

Is It Okay to Have Doubts?

Jonathan Morrow

Real Christians don't doubt. Or at least that's an unspoken message delivered in many churches. But the truth is that even well-known Christian historical figures wrestled with doubts, and likely your parents and youth pastors have them too! All humans experience doubts simply because no mortal can know all the answers. So be encouraged if you find yourself questioning; you are not alone. In order to live with our doubts in a spiritually healthy and faith-building way, however, we need to be clear about what doubt is and is not.

As J.P. Moreland and Klaus Issler point out in their book *In Search of a Confident Faith*, there is a difference between *unbelief*, *doubt*, and *lack of belief*.

1. *Unbelief* happens when someone willfully sets himself against a biblical teaching, as would be the case in a person asserting that Jesus is not the Son of God.
2. *Doubt* involves an intellectual, emotional, or psychological barrier that keeps a person from placing more secure confidence in a biblical teaching or in God himself. It may sound something like this: "I believe God is always there for me; but when bad stuff happens, I struggle to believe that."
3. *Lack of belief* involves someone disbelieving a biblical teaching or idea, though they want to believe. Someone with a lack of belief may say, "I need some help to believe."

Doubts aren't created equally; they come in different flavors. The two most common are *intellectual* and *emotional* doubts. Given a Christian understanding of faith as "confidence or trust in what we have reason to believe is true" as opposed to blind faith or wishing, the recipe for overcoming your doubts is not to somehow dig deep and crank out more faith by holding your breath and concentrating. Instead, you need courage to "doubt your doubts." Investigate them. Seek truth. (1) Be specific about what your doubts are—write them out and list reasons for and against them. (2) Pray, asking the Lord to help you in your unbelief. (3) Search the articles in this study Bible for answers. (4) Remind yourself that you are not the only one to ever ask your particular question; moreover, a reasonable answer to every concern related to Scripture exists 99.9 percent of the time.

Sometimes emotional doubts look like intellectual ones. But they are rooted in feelings. Perhaps you doubt because you've experienced disappointment, failure, pain, or loss. Maybe you have an unresolved conflict or wounds from your past that need to be addressed. Could it be you're allowing unruly emotions to carry you away for no good reason? Is this a spiritually dry season, one in which you are spending little time in prayer or studying the Word? Could it be that your doubts come down to fearing to really commit to someone? Remember, while feelings are normal, they aren't always right. They must be examined. And we must keep in mind that being emotionally down has nothing whatsoever to do with whether or not the Bible is reliable or whether God exists.

If you find yourself doubting, you're in good company (see Mk 9:24). But having the courage to doubt your doubts and investigate their causes leads to greater confidence in your relationship with Jesus. He can work through your doubts to increase your faith.