

START

Week 4:

Doubt is one of the things that most believers struggle with, especially when you are new in your faith. When you've just accepted Jesus Christ, doubt is a problem. Doubt makes you question if something is true. If I don't believe something, I doubt it. If I don't know it—I doubt it. If I don't know somebody—I doubt them.

What pastors know to be true is **most new believers walk away from their faith in the first three months.**

That's a true stat. And the people that make it three months . . . may not make it six months. Or nine months. Or twelve.

In those first 3, 6, 9, 12-month periods, doubt is a problem. And the reason people walk away from the faith is **due in large part to doubts and discouragement that come from life.**

I'm not going to ask you if you've had doubts in life. Because you have. We all have. You don't have pretend that you're perfect.

As for me, I doubt things all the time. I doubt that the Bengals are ever going to win the Super Bowl. They're my team, and they're terrible.

I also doubt other things on a regular basis. Just recently I had an intense moment of doubt on an iced over lake. Now, I am not a small person, but I enjoy ice fishing. This day the temperature was 40 degrees and all the top layer ice had melted. It just basically looked like I was walking on water, and for large ol' me, going to drown in an icy grave.

My doubt was **will it hold?**

That's always my question when I stand on ice. I looked down through it, and it had all these crystals and cracks. There were no fish that day. I caught nothing, and I had a lot of doubt about my safety.

That's life. That's how we are as people. We question things; we have doubts. Even recently in my life, I've questioned if I can live off of a KETO diet.

Can I live off pork rinds and cheese? I don't know if you have done the KETO diet, it's a lot of pork rinds and cheese. And you can live off of it if you do it right.

We ask ourselves a lot of questions like: Can I do this? Can I achieve this? Can I accomplish this? Does this person really love me? Does Jesus really love me? Do I even have a relationship with Jesus? Has he ever accepted me in my entire life?

Have you ever doubted God? If so, about what?

If you've ever doubted God, Jesus, the Bible, **you aren't the first to doubt God.**

You're not the first person in the world to ever doubt God. The first person to doubt God is found in Genesis 3. There's this moment when the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, are in the garden—and there's this tree. They're told by God that they can't eat from that tree, but they can do whatever else they want. And they followed the rules—for a while.

Then this serpent that comes up and says in Genesis 3:4-6 (NIV), *“You will not certainly die,” (that creates doubt) the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Adam and Eve listened to a serpent who convinced them to doubt the God who created them. That doubt led to sin, which also led to our broken world. That moment is where doubt entered the world for all of us.

You're not the first person to doubt God. And we're not in a utopia with our perfect mate in the garden, walking and talking with God. But even though we don't have that close of a physical relationship with God anymore—we still doubt him. It's part of our human, broken nature.

You're not the first to doubt Jesus either.

What are some of your doubts about Jesus?

In Mark 9 Jesus comes up to a man's son who is possessed by a demon.

Mark 9:21-23 (NIV) says, *“Jesus asked the boy's father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you*

can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Immediately the father exclaims, “I do believe. Help me in my unbelief.” Or “Help me in my doubt”.

Verse 25 continues, *“When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”*

The father doubted the power of Jesus, two thousand years ago. That’s not the only time Jesus was ever doubted. In the book of Matthew, Peter doesn’t know if Jesus is the man walking on the water. Jesus says, “Come out to me,” and Peter gets out of the boat. But then he doubts his safety, and he begins sinking.

Read Matthew 14:22-33

If you were Peter would you have even gotten out of the boat? Why or why not?

Why do you think Peter sank? What was his doubt?

Even though Peter walked on water for a couple steps, he started to doubt. That doubt caused him to sink.

Peter doubted God, but it didn’t destroy his faith, and it didn’t keep him from having a relationship with Jesus. It only brought them closer.

You’re not the first to doubt God, but **God can help you overcome your doubt.**

Doubt doesn’t always have to be a bad thing. Our enemy **Satan uses doubt to discourage and defeat you**, just like he has done since Genesis 3 until now.

Scripture records over 4,000 years of history, and in all those 400 centuries doubt has been used to pull people away from God. But we have alternative to doubt—**faith.**

The opposite of doubt is faith, having belief.

What are some things that you know you believe in?

Hebrews 11:1-3 (NIV) says, *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”*

Faith is confidence and assurance, being sure of things we don’t see. I have faith in Jesus Christ even though I can’t see him. I can’t touch him. I have faith in God, even though I can’t feel God. I have faith in the Holy Spirit because I see the words in the Bible are true, not only in my life but in the lives of other believers I know who’ve had radical changes in their life because of Jesus Christ. And God can change people immediately.

As believers, faith gives us **confidence that God and his Word are true, and that his promises are for you.**

The promises in the Bible aren’t for good, nice people. Nowhere does it ever say that in the Bible. “Well Jesus came into the world for all the nice folks, who have it all together. And he’s going to collect them all and take them to a nice paradise for all eternity.”

That’s not what it says at all. It says the opposite. “Jesus came for the lost, the broken, and downtrodden. That’s who he came for. To save the sick, heal them, and bring them into relationship with him.”

Being human, we all feel broken at some point. We all doubt who we are. So, we need to have faith.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Faith saves us.

Believing in a God we can’t see, believing in a Word that history has proven to be true. I went to the University of Michigan. It is a very secular place. It’s an anti-Christian place. In every class, I

had professors telling me I was in a cult. They would tell me Islam, Buddhism, Shinto were all fine religions, but Christians were the crazy people.

I had to have faith in the Bible. And when I left, not one of my professors challenged the authenticity of Jesus Christ being a real man. They believed it. Not only because it's recorded in our Scripture, but it's recorded in Roman documents, in Jewish historical documents, in a lot of documents that can't be disproven, without disproving those cultures.

Jesus Christ was a real man.

Secular scholars disagree on whether Jesus rose from the dead or ascended into heaven, but not whether he actually lived. It's undisputed that Jesus was a great teacher, a great man, and that he said what he said.

Read about Jesus death and resurrection in Matthew 27:32-56.

Do you have any questions about Jesus death on the cross?

Read about Jesus Resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10.

Do you have any questions about Jesus resurrection from the dead?

Our beliefs aren't far off from those Scholars. Their doubt separates them from God, and our faith unites us with Jesus.

Faith, belief in something we can't touch or see, believing in something we hope for, that's what saves us.

Ephesians 2:8 (NIV) says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—"*

Have you accepted God's free gift? YES NO

Jesus coming to the world was a gift to help our brokenness, starting all the way back with Adam and Eve. Yes, they sinned, but it was their doubt that led to it. It's that doubt that led our world astray. To fix that, it takes faith.

One of the things I love about God is **God's got your back . . . he loves you.**

We're not called to be perfect all the time. We're called to be faithful. We're called to be transparent, to be true, to be honest, and have integrity. Because we're never going to be perfect until we get to eternity.

That's why we have Jesus.

Jesus repeatedly covers over our sins with his sacrifice and the blood he shed on the cross. Because...we're dumb at times. We do dumb things and say dumb things. We experience anger and we explode emotionally when we're tired. But God's still got our back. He still loves us amidst all our failings.

Romans 8:38-39 (NIV) says, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

It doesn't matter what's going on in your life. It won't separate you from God.

God's always pursuing you. God wants you to be a part of his kingdom. Even after you are a believer, he's still pursuing a deeper relationship with you. God wants you. No matter how broken you think your life is, he wants you.

By understanding this truth, even your doubts won't separate you from God's love. Just because you doubt something doesn't mean God says, "Oh, well, _____ (Your name) doubted me. I'm done with him/her."

My daughter recently said, "Dad, will you play Fortnite with me?"

"Later," I responded.

I ended up playing a different game with someone else, and she came in and said, "Dad, you said you were going to play Fortnite with me. I don't think you're going to do it." What she was saying is "I doubt you. I doubt you're going to do what you said you would do earlier."

So, I stopped and played with her, because I don't want her to doubt my word. Even though she doubted me, I didn't stop loving her.

I love my daughter. I love that she wanted to play a game with me, and we won. Even in our human realm, we shouldn't stop loving people because of a momentary doubt.

God doesn't either.

You need to use doubt to further and grow your faith. You can **increase faith by hearing God's word.**

The answers to your doubt are in the Bible. I've been a pastor for 20 years, and I don't have the answers to everything.

I've got a list of questions for my first moments in heaven. A philosopher friend once told me, "When you get to heaven, you're not going to care about the answers anymore."

I want to know lots of things, and I'm not going to ever get them, and that's ok. That's how faith works.

I don't know how creation worked. I know what I believe, and it doesn't really affect my salvation, but I want to know how creation works. How long did it actually take? I want to know every little detail. I don't doubt that God created the world, but I want to know how. I take a literal reading of Genesis 1, but other really smart people have great alternative arguments. Am I right or wrong? I'll never know until heaven.

Do you have any questions that you'd love to know the answers to?

I've known people who got stuck on the details of creation to the point where they walked away from the church and their church family because they have so many great doubts that drove them away. But for me, my doubts drive me back into the Bible.

Faith comes through hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ.

You hear the message by going to church, listening to podcasts of great preachers across the nation, watch videos of pastors online, and going to Bible studies or Life groups. Those are all ways to develop faith and hear the word of God preached.

If you have doubt, you need to get more invested in God's word and his message.

James 1:5-8 (NIV) says, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”*

Doubt can undercut our relationship with Jesus Christ. It was one of the problems Peter had when walking on water. Doubt came in, and he started sinking. Doubt will pull at us and separate us from God.

But doubt, when you experience it in your life, can also be a good thing. Doubt doesn't have to discourage us. You don't have to say, “Well, I accepted Jesus Christ, but I must not be a Christian because I have doubts. Christians don't have doubts.”

Christians *have* doubts. Some believers when they are at the beginning of their walk with Christ, think that if they have doubts, they're done—it's over.

That's not true.

If you have doubts, **you're normal**. What you need to do is increase in faith and knowledge by getting invested in the Word, God's people, a study group, a life group, whatever it may be. Because doubt can push us further in your relationship with Christ.

Doubt can inform you that things are lacking in your relationship with God and spur you on to spiritual growth.

Doubt doesn't trust.

Doubt lacks understanding.

Doubt lacks knowledge of the Bible.

Doubt is wavering belief.

Experiencing doubt doesn't mean that God doesn't want you. Some people say, “I have doubts, so God must not want me.” That's not a thing.

God wants you despite your doubts. He wants to teach you about faith and equip you to grow in your faith to be more faithful over time. I'm much more faithful with God now than ever before in my life, because I've been maturing throughout my life.

Some Christians, who have been Christians for a long time, get a bad diagnosis medically or someone close in their life passes unexpectedly. And it rocks their faith.

And doubt creeps in.

Doubt is not something just new believers experience. It's something believers experience at every stage of their journey with the Lord.

Sometimes when you lose somebody, you don't understand why. You lack understanding. That's normal. What we need to do as believers is turn toward the church. Turn toward church people and allow them to love us and let their faith be contagious.

I went to a meal with young believers and it was so fun. Their faith was electric and I wanted to experience that same passion in my life. If you're struggling, not excited about God, or "retired" in your faith, call new believers and have a meal. You'll be excited afterwards. You probably won't sleep that night.

You'll be excited, because they are excited.

Write the names of some new/young believers you know: Don't have any? Find some ASAP.

I remember those first days, and I want to get back there. Let others excitement be contagious upon you. Let their faith affect you and help you overcome your doubt.

Faith trusts.

Faith gives understanding.

Faith increases in biblical knowledge.

Faith doesn't waver.

If your faith wavers, you're still a Christian. Our goal is to grow into faith the doesn't waiver, but we don't start there. I believe that God's got all of our backs, because he loves us.

We live in a broken world with broken people, and just because some broken person does something mean to me doesn't mean its God's fault. It means there's sin in the world. We don't have to doubt God because people are sinful.

One day God will reclaim the world and fix it all.

You can overcome doubt **through relationships with God, his people, and his Word.**

If you're not spending time with people who just started their journeys as believers, you're making a mistake and not fulfilling your mission in the Great Commission. That's our one job as believers.

If this year went by and you didn't have any conversations with new believers, what you're saying to yourself is, "I'm not fulfilling the Great Commission."

That's what we're called to do. It doesn't matter how young or how old you are. You don't have to have a life-changing conversation every day, but you can talk to people. You can say, "Hey, how are you doing? How can I be praying for you?"

Be an encouragement on someone's journey in their relationship with Jesus. That's our goal. Your faith will be strengthened through that. New believers don't need you to be strong and act like everything is perfect all the time. What they need is for **you to be honest and vulnerable about your struggles and doubts**, and how you overcome those doubts with your faith.

They need for you to say, "I understand where you're at. I have been broken like that too, and God put me back together this way."

What does this mean for you?

You may be thinking that you don't have any doubts right now. They're coming. Doubts are always around the corner. Adam and Eve in the garden, when they were walking with God, didn't have any doubts. God was standing right there. But at some point, the serpent came in and caused them to doubt. Even if you have great faith, doubt is just around the corner. If you're not constantly working to keep a good relationship with Christ, or if you're just starting out—doubt's there.

Doubt and discouragement is coming. When it comes, what you have to do is get into your Bible and call someone else who is a believer that you love and respect. Talk with them. Let them walk through the doubt moments with you and help you gain faith.

List names of Christians you can talk to about current or future doubts:

That's what the church needs to do. If you've got faith, position yourselves in the lives of people who are searching, so that when they're questioning, they call you.

Let your doubt drive you deeper into a relationship with Christ. It doesn't mean you're lost and broken, or hopeless. It means that you need to know Jesus more fully.

Let doubt drive you deeper into relationship with Jesus Christ and deeper into his word to grow your faith.