

The Roots Of Our Doubts

Doubts attack all of us. It seems that none of us are immune from their penetration into our lives. Os Guinness, in his excellent book on doubt, *In Two Minds*, said, “*Only God and certain madmen have no doubts*” (p.42). And if we have doubts about our beliefs, it will cause us to behave inconsistently with our Christian faith.

Why? Because beliefs determine behavior. How I think determines how I act and react in real-life situations. Guinness writes,

To believe is to be in 'one mind' about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be in 'one mind' about rejecting it. To doubt is to waiver between the two, to believe and disbelieve at once, and so to be 'in two minds' . . . The heart of doubt is a divided heart. (p. 25)

It is important to realize that doubt is not the same as unbelief. Jesus Christ never responded to unbelief, but He seemed always to have time for one with sincere doubts or questions.

How do we deal with those doubts? When in doubt . . . what? Take a moment and answer that question for yourself. When in doubt, how do you typically respond? Write your answer in the space below.

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Read James 1:2-5. I would suggest that in this study, you use either the *New International Version* or the *New American Standard Bible*, which are the primary translations quoted from in this book.

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (NIV)

According to James, what is the opposite of faith in God?

I believe there are five dimensions in which doubts can enter our lives.

I. Forgetfulness

We forget our great need for God. We fail to understand the great dilemma we are in without God at the center of our lives.

Read Psalm 103:1, 2.

¹ *Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.*

² *Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (NIV)*

What is it that we tend to forget?

When we forget all that God has done for us, we have problems. Some *major* problems. Read Psalm 103:3-5 and list some of the blessings of God in our lives. (For further study, include verses 6-19.)

Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (NIV)

II. Focus

When God gets out of focus in our lives, doubts enter. There are two major results of a loss of focus:

a. **Our view of God becomes inaccurate.**

We view Him as a magical genie, or a tyrant, or a distant grandfather - all of which are wrong.

b. **Our view of God becomes inadequate.**

As J. B. Phillips wrote, the problem is that our God is too small. It's not that God Himself is too small, but our perspective of Him is far too small when compared with the accurate picture in Scripture. God says in Psalm 50:21 “*You thought that I was just like you.*”

Read Isaiah 55:8,9.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (NIV)

In what way is God different from the way you view Him?

What practical things must **you** do in order to get to know God better?

III. Foundations

Often the foundations for our faith are lacking. As believers, we must build a strong foundation. An emotional conversion will lack the stable foundation to answer the real questions of life when they occur.

Many people today are in a position where they don't blatantly reject Christianity, but they don't embrace it whole-heartedly either. Why? Because they are not sure they believe the “why's” of the faith. Therefore, it is not surprising that some fall away from a vital relationship with Christ.

What foundational questions currently trouble you?

How have you dealt with them?

What do you believe you need to do to get some answers?

We must think *deeply*, pray *sincerely* and read *widely* to build a strong foundation for faith. Remember this important statement: **Christianity is not true because it works; it works because it is true.** Spend time learning the reasons for your belief.

IV. Feelings

Emotional stress and change can be an entry point for doubts. When we are physically exhausted and drained, when our coping systems are overloaded, it is hard to maintain emotional balance.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-8.

¹ Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." ³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (NIV)

What did the Lord God prescribe for the prophet Elijah after a time of spiritual battle and great stress?

Feelings can vary drastically. Basing our lives on them can be disastrous. How do we deal with them? Think in two areas:

- a. **Put your faith in the promises of God and His Word.** In other words, live by faith in what God has said.

Take a moment and memorize this statement:

The truest thing about me is what God says about me.

It's not what you feel, what others say, or what your peers think: it's what *God* says.

- b. Develop good self-talk.** Psychologists tell us that we talk to ourselves all the time. We tell ourselves all kinds of things through our self-talk. And we can actually begin to program our minds wrongly with inaccurate self-talk.

Read Philippians 4:8.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things. (NIV)

According to those verses, how is your “self-talk”?

Take some time to examine what it is that you say to yourself. Are those statements based on truth or error? Are they accurate or exaggerated? Are they edifying or destructive?

V. Follow-Through

Many fail to understand that when they come to know Jesus Christ, action is required. Belief and behavior are inter-connected. When a young Christian fails to see signs of spiritual life and growth, he starts to doubt if there is any genuine spiritual life there at all. He needs to be plugged into a discipleship program where he can learn the basics of the Christian life. In my mind, the **basics** include:

Knowing how to pray
Knowing how to read and study the Bible
Knowing how to deal with in your life
Knowing how to walk in fellowship with Christ moment by moment
Knowing how to share your faith with others.

Read the above list of "basics" once more. How are you doing in follow-through? Do one or more of these areas need further work in your life? Which one(s)?

What steps do you need to take to build those areas up?

Suggested Reading

In Two Minds, Os Guinness (InterVarsity Press)

The Transferable Concept Series, Bill Bright (Here's Life Publishers)