

Doubt, Fear, and Anxiety

*The physical realm life is a constant struggle to ward off disease. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, the life of faith [is] a permanent battle against doubt.*⁴²

—Alister E. McGrath

Towards the end of Jesus’ physical, earthly ministry the Apostles worshiped Jesus on a peak of a mountain in Galilee. It was there that they received The Great Commission, some of the last instructions they would receive directly from Jesus. A response to Jesus’ instructions seems out of place: “but some doubted”⁴³ (Matthew 28:17). This is amazing: at least two of the eleven Apostles (Judas Iscariot was dead at this point) there were struggling in their confidence in Jesus. No doubt, the Apostles were still processing all of the events that they had witnessed. They had been with Jesus three years and had seen him raise people from the dead, heal the sick, cure the blind. Talk about a whirlwind; look no further! Yet they were still insecure in their confidence of the Lord. Even though The eleven Apostles had seen

⁴² From Alister E. McGrath, *The Sunnier Side of Doubt* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 27. As quoted in Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, John S. Feinberg, ed., (Wheaton: Crossway Books), 273.

⁴³ Some scholars believe that the 500 people Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians were all at Galilee.

amazing things, but doubt was yet a part of their lives at that point.

To see doubt the recorded doubt is frankly, somewhat surprising. But, on the other hand, it is also encouraging in a few ways: 1) Jesus gave them The Great Commission, even in their doubts. 2) Even in their doubts, they were worshipping. 3) Seeing the disciples' doubt gives us hope in knowing that it is part of the relational experience with the Lord. We will have doubts at times. Our emotional makeups, our frail states, and sinful natures give life to them.

Go to War Against Doubt

If we are honest, we will all act like the doubting Apostles during our lifetimes. (One might think to himself/herself, "I would never doubt Jesus." "Give it time." is how most senior Christians would respond.) Like The Eleven, our doubts are real. We should not deny them, but they also should not define large sections of our lives. Consider something Spurgeon wrote,

*"Strive with all diligence to keep out the monster of unbelief. It is so dishonoring to Christ that He will withdraw His visible presence if we insult Him by tolerating it. It is true it is a weed that we can never entirely remove from the soil, but we must aim at its root with zeal and perseverance. Among hateful things it is the most to be defeated. [...] In your case, believer, it is most wicked, for the mercies of your Lord in the past increase your guilt in doubting Him now."*⁴⁴

We will see the "monster of unbelief" show itself in a few different ways: we doubt God's power; we doubt His love; we may also doubt His care/concern for us. These are terrible thoughts, but all will think them—at least briefly—over time. Be prepared.

We experience these doubts/fears mostly at times of significant difficulties. When this happens, we are to expel the doubts/fears and not allow them to take

⁴⁴ "Doubt and Unbelief" Truth for Life Devotionals from Charles H. Spurgeon, accessed Aug. 27, 2019, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/daily-devotionals/08/27/1/>.

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root in our lives. We do this best by replacing those thoughts with “whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). The Scripture teaches us to think about God’s truth because we cannot believe conflicting thoughts in the same moments of life. We may have conflicting feelings minute-to-minute, but we are to concentrate on God’s truth and live by faith in His promises. We are to establish our lives on what God has said, not on what we feel and think.

Remember, we are going to have problems. Jesus taught, “In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world” (John 16:33b). He also used a powerful metaphor to remind us of our situation in this world in Matthew 10:16, “I am sending you out like sheep surrounded by wolves... .” We should expect problems in our lives! Let’s not doubt during the trials and problems Jesus said we would experience.

We don’t need a significant amount of faith to see God do amazing things. It is not the *amount of faith* that keeps us in our contented corners; doubt is the real enemy. Jesus taught some of His disciples how much:

“Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:19–20 NKJV).

With these words, Jesus describes exactly how much potential we have as believing Christians. A mustard seed of faith with no corrupting doubt will accomplish much in the Kingdom of God.

Regarding asking God for wisdom James wrote, that a person “must ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind” (James 1:6b).

Doubt puts rot in our prayers, actions, and thoughts. We must pray with confidence in God. We do this more as we understand God better. God

explained to Isaiah in chapter 55, verse 9, “for just as the sky is higher than the earth, so my deeds are superior to your deeds and my plans superior to your plans.” Our faith should not be shaken when God allows trials in our lives. Let’s be open to how God desires to use us in life and how He wants to unfold His plan for us. Let us not lose our confidence in His wisdom and ways.

Dream Without Doubt

For your time here on earth, your prayers should far exceed what is possible for you to achieve on your own. We often keep our kingdom dreams in the framework of our abilities and understanding; therefore, we keep the dreams in our cautious limitations. We restrain our own potential *in Christ* by our unwillingness to have faith in Him to any significant degree. Paul explicitly taught these ideas in Ephesians 3:20-21, “Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Dream big with God; then dream bigger still!

Tozer wrote, “God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves.”⁴⁵

Anxiety

Children have anxiety about the dark, what’s under the bed or going to the church nursery. Adults have anxiety about adult things: the day before their weddings, going off to college, a problem pregnancy for a grandchild, or countless other things.

Jesus’ disciples had anxiety even though they saw Him calm storms, raise the dead, feed the masses, and heal the sick.

Anxiety seems to be a constant problem for many Christians in their everyday lives. Jesus taught on worry and anxiety as recorded in Luke 12:22-34:

⁴⁵ Tozer, A. W. As quoted from Ministry127.com, <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/god-wants-to-do-the-impossible>.

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²² Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For there is more to life than food, and more to the body than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by worrying can add an hour to his life? ²⁶ So if you cannot do such a very little thing as this, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider how the flowers grow; they do not work or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these! ²⁸ And if this is how God clothes the wild grass, which is here today and tomorrow is tossed into the fire to heat the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you people of little faith! ²⁹ So do not be overly concerned about what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not worry about such things. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world pursue these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, pursue his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is well pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide yourselves purses that do not wear out—a treasure in Heaven that never decreases, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

There are several key truths in this passage to live a life apart from anxiety:

1. Jesus commanded us not to worry about even food or clothing.
2. God knows what we need.
3. God will meet our basic needs.
4. We have a great inheritance.
5. The more things we have the more complex our lives become.
6. We will care about things we have invested in.

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Scripture Passages

Luke 12:1-12

Luke 24:13-27

John 16:1-4

Questions

- 1) What are some of the *sources and causes* of your doubts?
- 2) Are you doubting God in some way now?

Aim Point

- 1) If you are doubting God right now about something, confess it. Pray prayers of adoration toward Him. Ask Him for the strength to stand on what He has said instead of believing your own feelings about what is going on.
- 2) Read Hebrews chapter 11; that chapter reminds us of what others went through as they waited by faith for the revealed plans of God.