

PATH TO PURPOSE

GOD'S EPIC PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

Doubting Well

Text: Genesis 15:1-21

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1. How have you personally experienced doubt in your walk with Christ?
 - a. Has there ever been a season when your faith went from excitement to frustration to doubt?
 - b. How are you experiencing doubt in your faith journey right now?
 - c. What has been your experience dealing with the topic of doubt within the church? Have you had questions that were met with harsh, unloving answers? Have you ever been afraid to ask questions or express doubts because of fear of what the response might be?

2. Read Genesis 15:1-3.
 - a. It had been ten years since God first made His promises to Abram. (See Genesis 12:1-9) Abram is now 75 years old and Sarai is 65 years old! Put yourself in their position. What do you think would have been going through your mind? Where would your faith have been?
 - b. If doubt is or has been a part of your experience, rest in this: you can absolutely be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and still have doubts! This is because faith is not about intellectual certainty. Faith is about trust and obedience, regardless of how you might feel in a particular moment. How does this definition of faith challenge or encourage you?

3. Read Genesis 15:4-6.
 - a. How did God respond to Abram's doubt?
 - b. What was Abram's response back to God, and what was the result?
 - c. Read Genesis 15:7-21. God responds back with an unconditional covenant, showing that God would keep his promises without anything necessary on Abram's end of the deal. What does this exchange teach us about the character of God?
 - d. In what part of your life do you most need to hear these truths and receive them in faith?

4. Genesis 15 is essential to the understanding of the grand story of Scripture. Read Romans 3:21-5:1.
 - a. How did Genesis 15:6 point forward to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

- b. If we are made right with God through our faith in Christ, what is the point of the Law?
 - c. Many people try to pit God's justice and mercy against one another. They think either he is one or the other; just (including just consequences for sin) or He is merciful. But the testimony of Scripture is that He is both. How can God be both just and merciful? And what does this mean for how God is able to deal graciously with our doubts?
5. One of the themes of the book of Hebrews is our natural propensity to wander from God if we do not regularly put ourselves in paths that keep pointing us back to Him. Read Hebrews 10:23-25.
- a. What is the role of community in maintaining our faith, perhaps especially as we wrestle with doubts?
 - b. What is at stake if we do not stay engaged in Biblical community?
 - c. What are specific ways your community could help and support you as you wrestle with the doubts you have?

Challenge: 1 John 1:6-7 says that "If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." This means that the sense of closeness and fellowship we experience with God and His people is directly correlated with the degree that we "walk in the light", including being honest with God and others about our doubts. What do you need to do to walk into the light, wholly and completely in the light? Spend time being honest with God and your group about doubts you have, and spend time praying for one another and encouraging one another. (See Study Deeper for wisdom on dealing with doubt.)

Prayer:

Adaptation of Psalm 13

"Oh Lord, we admit that we all struggle with doubts. Doubts of your existence. Doubts of your presence. Doubts of your goodness. Doubts of your care, concern, and love for us. It pains us to the core. Our hearts are heavy and burdened. The Enemy, who has been sowing seeds of doubt ever since the beginning, so often seems to be gaining the upper hand.

Oh God, please answer us. Return our joy, our hope, our peaceful trust! Don't let the Enemy continue his taunts over us!

We do trust you, Lord. Help our unbelief. Even when lies begin to fly around our minds, we will rest in your unfailing love. We can rejoice, even when doubts arise, in our salvation in Christ! The cross covers all, and your grace is far beyond anything we can imagine! You are good. We declare that in faith. Restore our faith and joy in you to the point of overflowing with songs of praise!"

And we pray all of this in Jesus' name, who was the chief demonstration of your existence, love, and faithfulness. His life, death, and resurrection is the sure foundation we can rest on, even when we have questions about so many other things. Amen.

STUDY DEEPER

7 Ways to Deal with Doubt

Do you ever struggle with doubt? You do if you're honest.

Doubt affects the lives of many believers. The reality is that no one's faith is ever perfect in this life. That includes you. And if your faith is not perfect, then it can grow and become stronger today than it was yesterday.

I like to think of doubt as the gap between our current faith and perfect faith. If this is the case, we all doubt.

Not only this, but there is nothing Christians cannot doubt. Sometimes we doubt our salvation; other times we doubt God's love. Many times we will even doubt the reliability of Scripture, the existence of God, or the identity of Christ. Even John the Baptist, whom Christ called the greatest man ever born (Matt. 11:11), once expressed doubt about the very identity of Christ (Matt. 11:3).

Here are seven principles to consider when dealing with doubt.

1. Have mercy on those who doubt.

Jude 22 tells us to "have mercy on those who doubt." It is easy to judge, condemn, and look down on doubters as if they are second-rate Christians. But to have mercy on those who doubt is to be there for them, comforting and building them up.

Many times, this isn't just an overnight bout with doubt that ends after a good night's sleep. Some are doubters for a lifetime. It's just in their nature. You need to learn to have mercy on them (and on yourself). You may have to answer the same questions over and over again. That's all right. And it's an opportunity for you to learn patience.

2. Realize doubt is often the birth pangs of deepened faith.

Many of us became believers at an early age, with a faith mediated through our parents whom we trusted implicitly. As we become older, our faith is tested through trials, temptations, and suffering (Job; Luke 8:5–15; Rom. 5:3–4; James 1:3).

This is why our most significant doubt often comes during our 20s and 30s. But this is not a bad thing. We all need to consider that the truths we espouse might be wrong, in order to embrace our faith more deeply. Such doubt often results in stronger faith.

3. Be ready to live with mystery.

Sometimes we want all the answers. We want complete understanding before we commit to God.

While God has revealed so much to us, and there is much we can understand, there are the "secret" things that belong to him alone (Deut. 29:29). We will never be able to comprehend the Trinity, or how God

created everything out of nothing. But what we can comprehend is enough for us to rest in God when mystery arises.

4. Make the main things the main things.

Paul told the Corinthians he delivered to them things “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3). He goes on to talk about the atoning death and vindicating resurrection of Christ as being most central to the faith.

So many of us doubt secondary issues such as how and when God created the world or the details of Christ’s return. There are many issues in the Christian faith about which there has been legitimate disagreement for centuries. All of orthodox Christianity, however, has always been in unity about who Christ is and what he did.

So when you begin doubting what you were taught about secondary issues, don’t get too bent out of shape. A lot of us are still working through these matters.

5. Live according to the faith you still have.

Doubt is not unbelief. Again, doubt is the bridge that connects current faith to perfect faith. And that bridge will stand until our death or Christ’s return. When we go through a faith crisis, though, we don’t naturally see things this way. Once doubt enters and infects our lives on a conscious level, we may interpret it as outright unbelief. We simply don’t know how else to process it. We think we’re on an inevitable road to complete unbelief.

Unfortunately, since we think this way, and since others may treat us as if we have the plague, we begin to live as unbelievers. If sin were not the instigating problem before, it becomes the chronic problem now. It’s important for those struggling with doubt to not let their doubt influence their lives such that they start living like unbelievers. Encourage doubters to continue to live as Christians, repenting and believing the gospel, even if they don’t always feel like Christians.

6. Doubt your doubts.

Why give your doubt a courtesy you don’t give your faith? Is your doubt so compelling that it can’t be questioned?

When we go through times of doubt, we need to make sure we are critical of our doubts as well. Doubt usually doesn’t offer a better solution; it just nags at the one we already have. For Christians, we can be sure that the central truths of our faith will never be outweighed by our doubt. Pestered, yes. But never, when we learn to doubt our doubts, should our faith be overthrown.

7. Work through the sin in your life.

I intentionally saved this one for last. Often this is the first place Christians go with a loved one in the crisis of doubt, in large part because it helps us put doubt into a discernible box. It also helps us to find a quick solution. “Oh, you’re doubting your faith? Okay, quit sinning! Next?” Obviously, doubt is often more complicated.

But we must recognize that personal sin is a faith-drainer. Disobedience to God will take a significant toll on your faith.

We're all sinners, but some sins take a unique toll on our mind and worldview—especially if we attempt to justify them. For example, struggling with same-sex attraction is one thing; actively embracing homosexuality and trying to justify it biblically is another thing altogether. The toll here is not only moral, social, and physical; it also corrupts the mind. The effort to reinterpret the Bible in a way more friendly to homosexuality won't remain isolated to this one category; sooner or later, the mental paradigm you constructed to make your sin acceptable will corrupt everything else.

In short, if there is something you know you're supposed to be doing, and you're not doing it, doubt will soon spread, and your crisis of faith will be hard to overcome. We need to gently ask these types of questions when the time is right. But simply accusing people of some deep-rooted personal sin right from the gun can be judgmental and embarrassing. Ask if there's any sin that might be causing the person's doubt. If the answer is no and you cannot readily identify anything as the cause, don't push the issue.

Land and Country

I've found that there are primarily two types of doubters. The first are walking away from God and believe they're finding freedom. The second feel they're walking away from their faith and are deeply disturbed about it. The difference with the second is that they are always facing God, crying out with arms outstretched for him to help. Thankfully, in most cases, these doubters eventually return to the faith.

You may always, to some degree, live in the land of doubt. But it's possible your particular land of doubt is still within the country of faith. Doubting your faith does not mean you don't have faith. Jude 22 says we should have mercy on those who doubt, whether that doubt is in ourselves or in others. Let us do so.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-deal-with-doubt/>