

**“At The End of the Day: Dealing with Doubt”**  
**Rev. Perry J. Fruhling, St. Mark’s Faith & Life Center, 7-23-06**

Grace to you and peace... We continue our series, “At the End of the Day” as we deal with bottom line answers to questions of faith. Today we wrestle with the question of doubt. How do I deal with the problem of doubts in my faith life? What happens if I doubt? Does that mean I’m not a believer? I’d like to believe, but I have too many doubts to accept the Christian faith. So many of the struggles I’ve been through or seen have left me with debilitating doubts about God. I’ve studied philosophy and have questioned everything, I’m confused about faith. Today I want to spend sometime defining doubt, understanding it’s cause, and how to deal with it as a real issue.

For us as humans we often live with the motto, “seeing is believing.” But in reality, faith is the other way around, “believing is seeing.” Watch this video clip from “The Rookie,” in which Dennis Quaid stars as a coach of a Texas high school baseball team. Once a budding major league prospect, life took him different directions. But at an age when most major leaguers were retiring, his baseball team made a deal with him that he would try out if they won their league championship. He still has doubts about it all... The Owls have faith in their coach, but being faithless, he seeks a sign. (video clip).

Because of his inability to believe, leading to his impatience, he misses an important truth about himself. Even when we know something to be true, we often seek some kind of outside confirmation to justify our behavior. But it is really in *believing* that we truly *see*.

There is a misconception among Christians that doubt is not widespread. A theologian said theoretically all Christians were once agnostic in that they moved from unbelief to belief. It’s been said that unless you’ve doubted, you’ve never really believed. While that may be an overstatement, it is often true that intellectual struggles produce the deepest convictions in faith. Karl Barth also added that no theologian or Christian can fully rid themselves of this flaw. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ said that his surveys showed that 25% of those who attended his training institutes indicated doubts regarding their relationship with God. Some have projected that up to 70-90% of average humans doubt at some point or another.

**Doubt is NOT the opposite of faith. Unbelief is the opposite of belief.** Doubt might really be “hesitating between two positions” – **a sort of spiritual fork in the road.** Doubt may indicate lack of faith somewhere, but it is really not part of unbelief, but rather humanness...our universal experience. And Christians are not alone in this matter...doubted is reported among all faiths... and also among atheists. The very fact that the reality of God’s existence might be true and invade a person’s ultimate being plagues most atheists.

If you have had doubts about faith, you are not alone...**even persons from the Bible had doubts.** Doubt really originates with the Garden of Eden. Doubt exists because of sin, because of the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden. Back in seminary, one of my earliest papers dealt with what it was in the Garden that caused **Adam and Eve** to eat the forbidden fruit. Ultimately I settled on the issue of doubt...they doubted that God could provide for their every need...they doubted that God had their best interests at heart...consumed with themselves, they doubted what God’s plans were for them. In the Old Testament, **Job**, who experienced much heartache and pain in his life, blamed God for many of his problems and questioned God. In the New Testament, **John the Baptist**, who while in prison, sent his disciples to Jesus saying, “Are you the Messiah we’ve been waiting for or should we look for another?” Jesus didn’t rebuke John, but complimented him and told his disciples to go and tell John what you see and

hear...”the blind can see, the lame can walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor.” In other words, the prophecy is being fulfilled...there are signs... In the Gospels, **Thomas**, one of Jesus’ disciples was not present when Jesus presented himself as risen from the dead. Jesus appeared again to the disciples a week later when Thomas was there. He gave Thomas a sign, but told him blessed are those who believe without the sign he received of putting his fingers in the nail holes and hand in his side.

Really, today, in a world full of cynical, philosophical media, we are bombarded with a message...anything resembling Christian faith and values is to be treated with disdain...it is popular these days to doubt the presence of God in our lives based on a philosophy prevalent in media and society...But as I’ve said before, *“philosophy can explain the darkness, but it is not a light.”*

There are really three main types of doubt that cause persons to wrestle with faith: The first is **Factual Doubt**. Factual doubt is **uncertainty surrounding the evidence for Christianity**...such as philosophical points, such as the existence of God and the problem of pain or historical acts such as miracles and Scripture. So for some, believing in Christ is really a need to understand the historical data available in both Scripture and outside Scripture which supports the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Fortunately, other Christian doubters have been around to review and weight the evidence and then share their findings...from as early as the first century A.D. beginning with the disciple Thomas.

Not getting straight answers can lead to a lot of frustration for intellectual skeptic. For someone to say, “just believe” leaves them without a foot to stand on. For those who have questions, we must encourage them to examine the evidence. Lee Strobel’s book “The Case for Christ” is a good starting point for one who struggles with this sort of doubt. Because Lee was an avowed atheist and a lawyer, he sought to prove that Christianity was not true. But what he found in examining the evidence was that there was much more of a case for Christ and his resurrection than for not. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is the basic message of faith shared by the early church (40-50 A.D.)...*“that Christ died for our sins...He was buried, and was raised from the dead...”*

There are two important steps in dealing with factual doubt: 1) **Learn the facts about Christianity**: a) examine medical evidence based on the Bible’s recording of the death of Jesus, of Roman practices of the day, of logical principles regarding Jesus’ death if he re-appeared again within three days to his disciples; b) examine the evidence of Jesus’ burial and how logic dictates this natural process and the evidence for Roman’s practice in the day of rolling the stone in front of the tomb...and their decrees of death for anyone who stole a body; c) examine evidence from the Bible about the 515 witnesses to Jesus resurrection, more than 10 non-Biblical writers who attest to his resurrection, and the failure of alternative theories what happened to Jesus’ body after burial.

After learning the facts, **2) we need to review them often**; C. S. Lewis said we should “hold these before us every day...because this belief, nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind.” If further doubts arise, go back and study more...dive in deeper...it shows that you haven’t spent enough time dealing with areas of doubt in the mind.

But there is another point for the factual doubter to hear...eventually, 3) there is **a need for faith even in the midst of facts**. Think about Einstein’s theory of relativity...I can’t explain it, but I can tell you this: he didn’t come to it by performing experiments which convinced him of it – he gradually began to see the concept and then was convinced in his own mind...he didn’t

discover it by doing a number of tests. No, once he believed in his theory, he began to see it all around him and tests proved it out for him.

The second type of doubt is **emotional doubt**. Some researches say that up to 2/3 of people who doubt are plagued with emotional doubt. It is often disguised as intellectual doubt; it can masquerade under the issue of childhood problems; or can even be seen as the result of suffering. It is really the plight when one's feelings wage war on one's reason. Blaise Pascal reasoned it this way...ask an average person to walk across a board plenty wide on solid ground and they do it without fear, especially well-practiced. But put that same board across a chasm and imagination will prevail, even though reason can convince him of safety. In other words our emotions wind up overtaking our basic reasoning regarding Christian faith...

Emotional doubt can be the result of **peer pressure, need for attention, psychological problems, medical conditions, childhood problems, old wounds, identifying with fiction, watching Christian hypocrisy.**

You know, Dan Brown really capitalized on this in his book *The Da Vinci Code*. He got a lot of people to identify with fiction rather than facts. He capitalized on Christian hypocrisy in the Opus Dei, the devout Catholic sect; and capitalized on people's old wounds through the Roman Catholic Church. The book has led a number of people to doubt their faith...by using emotional tactics to tear down belief.

The result of emotional doubt is that people are unable to assent to Christian beliefs not because of the facts, but because of deep seated emotional struggles with the faith. Based on the facts of Christianity they have little problem, but put them next to hypocrites and they lose heart...or put them next to non-believers and they may wilt...or when the pains from the past arise they may block belief in our heavenly Father.

I still remember during 40 Days of Purpose, one of our members read the first couple of chapters where Rick Warren talked about those who have poor childhood memories of their earthly fathers and how that can be a roadblock to trusting their heavenly father. It was the first eye opener for her that she had lived with emotional doubt for years since her childhood...

Here are three steps in dealing with emotional doubt: 1) **Recognize you're not alone**...some people who struggle emotionally with the faith believe they are sitting alone in the pew while others faithfully are proclaiming their love for Christ. No, there are others who are struggling to believe because of the circumstances of their lives. Know that your doubts don't mean you're not a believer. Trust the confession you've made that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior; 2) **When you recognize it, confess it**; Philippians 4: 6 says, "*Don't worry about anything; pray about everything*". 3) **Practice Thanksgiving and Praise** in the midst of your doubt...the rest of Phil 4:6 says; "*Tell God what you need and thank him for what he's done.*" Know these doubts don't last forever...it is a season in your life, but dealing with these doubts is important.

Finally, the third type of doubt is **Volitional**. This is related to a person's will and their ability to make a decision regarding the faith. This person has an appreciation for the facts of the faith without being willing to make a decision. It could be related to an unwillingness to repent of a sin; it can also be related to questioning their decision to believe at an early age. I identify with the man in the Bible who brought his mute and deaf son to Jesus for healing in Mark 9. He tells Jesus (v 22) "do something if you can." In verse 23, Jesus says, "*Anything is possible if a person believes.*" *The father instantly replied, "I do believe, but help me not to doubt."*

As a child I so personally trusted in Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior. I dealt with emotional doubts going through adolescence and high school, needing to prove myself to be a part of a crowd that had little time for Christian values. But it was in going through philosophy and logic and studying world religions in college that I began to have some severe doubts about my faith...was it just something that I believed because I was duped as a child? I knew the truths about Christianity but was having a difficult time applying them to my life. I was heavily involved in self-discovery, but the truth is, that ultimately ends in despair.

I decided to continue to discover whether this faith was for me by attending seminary and making a commitment to at least listen to the discussion of faith again. There I found teachers who were ready and open to deal with doubt as a part of faith, not the opposite of faith...and a willingness to help discern the truth for living...ultimately when my life reached a crisis, I stood on the words of Soren Kirkegaard, who after weighing the numerous logical explanations for and against the existence of God said ultimately one must do something with regards to the faith...to do nothing is to do something...to believe, one must take a "leap of faith." If you been where I've been I invite you to face this sort of doubt this way:

1) **Make a commitment to Christ**...pray to submit to Christ; 2) **Replace Satan's lies with the truth**...you might be saying, "I can't get past my past" or "I can't commit more fully" but these just keep the believer's will from being exercised; but the best defense against the devil's attack is the Word of God.; 3) **Learn Scripture and it's vision for your life**... Listen to Christian music, read the Word (maybe start with Psalms as I did), get in a study, and concentrate on growing in faith...How do you keep the weeds from growing in the lawn? You fertilize the heck out of the lawn...concentrate less on the doubts Satan is putting in your mind and focus more on God's Word...

My mother used to have a sign in her workroom that read, "**feed your faith and starve your doubts.**" I pray that you'll do that...be they Factual, Emotional, or Volitional...learn and trust the facts...recognize your not alone in your doubts....start to praise God already as you you're your commitment to him for what he's about to do in your life.....

Someone once said, if you are doubting Jesus are you willing to give him up right now? What does that mean? Are you willing to trade Jesus for something, someone else to believe in? You see, it's all about relationship...when you have a personal relationship with the savior, the doubts may come and go...but you never let go of the friend who was different from any other human being on the face of this earth...you can put your trust in him...he is still central...look at him and see, if you'd trade him for anything, anyone else...Let's pray...