

Overcoming Doubt

Message 04 of the series, "Outlook: Overcoming Negative Emotions"

I. **Doubting God is common.**

"Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. "How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Mark 9:17-27 (NLT)

Life Application: Faith is essential to having a personal relationship with God.

"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see... And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him." Hebrews 11:1, 6 (NLT)

"We live by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV)

II. **Five Reasons We Doubt:**

a. God doesn't do things the way we think He should or when we think He should.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)

b. We can't explain God scientifically.

"The LORD our God has secrets known to no one." Deuteronomy 29:29 (NLT)

c. God's people have let us down.

"I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." Mark 9:18 (NLT)

d. Many people around us express doubts.

"Don't worry about this Philistine," David told Saul. "I'll go fight him!" "Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth." 1 Samuel 17:32-33 (NLT)

e. We focus on the size of our problems rather than the strength of our God.

Moses responded to the LORD, "There are 600,000 foot soldiers here with me, and yet you say, 'I will give them meat for a whole month!' ...Even if we caught all the fish in the sea, would that be enough?" Then the LORD said to Moses, "Has my arm lost its power? Now you will see whether or not my word comes true!" Numbers 11:21-23 (NLT)

III. **Five Things We Can Do to Help Us Overcome Doubt and Unbelief:**

a. We can acknowledge our doubts and pray.

"I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:24 (NLT)

Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer." Mark 9:28-29 (NLT)

Note: The disciples didn't have as much faith as they thought.

Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?" "You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matthew 17:19-20 (NLT)

Note: Effective prayer demonstrates our reliance on God as we surrender to His will and ask Him to fill us with faith and power.

- b. We can spend time in God's Word.

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Romans 10:17 (NIV)

"And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth." Acts 17:11 (NLT)

- c. We can spend time with people of faith who can educate and encourage us.

"When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours." Romans 1:12 (NLT)

"We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey." 2 Cor. 10:4-5 (NLT)

- d. We can remember the great things God has done in the past.

"Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will he never again be kind to me? Is his unfailing love gone forever? Have his promises permanently failed? ...But then I recall all you have done, O LORD; I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago. They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about your mighty works." Psalm 77:7-12 (NLT)

- e. We can act on the faith we have.

"Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well." James 5:13-15 (NLT)

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

John Schmidt • 11-04-18 • john@centeringlives.com

Resources to Help Build Our Faith and Overcome Doubt:

- *When God Doesn't Make Sense: Holding On to Your Faith During the Hardest Times*, by Dr. James Dobson, TYNDALE HOUSE / 2012
- *Disappointment with God*, by Philip Yancey, ZONDERVAN / 1997
- *Know Why You Believe, New Edition*, by Paul E. Little and James F. Nyquist, INTERVARSITY PRESS / 2008
- *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis, HARPERONE / 2001
- *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel, ZONDERVAN / 2016
- *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution, 10th Anniversary Edition*, by Michael J. Behe, FREE PRESS / 2006

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. Doubt does not just appear in our lives for no reason. What are some factors that contribute to experiencing doubt at different times in our lives?
2. Read Romans 8:28. Have you ever doubted that God could/would cause a bad situation to work out for good in the end? What influenced your doubting God?
3. Read Genesis 3:1-7 and 1 Peter 5:7-9. Do you believe that some of the circumstances in your life may be orchestrated by the devil to tempt you to doubt? How can someone stand firm against such shrewd attacks?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and Proverbs 12:25-26. What are some small things that have been said to you that encouraged you greatly on days you were struggling? Does encouragement have to be something deep and well-thought-out, or can it be something simple and kind?
5. Read Joshua 4:21-22 and Psalm 77:10-12. In seasons of trial and difficulty, we need to remember God's faithfulness to us in the past. Have you ever experienced spiritual amnesia (forgetting what God has done for you)? What are some practical ways we can overcome this and intentionally remember the good things God has done for us?
6. Read Titus 2:14-15. Through Jesus Christ we have been freed from doubt. However, each time we're tempted to doubt, we are faced with the choice of whether or not we will live in that freedom. What are some ways you can reject doubt and live in the freedom that Jesus Christ died to give you? How can you encourage believers to do the same?
7. Is doubt affecting your life today? How can your connect group encourage and pray for you?