

Week 1

Where Doubt Comes From



Welcome to Session 1.

When many of us hear the word “doubt,” we think it’s sinful. To question God is wrong, right? Well, that depends on the definition of doubt. We need to know what, “doubt” is before we can begin to figure out how to deal with it.

How would you define “doubt”?

Give an example of a doubt you’ve had before?

In this session, we’re going to answer the big question, “What is doubt?” To understand doubt, we have to understand who God is, since He’s the one we’re doubting, and we have to understand ourselves in relationship to Him. We’re going to face some big, foundational biblical truths—about who God is and who we are as Created beings—and see how those truths relate to our doubts.

ASK SOMEONE TO PRAY THEN WATCH THE VIDEO TEACHING FOR SESSION 1.

Use this page to take notes during the video teaching.

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE YOUR GROUP DISCUSSION.

Doubt is a profoundly personal, deeply felt struggle for many people. In the coming sessions, we'll engage that side of it, but in this session we explore the big questions of doubt: what is it, and where does it come from? These are big idea questions and will lay an important foundation for understanding God, doubt, and faith that moves us forward.

This session defined doubt, in it's most basic form, as "simply not knowing." Why, then, is doubt not necessarily sinful?

What do our doubts say about us?

What do our doubts say about God?

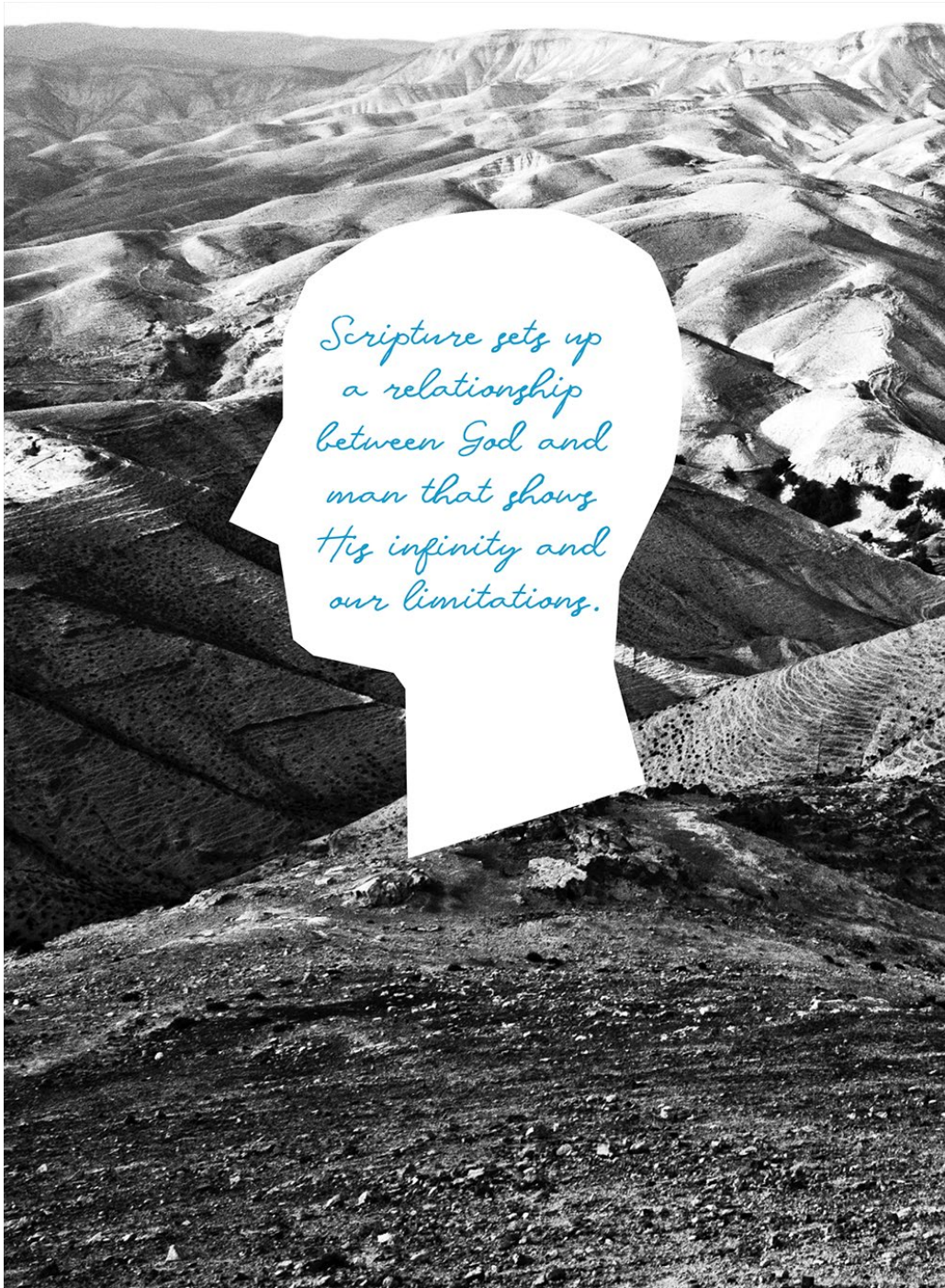
Read Psalm 139:6. If God is infinite and we're not, why are many of our doubts natural?

What stirs up your doubts?

How do you respond when you doubt? Do you feel guilty when you doubt? Why or why not?

How has today's session changed the way you think about your doubts?

CLOSE THE GROUP IN PRAYER. REMIND THE GROUP TO COMPLETE THE THREE PERSONAL STUDIES BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING.



Personal Study 1

READ GENESIS 1.

What does this passage tell us about the relationship between God and people?

How should we think about God as a result?

From its very first words, Scripture sets up a relationship between God and man that shows His infinity and our limitations. He's the Creator, and we're the created. He existed before time began, and we exist within time. He's eternal, and we have a life span. He always has been, and we came into existence at a specific time, and our bodies will pass away at a specific time. He created everything from nothing, and we're part of that, spoken into existence with words.

To understand God, and our own doubts, it's vital that we grasp this relationship. We tend to go through life with the assumption that we can learn, discover, and comprehend anything if we truly want to. We see ourselves as the masters of our domain with the world at our fingertips. We have technology, science, and cultural advancements on our side. We build lives of ease and efficiency with the aim of security and comfort. And we rarely, if ever, consider our limitations or God's lack of them.

Think about your own life and relationship with God. What does it mean for you that God is infinitely good, wise, and powerful?

How difficult is it for you to acknowledge your limitations? Why is humility an important aspect of our faith-walks?

God created all that exists, so He stands outside of and beyond the created order. God was, is, and will be forever. God spoke all things into existence and created our ability to learn, create, think, solve, build, and make. Despite all our efforts, we'll reach the end of our abilities. We'll max out our understanding. We live within a defined time frame and a limited capacity for understanding. Refusing to acknowledge these limitations only leads to hurt, sorrow, and confusion.

READ GENESIS 3.

Where do we see doubt in this passage?

In Genesis 3, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to doubt the goodness of God. They foolishly chose to pursue being gods rather than trusting what God said. They wanted God's knowledge for themselves. They wanted His deity and infinity, so they broke His explicit command. In doing so, they introduced sin into the world, and they doomed themselves and every person to follow to death. In one bittersweet bite of fruit, the world went from paradise to graveyard. Adam and Eve's doubts led them away from God.

In what areas of life are you most tempted to doubt God?

The consequence of sin was a curse. It's not a spell or a fairy tale curse that can be broken by a kiss or a quest. It isn't limited to a person or place. It's pervasive, touching every person everywhere for every moment of all time. The curse taints every aspect of life: relational, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual.

This means that every thought we have, every discovery, advancement, and invention—they're all flawed and incomplete. And it means that our view of ourselves is broken too.

Think about the curse that God institutes in Genesis 3 (vv. 14–19). How does the curse affect how we relate to other people? How we work? How we view ourselves?

We want knowledge, like God. We want to be gods of our own lives, and we often don't even realize these sinful impulses. The fall has blinded us and we can't see what is true as reality. We love things we shouldn't, believe things we shouldn't, and are skeptical of things that are true and good.

When we consider God's perfect holiness, the curse becomes that much bleaker. Before, we were limited in our understanding of God by being finite. Now we're sinful, blind, self-worshipping, and further removed from a true understanding of God.

How does the curse impact our ability to understand and see God for who He is? How does it shape how we view ourselves in relationship to Him?

We've seen two significant realities that shape how we see and understand God. First, God is infinite, and we're finite. Second, God is perfect, and we're sinful. It seems obvious, then, that we would struggle to understand God. With our limitations and weaknesses and His infinity and holiness, we're bound to reach the borders of our understanding. We don't have the capacity to fully understand an infinite God.

Now we're at the core of where doubt comes from. Doubt, in its most basic form, is when we say, "I don't know." It's simply being unsure. Doubt happens when we don't understand. For finite, sinful people like us, of course, we'll experience doubts about God.

Why are we so uncomfortable admitting "I don't know" when it comes to God?

God is constantly thinking and doing things at a level beyond our comprehension. At every moment, God is sustaining the entire universe, knowing every thought, weaving every life, and working His perfect plan for all creation. He never stops. We can't possibly comprehend even a minuscule fraction of God's perfect knowledge and wisdom. We shouldn't be expected to fully understand God.

As you reflect on these truths, something should stir in your mind; doubt isn't necessarily a sin. To doubt is human; it's natural. It's a direct result of being who we are—finite creatures seeking to understand things beyond ourselves. We'll inevitably doubt. It's inevitable we'll question, wonder, and be unsure.

Scripture is full of people with questions and doubts. Gideon asked God for a sign because he was afraid (Judges 6:36–40). Hannah pleaded with God for a son with the kind of pain that only comes from fear and doubt (1 Sam. 1:1–11). Job lost everything and wondered aloud why such a thing would happen (Job 3:11). The Psalms overflow with prayers asking where God is, when He'll return, has He forgotten his people, and more. The prophets lamented and mourned and wondered when God would rescue His people. Thomas didn't know how to believe in Jesus' resurrection until he saw Him in the flesh (John 20:25).

Why did the writers of Scripture include stories about people of faith who wrestled with questions and doubts?

How does knowing that people of faith struggled with doubt change your definition of what it means to be a mature Christian?

To doubt is human. It's how we respond when we doubt that determines whether or not it's a sin. You can doubt in a way that draws you closer to faith in God, or you can doubt in a way that undermines and dissolves your faith. We'll study this distinction further in the coming sessions.

Since doubting is human and normal, what is it that separates sinful doubt from the kind that builds our faith?

What kind of response to doubt should we have in order to strengthen our faith in God?

Personal Study 2

We saw in the first study that in one sense, doubt is not knowing. It comes from our limitations and sinfulness, an inability to see and understand all that God is, and all that He is doing. It's innate to humans to simply not know, to misunderstand, and to, therefore, doubt.

On the other hand, that's not where it feels like doubt comes from much of the time. For some of us, doubt is intellectual—big questions about God and deep questions about reality or truth. For many others, though, doubt is experiential. It wells up when circumstances aren't right, and life is hard; death, illness, unemployment, divorce, financial hardship, broken relationships, betrayals, tragedies, natural disasters. The pain and loss we feel stirs up questions we cannot answer, most notably and consistently, "WHY?"

This study will not likely answer that question (sorry!), but hopefully, it will help you know what to do with it. Because that really matters. How you ask questions in the midst of hardship and to whom you ask them could be the difference between drawing closer to God or leaving the faith.

When you think about times you've asked "why?" in difficult circumstances, where have you gone for answers? Has that been helpful? Why or why not?

Do your doubts stem more from intellectual questions or experiential hardship? What motivates you to look for answers?

Intellectual questions

Experiential doubt

Let's look at a passage that can help us consider our doubts and struggles and give us some clarity and comfort.

Psalm 139:1-6 says:

*Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I stand up;
you understand my thoughts from far away.
You observe my travels and my rest;
you are aware of all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue,
you know all about it, Lord.
You have encircled me;
you have placed your hand on me.
This wondrous knowledge is beyond me.
It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.*

PSALM 139:1-6

Verses 1–5 should comfort us with the reality that God cares for us and is always with us. Everything described in verses 1–5, everything we find comforting, stems from the bigness of God and His constant awareness, foreknowledge, power, and protection at all times. These characteristics demonstrate the sovereignty and infinity of God. They are expressions of God's power and character on behalf of His people.

What does this passage reveal about God's character?

How does possessing an understanding of God's character help us trust Him even when we don't have all the answers?

In verse 6, the passage culminates in wonder. David wrote that the ways and wisdom of God are too wondrous to be understood by mere humans. This is primarily a statement of worship. The very things about God that cause us to doubt—those aspects of His character that are infinite and mysterious—are the very reason we can trust Him in faith.

Psalm 139 offers a gentle but non-ignorable answer: it's not always for us to know, but we can always trust. This doesn't mean it's wrong to ask why, to wonder, or to feel the deep ache of why. It does mean that it's wrong for us to resent or mistrust God when there isn't a readily apparent answer.

How does knowing that some things are beyond our grasp actually help with our doubts?

Our knee jerk reaction is to think “that doesn't make sense” or “that isn't right.” But to think like this is to make the tacit assumption that we know better than God and to assume that our instincts are more correct than His Word. When the Scripture declares God's knowledge “too wondrous,” it gives context to our questions and doubts—they're real, they're powerful, they matter, and they exist inside the infinite wisdom and goodness of God. The moment our questions and doubts move us to a place of thinking God's Word isn't right and we know best is when our doubts have become sin.

Why is it so natural for us to think that our understanding is greater than God's?

What level of trust do you place on the Word of God? How do you reconcile your opinions and feelings with the Word of God? What or who is the final authority in your life?

Your questions aren't too big for God. God is immense while also being close, personal, caring, and attentive (Ps. 139:1–5). We must never confuse God's greatness for God being distant. God is love (1 John 4:8) and nothing earthly, spiritual, or circumstantial can separate the children of God from His love (Rom. 8:38-38). We know this because He sent Jesus to be one of us, fully human while maintaining full deity, and to live the life we couldn't live and die the death we deserved to die.

At every moment God is sustaining the entire universe, knowing every thought, weaving every life, and working His perfect plan for all creation.

So when we're confronted with “Why?” and see no clear answer, that's OK. God has the answer, and God is not far away. God not only has the answer, God is the answer to all our doubts and questions. He's close, He's watching, and He's caring.

How can we keep in mind God's greatness and infinity when we begin to doubt and question?

Personal Study 3

We've examined doubt from the outside—where it comes from, the nature of it, and how we should think about it. That kind of study is helpful and necessary. But doubt is also deeply personal and isn't something we should only examine clinically or externally. Let's examine doubt from the inside: how you experience doubt and think about it. Whether you struggle deeply with doubt or not at all, put thought and prayer into these questions. Be honest with yourself and with God as you answer and see what He reveals about Himself, faith, and your heart.

What kinds of doubts have you experienced or struggled with? What questions have nagged at you or scared you enough you've been afraid even to ask?

How have you handled questions about God or Scripture that seem unanswerable, the mysterious or difficult portions of the Bible?

Do you struggle to find peace with the idea that God knows things and acts in ways beyond your understanding? Why or why not?

Have you felt guilt for doubting? If so, how has this session affected those feelings? If not, why do you think that is?

When you doubt, what do you do? How do you respond?