

But then, when he sees the danger around him, fear and doubt kick up, which leads to his sinking. As he begins to sink, he cries out to Jesus, “Lord, save me” (Matt . 14:30). Jesus grabs him and says to him, “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” (Matt. 14:31b).

Here, we see Peter, the man who was in Jesus’ inner circle and had witnessed him perform incredible miracles, doubting Jesus. We’re reminded again that God’s ways are not our ways! If it were me, I’d be tempted to let Peter fall in. “That’s what you get for doubting me, Pete! Swim on back to the boat. Who wants to try next?” Thankfully, God’s ways aren’t our ways. Instead, notice what Jesus does the moment Peter asks for help: “*Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him*” (Matt. 14:31a).

Despite his good intentions, Peter had doubts. Rather than keep those doubts to himself, he called out to Jesus and received the help he needed.

In Mark 9, we see a similar example. This time, instead of one of the twelve wrestling with doubt, it’s a man with a demon-possessed son. No one was able to heal the boy due to their unbelief (Mark 9:18-19). So, the father brought his request to Jesus, to which Jesus responded, “*‘All things are possible for one who believes’*” (Mark 9:23). In a moment of extreme honesty, the man replies, “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24).

Like Peter, the father in Mark 9 is wrestling with doubt. But that’s not the only similarity between these two. Also, like Peter, instead of suppressing that doubt, the father confessed it by calling out to Jesus for help.

In each case, the one doubting confessed his doubt to Jesus and asked Jesus for help. This is key. Step one: confess. Step two: request. God is a gracious Father who takes joy in coming to the aid of those who call on

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him. Like a good Father, he doesn't take pleasure in watching his children flail. In the Gospels, we see the heart of God on display, extending compassion to those who doubt and consistently helping those who ask for it.

It would be great if all uncertainties were taken away with Christ at his ascension. Unfortunately, even after his resurrection and subsequent departure, many of God's people continued to struggle with doubt.

### *Epistles*

A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal that eighteen of the twenty-one epistles reference doubt, either implicitly or explicitly. Of those, two of them were written by half-brothers of Jesus (James and Jude), who we know had their own doubts about their brother (John 7:5)!

The brief book of Jude is uniquely helpful for our discussion. Jude, once a doubter who dismissed Jesus' claims, now urgently warns believers about the false teachers stirring up doubt.

Toward the end of his letter, Jude charges his readers to "*Have mercy on those who doubt*" (Jude 22). In all likelihood, Jude remembered the days when he doubted his brother's claims and recalled how his own brother showed him mercy. How Jesus didn't harbor anger toward him, but instead was patient with him, repeatedly showing compassion, and eventually helping him to see the truth.

So now, as Jude concludes his letter, he knows his readers will encounter people being swayed by false teachers. He knows they'll run into those wrestling with doubt.

And what's his counsel to them?

Show them mercy.

Why?

Because he knows that's what Jesus did with him. He learned from firsthand experience that Jesus' heart toward the doubter is one of mercy, patience, compassion, and love.

From Israel's doubt in the wilderness, to the psalmists' doubt in their sufferings, to Job's doubt in the waves of tragedy, to the doubt

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encountered in the gospels, and to the doubt found in the epistles, God's response to doubt is consistently merciful.

He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exod. 34:6).

He is gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29).

He will never cast out anyone who comes to him, even the one wrestling with doubt (John 6:37).

Friends, take your doubts to God with boldness (Heb. 4:16), knowing that he is not annoyed or irritated with you. Your union to his Son has secured for you his attentive ear and his Fatherly affection.

Now, let's consider how doubt can be transformed into confidence.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. Why is God merciful to us in our doubts?
2. If we know God is merciful, why are we still sometimes slow to go to God for help with our doubt?
3. What would it look like for you to give your doubts to God, like we see in the examples from Scripture above? Discuss these topics with your mentor.

# 3

## TRANSFORMING DOUBT TO FAITH

In Part One, we defined doubt and identified the different kinds of doubt we encounter (intellectual, emotional, and willful).

In Part Two, we considered biblical examples of doubt throughout the canon of Scripture, and we examined God's heart toward those who doubt.

In Part Three, we'll cover what to do when hard times hit, when doubt rises, and how to transform doubt into strengthened faith. For many believers, self-doubt and confusion can feel overwhelming, especially when someone says, "I want to believe in God but I have doubts." Scripture reassures us that we are not alone in this struggle and that doubt and faith often coexist before faith becomes stronger.

### ***My Story***

I made a profession of faith when I was young—probably seven or eight years old. But like many with a story like that, I wasn't serious about my faith until my high school and college years.

That season was pivotal for me. The Lord led me to repent of long-held idols, he increased my love for the local church, he developed in me a greater desire to serve than be served, my wife (Danielle) and I began dating, and I was growing spiritually. Many wonderful things were happening, and life was good! But the shoe was about to drop.

As I neared college graduation and marriage, one trial after another began to hit. The Great Recession led to my dad losing his business. Losing the business led to our family's bankruptcy. The bankruptcy led to the loss of our home and vehicles. The financial strain led to my parents separating.

## FIELD GUIDE

In the midst of this, my dad got sick, but of course, he was too busy dealing with everything else to go to the doctor. By the time he did, the cancer was already stage three. During all of this, one of Danielle's brothers died. Eventually, as his cancer progressed to stage four, my dad agreed to move in with Danielle and me (newlyweds) for round-the-clock care. Not long after, he passed away in our apartment while holding my hand.

My life went from progressively hopeful and optimistic to beaten and bruised by wave after wave of sorrow.

I knew what "sorrows like sea billows" felt like.

During that season of sorrow, I begged God to intercede. I pleaded with him to make things right. To fix what was broken. I knew God's ultimate motivation was his own glory (Isa. 48:9–11). But I didn't understand why he wouldn't heal my dad, or fix my parents' marriage, or financially provide for our family, or heal Danielle's brother. I didn't have answers.

Yet, despite the pain and unanswered questions, the Lord miraculously used that season to strengthen my faith. How? By leading me through the same four things anyone else with doubt needs to go through. For believers facing grief, uncertainty, or the fear of doubt, these four steps become deeply practical. The biblical examples of doubt teach us that God welcomes honesty even in our weakness.

### 1. Take it to God

When questions arise and uncertainty begins to fester, let that be a sign that you need to talk to God. You'll be tempted to hold on to it yourself for a while. The enemy will try to convince you that it's not significant enough to bring to God, at least not yet. Don't listen to that voice. Take your doubts to God the moment you recognize them. When you feel self-doubt creeping in or when you say, "I want to believe in God but I have doubts," prayer is often the first and most healing response.

Charles Spurgeon, often referred to as "the prince of preachers," suffered with his own doubts at times. Yet, he knew the importance of going to Christ, despite the devil's accusations:

*"I find it very convenient to come every day to Christ as a sinner – as I came at first. 'You are no saint' says the devil. Well, if I am not, I am a sinner, and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Sink or swim, there I go – other hope I have none."*

## SELF-DOUBT: HOW TO OVERCOME IT AND STRENGTHEN FAITH IN HARD TIMES

You may think your doubts make you a sinner-and perhaps they do-but Christ came into the world to save sinners. Therefore, if you take your doubt to him, you have nothing to fear. Doubt and faith grow together whenever doubt is honestly brought into God's presence rather than hidden away.

### 2. Be Transparent

Be transparent with God. As you take your doubts to him, don't hold back. Be awkwardly transparent. The concern you'll naturally have is that you're being irreverent or disrespectful to God. But if the psalmist can be transparent enough to request that God bash in the teeth of his enemies (Ps. 58), you can be transparent with your doubts. God can handle it.

Be transparent with God's people. Christians are commanded to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). This isn't possible unless we're honest with one another about the things that are burdening us. If you're not already part of one, join a healthy church where you hear the hope of the gospel every week. Where the practice of confessing sin and struggles is a normal thing. Oftentimes, you'll find that others around you have had the same struggles, and they'll be able to share what was helpful to them.

This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote to the church in Corinth:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)*

When you're afflicted with doubt, transparently share that with other Christians. You may find that they've gone through the same thing and that God provided them with answers that will be helpful to you as well. Their stories become practical examples of doubt that show how believers grow through struggle, not in spite of it.

### 3. Ask for Help

**Ask God for help.** Like Peter when he began to sink, like the father in Mark 9, and like the psalmists, boldly ask God for his gracious aid. You're not inconveniencing God by asking for his help. In fact, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is called our "Helper" (John 14:26)!

When God wants to comfort his people, he tells them, "*fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*" (Isa. 41:10).



## FIELD GUIDE

Ask him for help.

The primary place God provides help for his people is in his Word. Go back to his Word. Return there again and again. Be reminded of who he is. Plumb the depths of Scripture. Seek understanding like hidden treasure (Prov. 2:4).

**Ask God's people for help.** It's important to be transparent, but you also need to take the next step and ask for help. It's okay to reach out and say, "Hey, I'm really struggling to believe \_\_\_\_\_ right now. Do you have any experience with that, or any resources I can borrow, or can we just meet to chat?"

When you became a Christian, you were adopted into the body of Christ. That body exists to reflect Christ and help other members of the body. Paul told the church in Corinth, "*If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together*" (1 Cor. 1:26). It's a normal thing to help other members when they need it. Again, the importance of belonging to a healthy, gospel-centered church cannot be overstated here.

As you wrestle with doubt, you need to be around others who can point you to the truth. You need to hear God's Word proclaimed faithfully, you need to sing songs that reflect what God says is true, you need to hear the prayers of others around you as they confess their own sin and ask God for help, and you need to be reminded of the assurance that's found in Christ for all those who go to him for help.

### 4. Trust

You may not receive answers as quickly as you'd like. When Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection, Jesus showed him mercy. But as one author put it:

*Jesus's response was merciful delay — he let Thomas sit in his unbelief for eight miserable, lonely, probably scary days. And then, when the time was right, Jesus appeared to him, saying, 'Do not disbelieve, but believe' (John 20:27). He knows when to deal silently, and for how long, with doubts that assault us when, for whatever reason, we elevate our wisdom above God's (1 Cor. 1:25).*

Trust God even when you don't know the answers. Trust that he's working in ways that you may not understand. Humble yourself before him, and when doubt rears up, plant this flag: there is an answer.

## **SELF-DOUBT: HOW TO OVERCOME IT AND STRENGTHEN FAITH IN HARD TIMES**

I can't mathematically prove gravity, yet every morning I step out trusting I won't drift into space. So with doubt: answers may feel unreachable and elusive, but God's Word is trustworthy. Plant your feet firmly on Scripture and trust that God will hold you fast.



## CONCLUSION

You and I don't need to have the answer to all things. In fact, we won't ever have the answer to all things this side of glory. But when your questions feel overwhelming, be reminded that you can take those to God. His response to the doubters is mercy. Be transparent with him and with his people. And trust him, even when your answers aren't arriving as quickly as you'd like.

Spurgeon put it well when he said, *"Often doubts will prevail. What a mercy it is that it is not your hold of Christ that saves you, but His hold of you! What a sweet fact that it is not how you grasp His hand, but His grasp of yours that saves you."*

As you bring your doubts to God, be reminded that the *strength* of your faith is not what saves you. What saves you is the *object* of your faith, which is Christ alone.

Your grip may waver, but Christ's grip never does. The crucified, risen, and reigning King gripped the cross so that even your weakest whisper of faith is welded to his finished work. Take your doubts to him openly and honestly. Ask him to help your unbelief. Trust that he welcomes you, will help you by his word, and will continue to hold on to you in the thick of doubt.



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