

I Have My Doubts **Jim Stephens**

Nobody wants to be a coward. We like to think we're brave and courageous and that we'd run into a burning building to rescue a child, or jump into a river to keep someone from drowning, or that we'd stand up against a wall and face a firing squad for our faith. The truth is, we never really know how brave we are or how strong our faith until it happens.

"I do believe, but help me not to doubt!" (Mark 9:24b)

John the Baptist was one of the most courageous men in the Bible. We read last week in John 1 and 3 his bold testimony about Jesus the Messiah and Savior.

John believed. He was committed to what he believed. "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," "I am only the messenger," "He must increase, I must decrease."

Matthew 3, Mark 1, and Luke 3 tell more about John's ministry. John was bold, fearless, and honest. He confronted sin in high and low places. John confronted proud religious people. John confronted selfish rich people. John confronted cruel armed soldiers.

Then John was thrown in prison for confronting the wicked puppet King Herod over his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife.

In prison, when his personal situation looked hopeless, John the Baptist – hero of faith and man of courage – began to have some doubts. In fact he sent two of his loyal followers to Jesus with this question..

Read it in Matthew 11:2-6

2 John the Baptist, who was now in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 3 "Are you really the Messiah we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?" 4 Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him about what you have heard and seen— 5 the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." (Matthew 11:2-5 NLT)

Jesus didn't rebuke or criticize John for the doubts and questions he experienced when he was in the dark. In fact, Jesus praised him for his faithfulness and his courage.

John the Baptist is one of the most famous doubters in the Bible!
Here are some Other Famous Doubters in the Bible...

The Apostle Peter (Matt 14:22-34)

*22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. **30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** 31 **Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"** (Matthew 14:30-31) 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. (Matthew 14:22-34 NIV)*

Peter was bold, outspoken, impulsive, always quick to speak and act. He believed. He left everything to follow Jesus. He took the step of faith out of the boat. But when "he saw the storm", he wavered (doubted) and began to sink. How did Jesus respond?

The Apostle Thomas (John 20:19-29)

- *On the evening of that first day of the week (**Resurrection day**), when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and showed them his hands and side.*
- *Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 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 it."***
- *A week later (**The next Sunday night**) his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.*
- ***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."** (John 20:27) 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:19-29 NIV)*

Thomas believed. He followed Jesus to the end. But when Jesus died, his hopes were shattered. And he missed out on the first resurrection experience. *(Ever feel as if you*

missed out on something really important?) But he expressed his doubt and continued to meet with them.

An Unnamed Father whose beloved son was desperately ill, tormented by a demon. (Mark 9:14-27)

- *14 At the foot of the mountain they found a great crowd surrounding the other disciples, as some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. 16 "What is all this arguing about?" he asked.*
- *17 One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son for you to heal him. He can't speak because he is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."*
- *The evil spirit often makes him fall into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us. Do something **if you can.**"*
- *23 "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." 24 The father instantly replied, "**I do believe, but help me not to doubt!**" (Mark 9:23-24)*
- *25 Jesus rebuked the evil spirit. "Spirit of deafness and muteness," he said, "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" 26 Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy lay there motionless, and he appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. (Mark 9:14-27 NLT)*

Famous doubters of the Bible. They believed in God. They believed Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior. But they also doubted!

People who have faith and who also have doubts are in very good company. It does not make you a bad person to have doubts. But it is very important that we learn what to do with doubts and how to deal with them.

You know what I think? I think You've got to be a believer to have doubts!

I have Faith, I also have Doubts. *(By the way, here's a special bulletin for those of you who never have doubts. I've got another message that has more application to you and we'll do it another time. It's called "Getting in Touch with Reality!")*

- **Faith:** I believe, I trust, I commit myself to what I believe
- **Unbelief:** I don't believe, I don't trust, I hold myself back.
- **Doubt** ("To think twice", to waver): I believe but I waver. I have second thoughts.

Faith ↔ Doubt ↔ Unbelief

Faith on one side: I believe, I trust, I commit. Unbelief on the other side: I don't believe, I don't trust, I don't commit. Doubt wavers in the middle. If you don't deal with doubt, it moves you towards unbelief.

Things we have doubts about: (Not everyone has the same doubts)

Some have more doubts about more things. Just as some worry more and some try to analyze everything. Some times we have more doubts than at other times, because of what is happening in our lives.

- Is God really there?
- Does God really love me?
- Will God answer my prayer?
- Am I really forgiven, Am I accepted, Am I saved?
- Why is life so unfair?

There are many different doubts you may have. Not all the time. Not all at the same time. Not all for the same reason.

Some causes of doubts:

- Wrong presentation of the gospel (No problems for Christians)
- Wrong view of God (Mr. Fixit or Harsh Judge)
- Lack of knowledge (I don't know what to expect, so I use my imagination)
- Lack of understanding (Why?)
- Personal experiences:
 - Unanswered prayer (Heart's desire unfulfilled, need unmet)
 - Illness (Not healed, no relief)
 - Death of a child or other loved one (Death of older, death of younger)
 - Other personal loss (Divorce, family break-up, business failure)
- Hypocrisy (Christians who say one thing and do another)

Consequences of Unconfronted Doubts:

- Fear (I'm on my own. It's not real. There's no hope!)
- Faith paralysis (I'm afraid to take a risk, a step of faith)
- Prayer paralysis (Prayers of complaint or unbelief rather than prayers of faith)
- Apathy (Why even bother? What's the point?)
- Rebellion (Alright, if that's the way God treats me, I'm out of here!)
- Discouragement (It'll never work. I'll never make it.)
- Anger (God has let me down. He failed me.)
- Frustration (What can I do?)
- Drifting further from God (drifting towards unbelief)

Right and Wrong Ways of Handling Doubts

Expressing doubts can be destructive or constructive. Holding them in and refusing to face them is always destructive!

Wrong Ways of Dealing With Doubts:

- **Ignore them.** Sweep them under the carpet. Deny them. They will form a void at foundation level in your life. When troubles come, your faith will collapse.
- **Broadcast them.** Undermine the faith of other, weaker believers (Asaph Psalm 73:2, 13-17)

2 But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff! My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. 13 Was it for nothing that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong? 14 All I get is trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain. 15 If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to your people. 16 So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is! 17 Then one day I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I thought about the destiny of the wicked. (Psalm 73:2, 13-17 NLT)

Right Ways of Dealing With Doubts:

- **Be honest.** Don't cover it up, sweep it under the carpet, bury it in the cellar. **Don't let the devil beat you up with accusations that you are inferior and that God is going to reject you because of your doubts.**
- **Go directly to Jesus.** Pray. Talk to Him. Tell Him how you feel. How did the Famous Doubters in the Bible – John the Baptist, Peter, Thomas, the Unnamed Father, handle their doubts? They brought them to Jesus. What did Jesus do? He brought them back to faith.
 - Just as John did. *Go tell John what you see and hear.*
 - Just as Peter did. *Why did you doubt? (Doubt means think twice – waver.)*
 - Just as Thomas did. *Stop doubting and believe.*
 - Just as the unnamed father did. *Anything is possible if you believe.*
- **Know the truth.** About God – His character. How? Reading, journaling, teaching.
- **Make declarations of the things you know to be true.** Memorize scripture verses. **My verses for daily reading.** What God has done for you in your life? It sets something in you.

- **Stand firm on the things you know.** What does the Bible say about it? *Jesus – "It is written."* Something is written in the Bible about all the foundational issues of faith (and doubt).
- **Don't disbelieve just because you don't understand.**
 - There will always be mysteries and unanswered questions and unresolved issues.
 - That's why it's called FAITH and not science or knowledge.
- **Talk with other believers about the issues that are causing your doubts.** God may give them insights for you. God may give you insights from the discussion.
- **If you are a mature Christian, you ought to help those who are less mature than yourself.**

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (Romans 15:1-2 NIV)

Close and response