

# Week 7: Dealing with Doubt

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Objective: Help Christians understand the nature of doubt, how to respond to it biblically, and how to strengthen their faith through truth, trust, and godly encouragement.

## A. Introduction – 5 minutes

- Ask: “Is it wrong to have doubts?”
- Clarify: Doubt is not the opposite of faith - unbelief is.
- A distinction needs to be made; not all doubt is the same:
  - Doubt as uncertainty (seeking understanding)
    - EX: “How do we know this is true?”
  - Doubt as struggle (emotional or circumstantial)
    - EX: “I used to believe, but after what I’ve been through...”
  - Doubt as resistance (willful rejection)
    - EX: “I don’t care what the evidence says.”
- Emphasize: Doubt is often the soil where deeper faith grows.
- Apologetics exists not just for skeptics outside the church, but for believers inside seasons of doubt.
- C. S. Lewis, a one-time atheist turned Christian, describes how his argument against God collapsed because it depended on moral certainty:
  - “My argument against God was that the universe seemed cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”
  - C.S. Lewis became an atheist partly because he thought the world was too cruel for God to exist. But then he realized something unsettling: his very complaint depended on a moral standard he couldn’t explain without God.
  - His doubt didn’t destroy faith - it exposed the foundation of it.
  - It shows doubt as a pathway to truth, not a failure of faith.

**Key Point:** Today we’re going to do five things: normalize doubt, see it in Scripture, diagnose where it comes from, learn how to respond to it, and finally talk about how to walk with others through it.

**Transition:** If doubt disqualified someone from following God, Scripture would be a very short book. So, let’s see how God actually responds to doubting people.

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## B. Biblical Examples of Doubt – 15 minutes

As we walk through these examples, listen for two things: what kind of doubt is present, and how God responds.

1. Thomas (**John 20:24-29** Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
  - a. Thomas doubted testimony, not Christ’s power.
    - i. His doubt centers on verification: “Unless I see... I will not believe.”
    - ii. Thomas does not reject Jesus outright.
    - iii. He doubts the testimony of others, not the possibility of resurrection itself.
  - b. Why It’s Powerful
    - i. Thomas represents the honest skeptic within the community of faith.
    - ii. He is still counted among the disciples, even in doubt.
    - iii. Jesus does not remove Thomas from leadership or rebuke him harshly.
    - iv. Jesus met him with evidence, not shame.
  - c. Doubt that seeks truth is different from unbelief that resists it.
    - i. Christianity is not afraid of evidence.
    - ii. Faith is not believing without reasons - it is trusting based on sufficient reasons.
  - d. Jesus meets Thomas with the very evidence he asked for, yet gently calls him forward:
    - i. **John 20:27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”
    - ii. The strongest confession in the Gospel of John (**v.28** “My Lord and my God!”) comes from the former doubter.
2. John the Baptist (**Matthew 11:2-6** When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”)
  - a. John struggled when Jesus didn’t meet his expectations.
  - b. Prison becomes the context that intensifies uncertainty.
  - c. Doubt can arise when God’s methods differ from our assumptions.
  - d. Why It’s Powerful
    - i. John is called the greatest prophet born of women. (Matt 11:11)

- ii. If doubt disqualified someone from faithfulness, John would not qualify.
        - iii. And yet, his doubt emerges after faithful obedience, not before.
      - e. Jesus does not shame John.
        - i. He responds with messianic evidence, pointing to fulfilled prophecy (Isa. 35:4-6, 61:1):
          - 1. The blind see
          - 2. The lame walk
          - 3. The gospel is preached to the poor
        - ii. Jesus reframes John's doubt by anchoring it in Scripture and God's redemptive plan.
3. Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 15, 17-18)
  - a. Doubt in God's promise
    - i. Abraham asks, "How can I know...?" (Gen. 15:8)
    - ii. Sarah laughs at God's promise (Gen. 18:12)
  - b. Why it's powerful
    - i. These are covenant people doubting after receiving promises.
    - ii. Their doubt didn't cancel God's plan - but it did complicate their obedience.
  - c. Doubt often asks, "Is this really possible?" Faith answers, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
  - d. God gives Abraham evidence (stars, covenant ritual), not rebuke. Biblical faith often includes reassurance.

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4. Gideon (Judges 6,7)
  - a. Doubt in calling and self-identity
    - i. "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened?" (Judg. 6:13)
    - ii. Fleeces show insecurity, not rebellion.
  - b. Why it's helpful
    - i. Gideon doubts God's presence and his own adequacy.
    - ii. God patiently confirms His calling.
  - c. Doubt doesn't always mean disobedience - it often means fear.
  - d. God meets Gideon with signs before asking him to act boldly.
5. Moses (Exodus 3,4)
  - a. Self-doubt and fear, also doubt in God's power through him
    - i. "Who am I?" (Exod. 3:11)
    - ii. "What if they don't believe me?" (4:1)
    - iii. "I am slow of speech" (4:10)
  - b. Why it works well
    - i. Moses doubts repeatedly - even after miracles.
    - ii. God responds with patience until doubt turns into refusal.
  - c. There is a difference between struggling faith and resistant faith.
  - d. God provides signs, not slogans.

- i. Not a slogan (cliché like “God is Love,” “Don’t question God,” or “Because I said so”)
  - ii. But a sign (the miracles).
    - 1. God doesn’t say, “Moses, stop doubting.”
    - 2. He gives evidence appropriate to Moses’ fear.
- 6. Other examples:
  - a. Psalms
    - i. Lament and worship often exist together.
    - ii. God welcomes honest questions that lead toward trust.
  - b. The disciples during the storm (Mark 4:35-41)
  - c. Zechariah (Luke 1:5-20)

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- 7. Elijah (1 Kings 19)
  - a. Doubt after spiritual victory
    - i. Victory over prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)
    - ii. **(1 Ki. 19:4)** He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,”
  - b. Nature of doubt: Emotional and exhaustion-driven
    - i. “Despair is always color-blind; it can only see the dark tints.” (Alexander Maclaren)
  - c. Why this one is crucial
    - i. Doubt can come after great faith moments.
    - ii. Emotional depletion often masquerades as spiritual doubt.
  - d. Point: Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is rest... and listen.
  - e. Notice how God responds
    - i. With food, rest, and presence - before correction.
    - ii. **(1 Kings 19:5-13)** Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 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.” 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. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

- iii. The question the Lord asked (“what are you doing here”) isn’t a rebuke, but an invitation for Elijah to pour out his heart before the Lord.
  1. Recall Jesus talking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus Lk. 24 (they were depressed about what had just happened. Jesus asked, “what things?” Of course He knew, but he asked to encourage them to unload the burden of their hearts.)
  2. Look at Elijah’s response: it’s almost whiny. ‘I’ve been working hard (for you!), but no one is listening. People have died, and now they’re trying to kill me!’
    - a. In other words, ‘God, you’re not holding up your end of the bargain. Things should be good right now!’
- iv. How would you expect God to respond?
  1. How do you respond when confronted about a shortcoming?
  2. Rule #1 of parenting? Don’t overreact!
- v. Elijah realized that God doesn’t reveal himself only in powerful, miraculous ways. To look for God only in something big may be to miss him because he is often found gently whispering in the quietness of a humbled heart.
  1. Are you listening for God? Step back from the noise and activity of your busy life and listen humbly and quietly for his guidance – it may come when you least expect it.
  2. **Psalm 46:10** Be still and know that I am God.

**Key Point:** Doubt didn’t remove these people from God’s story - it moved them deeper into it.

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What this teaches about God’s character:

- Patient, not threatened by questions
- Relational, not transactional
- Concerned with trust, not mere compliance
- God treats doubters as people to shepherd, not problems to silence.

Important clarification:

- “God provides signs” does not mean:

- God owes everyone miraculous proof
- God will satisfy every demand for evidence
- Faith is built on signs alone
- Scripture distinguishes between:
  - Humble doubt seeking understanding
  - Proud unbelief demanding control
- Jesus refuses signs when:
  - The request is a test, not a trust step
  - Motive is hardness (**Matt. 12:38-39** Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.)
- REMEMBER
  - Christianity invites investigation
  - Evidence supports faith; it doesn’t replace it

**Transition:** What’s striking is that these people doubted for very different reasons. Which means the question isn’t just ‘Do I doubt?’ but ‘Why do I doubt?’

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### C. Sources of Doubt – 5 minutes

Doubt rarely shows up announcing its real cause. What we feel on the surface is often not what’s happening underneath.

Think of IT troubleshooting or Medical diagnosis – people often proclaim different symptoms and not the real problems.

1. Intellectual – Questions about God, the Bible, science, or history
  - a. Someone says they’re struggling with science and the Bible, but the real issue may be a prayer that went unanswered (like a scapegoat).
2. Emotional – Suffering, disappointment, unanswered prayer
  - a. Pain doesn’t usually make us stop believing God exists - it makes us wonder whether He cares.
  - b. Echoes Elijah, the disciples in the storm, and John the Baptist.
3. Moral – Desire to justify sin or avoid obedience
  - a. Sometimes doubt isn’t about evidence, but about resistance - because belief would require repentance or obedience.
4. Relational – Hurt caused by Christians or church experiences
  - a. For many people, the first crack in faith wasn’t an argument - it was an experience with Christians.

When doubt surfaces, the first question isn’t ‘Is Christianity true?’ but ‘What kind of doubt am I dealing with?’”

- If the doubt is intellectual, it needs answers

- If it's emotional, it needs care
- If it's moral, it needs honesty
- If it's relational, it needs healing

Self-Diagnostic question: "If this doubt were resolved today, would my faith actually be settled - or would something else rise to the surface?"

**Key Point:** Understanding the source of doubt determines the wisdom of the response. Treating every doubt the same way is like prescribing the same medicine for every illness.

**Transition:** Once we know where doubt comes from, the worst thing we can do is give the wrong kind of help. Different doubts require different responses. If we misdiagnose the doubt, we'll misapply the cure.

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#### D. Responding to Doubt Biblically – 10 minutes

- Seek truth (**John 8:31-32** Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.")
  - Christianity invites examination.
- Pray honestly (**Mark 9:24** "I believe; help my unbelief!")
  - God honors transparent faith.
- Stay in community (**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.)
  - How important is encouragement? Isolation intensifies doubt.
- Remember past faithfulness (**Psalms 77:11-12** I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.")
- Three Anchors of Faith:
  - Truth: Is Christianity true? (addresses intellectual doubt)
    - God reveals Himself through history, Scripture, and ultimately, Jesus
    - Faith does not ignore evidence - it responds to it.
  - Trust: Is God good? (addresses emotional doubt)
    - The Bible repeatedly points believers back to God's proven goodness:
      - Supremely displayed at the cross (Romans 8:32).
      - God's purposes are often hidden, but His character is consistent (Isaiah 55:8-9).
    - We trust God not because life is easy, but because He has shown Himself faithful.
  - Commitment: Will I follow Christ even without full understanding?
    - The Bible teaches that understanding often follows obedience, not the other way around.

- We never have complete knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:12).
  - Faith means choosing to follow even when questions remain.
  - Commitment keeps us walking with God while truth and trust continue to grow.
- Apologetics role: Evidence strengthens faith but must be joined with trust and obedience.
- Lewis “Faith is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”
  - Lewis teaches us that faith is not the absence of doubt - it’s the refusal to let moods overrule truth (see Philippians and the difference between happiness and joy).
  - In fact, Lewis has said he didn’t lose faith because he doubted - he lost atheism because he followed his doubts honestly.

**Key Point:** Faith grows when truth, trust, and commitment grow together.

**Transition:** Everything we’ve talked about so far applies to our own hearts - but Scripture never lets us stop with our own faith alone.

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## E. Encouraging Others Who Doubt – 5 minutes

- Jude 22 – “Be merciful to those who doubt.”
- What not to say:
  - “Just have more faith.”
  - “Real Christians don’t doubt.”
- CARE model:
  - Connect: Listen first.
  - Affirm: Their struggle matters.
  - Respond: Offer truth gently.
  - Encourage: Point back to God’s character and Word.

**Transition:** Before we can be a safe place for others, we have to be honest about where we are.

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## F. Application and Encouragement – 5 minutes

Reiterate: The goal today isn’t to eliminate all doubt - it’s to learn how to walk faithfully through it.

- Doubt is a doorway, not a dead end.
- God is not threatened by sincere questions.
- Reflection exercise:
  - Write one doubt you’ve never voiced.
  - Identify one trusted believer to talk with.

- Assignment:
  - Read Psalm 73.
  - Track the psalmist's emotional and spiritual journey.

*Next Week...*

*Answering Common Questions*

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## **G. Class Discussion**

Discussion Questions:

1. What kinds of doubt are hardest to admit, and why?
2. How can the church become a safer place for honest questions?
3. How has God grown your faith through seasons of doubt?