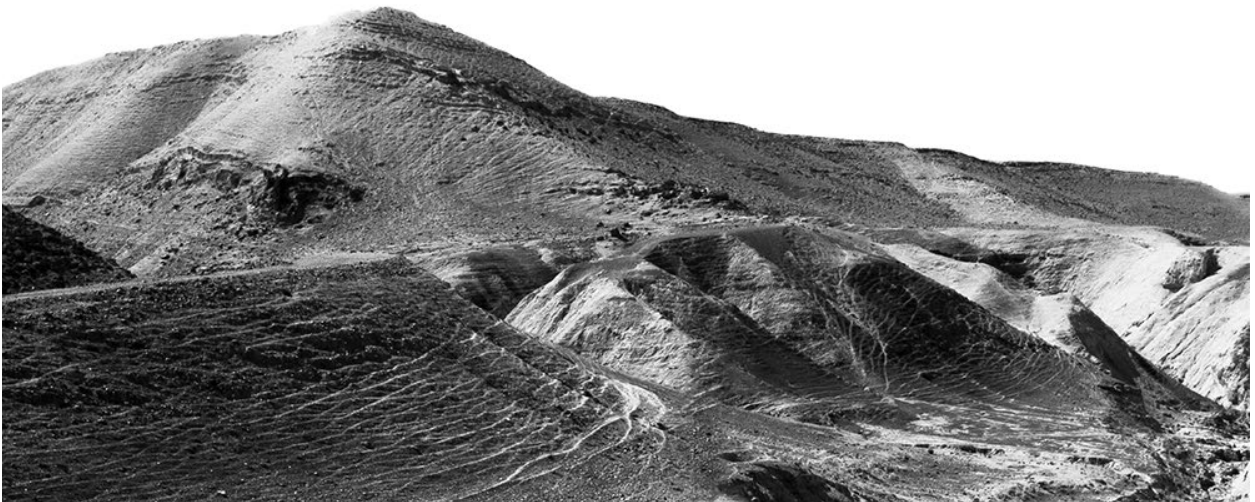


Week 2

Doubts that Break Our Faith



Welcome to Session 2.

What was one key takeaway from your personal study last week?

Last session, the question was posed, “Is doubt sin?” and we came to this conclusion: It’s how we respond when we doubt that determines whether 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.

As you’ve thought about your own doubts, do your doubts draw you closer to God or drive a wedge in your relationship with Him?

That's the issue we'll address in this session: how we doubt, particularly, how we shouldn't doubt. We'll walk through what it looks like to doubt in such a way our faith is undermined and ruined. We'll explore the kinds of attitudes and beliefs that lead us down this road and examine ways to avoid them without dodging hard questions.

How do we contemplate hard questions, mysteries, and uncertainty without losing our faith? That's the question we are about to answer.

**ASK SOMEONE TO PRAY THEN WATCH THE VIDEO TEACHING FOR
SESSION 2.**

Use this page to take notes during the video teaching.

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE YOUR GROUP DISCUSSION.

This session explored one side of doubt—the negative side. It looked at what kind of doubt becomes sin. And it left a big question mostly unanswered: How can doubt build our faith? That’s OK and on purpose. We’ll explore that in the coming sessions, but for this discussion, focus on how you respond to questions and doubts.

Thinking about your own doubts, are you most likely to take questions to God and His Word, or do you look elsewhere?

Have someone read Hebrews 11:1. How does this verse highlight the tension between faith and doubt?

What do you think the difference is between doubts that destroy faith and doubts that build it up?

When you hear the phrase “God says it, I believe it, that settles it” what does it mean to you? How does this phrase dismiss doubts that need to be dealt with?

Can you think of any biblical examples of those who doubted? How did they handle their questions/doubts? What were the results?

What experiences do you have of questions/doubts drawing you closer to God?

Personal Study 1

Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

HEBREWS 11:1 (CSB)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

HEBREWS 11:1 (ESV)

What do you notice about the connection between doubt and faith in this verse?

In Hebrews 11:1, we see something mind-bending, and looks almost like a contradiction in terms. We see faith defined in terms that seem opposed to one another—reality or assurance of hope, proof, or conviction of the unseen. If something is hoped for and is unseen, that means we're inevitably unsure of it. We may be confident and may believe strongly in it, but we aren't sure. But this verse says faith is the assurance of those things, the conviction of them. Faith proves to our hearts the very thing we're unsure of. Confounding, right?

How has faith given you proof when you would have otherwise been unsure?

As long as we're wading in deep waters, let's go a little deeper. The further implication in this verse is that faith and doubt are inseparable. If there is no doubt, there can be no faith. Hebrews 11 inextricably links something we don't like and don't think is good (doubt) to something we desperately want and know we need (faith). But if you remember that doubt *is not* inherently sinful and *is* inherently human, this verse becomes clearer.

Does it make you uncomfortable to link doubt and faith? Explain.

Of course, faith and doubt are inseparably linked. How else could we believe anything about an infinite, perfect God? Our instinct is to want clear answers and empirical evidence for every idea. We want neat and tidy truths summed up clearly, but with God we get no such thing. We certainly can't reduce Him to a size we can wrap our heads around. Nor can we overcome our sinful blindness and skewed perspective on our own. Questions will remain unanswered. Evidence will be unsatisfactory. We'll never neatly systematize and sum up God. This means that faith, the assurance and confidence of those things we hope for in the Lord and the conviction of those things we haven't seen about Him, is the only right response to doubt. There can be no faith without doubt.

But there can be doubt without faith. This is the doubt that destroys faith and is what I call “unbelieving doubt.”

Does “unbelieving doubt” sound redundant to you? What’s the alternative?

When unbelieving doubt poses a question, it’s not interested in the answer for any reason other than to disprove it. If you’re experiencing this kind of doubt, you’re not asking questions to learn; you’re asking in order to undermine and don’t want to progress to an answer. You want to show that there’s no answer or to deflect and disparage the answer, so you don’t have to believe it. Unbelieving doubt isn’t working toward anything true but merely against belief. These doubts are the wild monsters that wreck faith.

How does a person get here? What separates unbelieving doubt from believing doubt? (I know, “believing doubt” sounds like a contradiction; an explanation is forthcoming).

Ultimately the answer is this: unbelieving doubt is placing your faith in the wrong thing. That’s right; unbelieving doubt is based on faith. It may refuse to have faith in God or His Word, but it absolutely functions on faith—faith in self. Doubt that destroys our faith in Jesus is actually faith in ourselves.

What do you think when you read “unbelieving doubt is based on faith”? Faith in what or whom? Can a person go through life with no faith at all?

**Resistance to God’s Word as true and authoritative communicates
that you define truth and are your own authority.**

Consider this: a refusal to believe God is an affirmation that I know better; it’s the belief that God doesn’t know best. Thus, it’s a belief in my knowledge, my way, my wisdom. A resistance to seeing God’s Word as true and authoritative is an affirmation that I define truth and am my own authority. Unbelieving doubt is an assertion that I am god and is idolatry of me.

Think back to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden and brought sin and death into God’s perfect creation. They chose to believe God didn’t really know best, that He wasn’t telling the truth. Their doubt in God was belief in a lie.

How did Adam and Eve exercise faith in themselves by disbelieving God?

In what areas are you tempted to trust your own judgment over and above what God has said?

It takes faith to doubt God just as much as it does to believe in God. Except that this faith is based on a finite, sinful person who will inevitably follow in the footsteps of Adam and Eve.

The doubt that undermines faith is not a doubt of simply being unsure; we're all unsure at different points in time. Unbelieving doubt is a refusal to believe and a conviction that what I'm unsure of is more sure than what God said. And to hold this conviction, you must believe profoundly in yourself and your ability to know, understand, and outwit God.

Where do you see unbelieving doubt at work in the world around you?

While there are things God says and does that are beyond our comprehension, why is it so easy to forget what He has done and said that we can understand (the exodus, His promises, the cross, the Resurrection, etc.)?

The Bible frequently reminds us to remember God's past faithfulness in order to believe in Him in the present and future. God often says of Himself, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt." Unbelieving doubt requires that we spurn the past faithfulness of God. It asks us to ignore the command to "not forget all his benefits" (Ps. 103:2). In short, it requires us to disregard God's work and trust our own.

Do you think every person struggles with unbelieving doubt? Where do you see it in your own life?

What do you think the relationship is between unbelieving doubt and other sins or struggles?

Personal Study 2

The fool says in his heart “there is no God.”

PSALM 14:1 & PSALM 53:1

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

PROVERBS 9:10

Sometimes putting things in terms of “doubt” and “belief” makes them impersonal. It can sound intellectual, like a thought exercise or a problem to solve. But that’s not how the Bible deals with unbelief. Scripture makes it clear that the defining thing about us is what we believe about God. So to discuss “unbelieving doubt” is no mere thought exercise or puzzle. It’s a matter of life being rich and full or empty and hopeless.

How and why is what we believe about God the most defining thing in our lives?

How does what you believe about God define your life?

In the previous study, we described unbelieving doubt as idolatry, the belief in self as the lord of life. How does this look in the midst of struggles?

Thinking God made a mistake.

Thinking God forgot something.

Thinking God was surprised by something

Thinking God isn’t who He says He is in the Bible.

Thinking God hasn’t or won’t keep His promises.

Thinking that just because we don’t understand something about God means it can’t be understood.

Thinking God isn’t good because He isn’t doing what we want Him to do.

Thinking God owes us something.

Some of you doing this study might not believe there is a God. Most of you, however, do believe in God. And most of you who believe in God claim to follow Him. So let me pose this question:

What's the difference between believing we're the lord of our own lives and not believing in God at all?

If our doubts put us in a position where we no longer trust God, we question His motives, we wonder about His abilities, we're skeptical of His presence and power, and we mistrust His Word then what's the real, functional difference between these unbelieving doubts and not believing in God at all?

Psalms 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 begin the same way: "The fool says in his heart 'there is no God.'" In biblical terms, a fool is someone who rebels against God, who is wise in his own eyes, and thinks he knows best. This is the essence of unbelieving doubt. The rejection of God is foolishness, according to the Bible. But we need to understand that "foolishness" isn't the same as "stupidity" or "ignorance." Those are issues of knowledge and immaturity. Foolishness—as the Bible defines it—is sin leading to destruction. Unbelieving doubt is foolishness.

If foolishness is the rejection of God and leads to the way of destruction, what's biblical wisdom? What are its rewards?

Look at Proverbs 9:10, though. It offers a refrain that is woven throughout the pages of Proverbs and is reflected across all the books of the Bible.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

To grasp the significance of this, we need to understand what "fear" and "wisdom" mean.

What does "fear of the Lord" mean? Why is it a good thing for us?

To fear the Lord doesn't mean to cower or feel threatened. 1 John tells us that "perfect love casts out fear" and "God is love," so we know this can't be that kind of fear. Instead, imagine standing in the African Savannah and seeing a bull elephant striding toward you. You would be afraid, but you would be awed too. Now imagine standing on the brink of Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world at more than 3,000 feet. You would be weak in the knees at the height and the rush of water, but you would be overwhelmed by the beauty and majesty too. Now imagine meeting Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain, known for her diplomacy, gentility, and dignity. You would be nervous and overwhelmed by her position of royalty but also warmed and welcomed by her grace. Combine these, and we have the slightest sense of what it feels like to fear God.

What's the connection between fearing the Lord and doubt?

What makes fear of the Lord matter to us daily as we deal with hard questions and difficult or painful realities of life?

To fear the Lord is more than this too. To fear the Lord is to know and believe deep down in our souls what we laid out in the first session: God is infinite, all-powerful, and all good, and we aren't. So it is to live life according to the way and command of the God who knows best, plans best, works best, and has our best in mind. This is wisdom. Wisdom is to walk according to the way of the Lord, not the way of self. It's the way of hope and life.

Unbelieving doubt is foolish rebellion against the living God. It's not a mere exploration of ideas but rather a rejection of the truth that gives life. Believing in God is hard. Believing in God can be confusing. Sometimes it's scary—so is fearing the Lord. The difference is that the fear of the Lord brings into account the love of the Lord, which drives out other fears and is the way of wisdom, life, and hope.



Personal Study 3

While doubt isn't necessarily a sin, there's a great temptation for us to respond to it in such a way that it becomes sin. It's easy and natural to respond to difficult questions or circumstances with an attitude of pride and a mindset that we know best. Sometimes this is overt rebellion, and other times it's a quiet resignation that we can't believe God and His Word. Either way, when we struggle to find hope in God, we are like the fool who says in his heart, "there is no God" because a God we don't trust might as well not even exist. This is unbelieving doubt. Now is the time to do a frightening thing: examine your heart. Drag your doubts into the light to let the Word of God shine on them. See how He compares to things you fear and how He responds to the questions you struggle to answer.

When you read Hebrews 11:1, how do you make sense of the tension between the assurance it describes and the unknown it describes? How does that help you understand what it means to have faith?

When you read "a refusal to believe God is an affirmation that I know better," what does that look like in your life? In what areas of life do you act as if you know better than God?

How do you think doubts transition from an innocent starting place of "I don't know" to the place of unbelief that can't or won't trust God?

If you say you believe in God, but you can't or won't trust Him, what kind of God is He really?

What's the connection between faith, wisdom, and fear of the Lord? What do you need to pray for specifically to grow in these characteristics?