

Discussion Starter #1: Do you think doubt could have any positive benefits? If so, how? If not, why not?

Key Passage: “I believe; help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)

Understanding Doubt

1. Doubt is not the same as disbelief.

Doubt is a natural part of faith – it is a longing to be certain of the things we already trust. Doubt voices its questions and concerns from the standpoint of faith. The doubter already believes but is looking for more light.

In contrast, disbelief is an obstinate, rebellious action by someone who does not want to believe and fears having to change if faith were true. A disbeliever is content with darkness. For example, atheist Thomas Nagel said, “I want atheism, to be true. It isn’t that I just don’t believe in God. I don’t want there to be a God. I don’t want the universe to be like that.”

Discuss: Explain the differences between doubt and disbelief in your own words.

2. We will always have questions—and perhaps the occasional doubt—about the immense and deep subjects of God, Jesus, the Bible, eternity, etc.

Only God knows everything about everything! Since we are not omniscient, we will always be growing and learning. However, just because we will always have questions doesn’t mean we don’t have any answers. Yes, we’ll always have questions—and sometimes perhaps even occasional doubts—but we are not left without good reasons for what we believe. There are many questions about God, the Bible, etc. that have satisfying answers, and these answers are sufficient for us to accept the Bible as God’s Word, place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and entrust our lives and eternity to God.

Discuss: Do you think a person’s heart attitude (e.g., humility vs. skepticism, etc.) in the way they ask questions and search for answers matters? Why or why not?

3. Doubt affects atheists and believers in other religions, not just Christians.

Doubt is not a problem for Christians alone. All other worldviews – whether Jewish, Islamic, atheist, or religious – also must deal with the fact that their beliefs are based upon faith, and therefore they are also vulnerable to doubt. C.S. Lewis said, “Now that I am a Christian, I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable; but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable.”

How Jesus encouraged one of His followers who struggled with doubt

Jesus said that among those born of women there had not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist (Mat.11:11). John was a godly man raised in a godly home. His parents served God, and his mother, Elizabeth, knew that Jesus was “Lord” while He was still in His mother Mary’s womb (Lk.1:39-45). John grew up with this information, and Jesus’ status as Messiah was confirmed to him when he saw God’s Spirit descend on Jesus at the point of His baptism (Lk.3:22). If anyone should have been sure of Jesus’ identity, it was John the Baptist. But the New Testament reveals a moment of dramatic doubt in John’s life. While in prison for confronting Herod about his sin, and knowing that he would likely be executed soon, John sent two of his followers to ask Jesus a question that revealed his doubt: “*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*” (Lk.7:19).

Jesus’ response was important and revealing. At that very time, Jesus cured many people in the presence of John’s disciples then said, “*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me*” (Lk.17:22-23). Jesus could have condemned John, but He didn’t. He could have scolded him for his failure to trust what John’s own mother seemed to know so clearly, but Jesus didn’t do that either. Jesus could have instructed John to simply trust in what he had been raised to know, but that’s not what Jesus did. Instead, Jesus provided John with evidence. As a demonstration of His deity, Jesus performed miracles consistent with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (Is.29:18; 35:5-6). From this event in Scripture, three reminders emerge:

- **Even people with strong faith doubt sometimes.** If John the Baptist experienced doubt, we may also find ourselves in a similar situation. In spite of their confidence and strength of character, many wise believers have experienced doubt in the face of their circumstances. The issue is not “Will I have doubts sometimes?” but “How will I deal with my doubts if/when they arise?”
- **Bring your doubts to Jesus—it’s okay to tell God exactly how you really feel.** Share your heart honestly with Him. He will be there for you, as He was with John.
- **Defeat your doubts – what you don’t know – with what you do know.** When times of doubt arise, it is important for us to return to the evidence that brought us to faith in the first place. That’s what Jesus did for John; He provided clear evidence that helped John “connect the dots” and reminded John of Jesus’ identity. When we return to evidence – what we do know – to strengthen our faith, we find resources available to develop our confidence. Sometimes we need to go through the foyer of doubt to get into the sanctuary of certainty.

Discuss: What do you find encouraging about the way that Jesus dealt with John the Baptist’s doubts?

Discuss: How would you encourage a new believer who struggling with doubt?