

Week 3

Bring Your Doubt to Jesus



START

Welcome to Session 3.

As you studied unbelieving doubt over the last week, what point or idea was the most helpful to you? Why?

In the last session, we looked particularly at the kinds of doubt that undermine and kill our faith, unbelieving doubt. Starting this week, we're going to begin to see how doubts can actually build our faith.

What do you do instinctively when you begin to struggle with doubt? What actions do you take?

For the next few sessions, we'll look at a story of a doubting man's interaction with Jesus from a few different angles to see what we can learn about how we should respond to doubts and how Jesus responds to us. We will begin to see how his response to doubt led him to help, hope, and faith in Jesus.

WATCH

Use this page to take notes during the video teaching.

DISCUSS

Read Mark 9:14-17 together.

Where do you see yourself in this story of a father in need?

What could you learn about doubt and questions from this father's faith?

Why is it so hard to bring doubts and struggles to Jesus?

What does it look like for you to bring doubts to Jesus? What practical steps can you take to do that?

This session examined the story of a father facing an enormous struggle, dealing with massive doubts, and coming to Jesus for help. It's a story of faith that we should be able to find ourselves in. No, most of us don't have a demon-possessed child. But we do have problems we don't know how to resolve. The father recognized what he was dealing with reached beyond his capability, so He took his needs and doubts to Jesus. The question is: does our response to doubt resemble his?

What's the risk when we refuse to bring doubts to Jesus?

What experiences have you had in bringing hard things to Jesus? What has the result been?

KNOW- PERSONAL STUDY 1

READ MARK 9:14-27.

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

MARK 9:14-27

What stands out to you in this text, specifically about the father's actions and posture?

Think of the people you love most in the world: your spouse, children, friends, or family. Now imagine that one of them faced potential death every day. With no notice, he will experience a fit or seizure that could take his life. This has gone on for years, and you have tried everything in your power to help. You've taken him to doctors and specialists, you've taken him to psychiatrists and counselors, and you've met with pastors and prayed over him. And still, he suffers. And you suffer with him.

Put yourself in the shoes of the father in this story. How do you think he must've been feeling? What kinds of struggles was he bringing to Jesus?

The father in this story was helpless, exhausted, and afraid. All his efforts had come to nothing. As a father, he likely felt guilt and shame because he couldn't save his child from suffering. He was supposed to provide for and protect his children, and he could do nothing. He was powerless. Each day was an unknown, a frightening reality of uncertainty, and he had no idea when this cycle would come to an end or what possible end there would be besides disaster and tragedy.

So many of our doubts come from a similar circumstance. It may not be a child whom we can't help or heal, but the emotions and struggles are the same: fear, worry, fatigue, shame, guilt, helplessness. It's a context of all questions and no answers. Doubts thrive when we keep them to ourselves instead of taking them to Christ.

What experiences or struggles have you had that have stirred up doubts like this?

The text isn't clear whether the father came to Jesus with his need as soon as he heard about Him or whether he was reluctant to approach Jesus. It doesn't say whether he had known about Jesus for months and hesitated out of fear and shame or whether he rushed to get help from Jesus the moment he heard about His miracles and ministry. It doesn't say whether he traveled a great distance or down the block. What it makes abundantly clear is that the man faced an overwhelming problem, struggled with doubts, and brought them to the feet of Jesus.

Why do you delay bringing your doubt to Jesus?

How do your doubts fester and grow by not bringing them to Jesus, so that He can deal with them?

The father approached Jesus unabashedly. Not tentatively or privately. Not leaving his son behind lest he cause a scene. Not in secret and embarrassment like the religious leader, Nicodemus (John 3). The father came in a crowd, brought his son, and boldly asked for the help he needed. He even asked the disciples first, since Jesus wasn't there yet. He was in desperate need and willing to do what it took to get help. In short, the father's actions were the exact opposite of our most common instincts.

What can we learn from the father about how we can approach Jesus with doubts?

The father was a model of obedience and faith. He modeled the kind of faith Hebrews 11:1 describes--, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." He approached Jesus with boldness (assurance) and asked for help with clarity (conviction) in spite of the doubts he carried. He embodied faith. This story depicts how we should respond to doubt and the actions we should take.

Do you feel free to come to Jesus with boldness and confidence in your time of need like the father did? Why or why not?

What doubts are you keeping from Jesus?

Some of you may just now be discovering the real Jesus. Some of you have known Jesus for a long time. Regardless, the actions of faith are the same. Come to Jesus with your doubts. He will respond with mercy and grace and the help you need. You'll find no answer to doubts and struggles elsewhere. Only Jesus can meet our desperate needs and answer our deepest questions

BE- PERSONAL STUDY 2

Many of us acknowledge we should bring our doubts to Jesus, but mere acknowledgment isn't enough. We have to take action and actually bring our doubts to Jesus. In the first day of personal study, we put ourselves in the shoes of the father in the story—with all his fears, pains, and doubts. For many of us, this exercise was a thought experiment. However, for others of us, we don't need to imagine doubts; we wake up each morning with real doubts and questions.

While the father approached Jesus with clarity and boldness, our inclination is to do the exact opposite. When we carry the sort of burdens he bore—fatigue, fear, shame, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness—Jesus is often the last place we run. We fear rejection. We don't trust His promises. We forget all the accounts Scripture gives us of Jesus saving, helping, healing, restoring. Our sinful nature, the one that follows in the footsteps of Adam and Eve, gravitationally pulls away from Jesus.

What happens when you pull away from Jesus?

What leads you to pull away in the first place?

Sometimes we seek to hide our struggles. This may work with other people, but it will never work with God. We forget God is all-knowing and ever-present. It's impossible to hide anything from Him.

Sometimes we flee the presence of God. This might look like letting dust gather on our Bible, avoiding Christian community, and neglecting prayer. However, our doubts grow in proportion to our distance from God.

Sometimes we deny reality. We deny doubts and struggles, and suppress them in an attempt to fool ourselves and others. It's like a child who, when told to clean her room, shoves everything under the bed and announces, "I'm done." If she tries that enough times, eventually all the trash begins to spill out. The old juice boxes gather fruit flies, and the banana peel stinks to high heaven.

When we deny the reality of our struggles, they turn into a putrid mess that eventually become obvious.

Sometimes we use a proxy for Jesus. We talk to friends, counselors, and pastors. These are all good things to do when doubting. It should not be struggled with alone. And when we rightly lean on people in our struggles, they point us back to the truth of Scripture and the hope of Jesus. But often those good things become substitutes for Jesus. If we're taking our struggles to good people but ignoring the Word of God, we're settling for less than the hope and help we truly need.

Why do the above tendencies seem like a better option to us than going to Jesus directly?

Counselors, friends, and pastors are all good gifts whom God gave us to help us. But how do you recognize when you're depending on them instead of Jesus?

All of the examples on the previous page are ultimately examples of depending on ourselves instead of God. Only after we've run through a multitude of these self-solutions do we stop and finally arrive at the conclusion that we need Jesus. He's our last resort.

He's also our best resort. Jesus is the only true hope for the struggling doubter. Yes, we can run, hide, or deny for a time, but nothing is resolved in our souls. In fact, usually the opposite happens, and things get worse. Yes, counselors and pastors and friends will help—in so much as they point back to the truth of Christ as found in the Bible. Anything shy of that, and they feed our dependence on idols and self.

What or whom are you currently depending on that isn't Jesus?

All our fears and hesitations, the same ones the father must have felt, aren't too great for Jesus. No shame is too deep. No struggle leaves a stain too dark.

No web of questions is too tangled. No long-standing failure is too late. Jesus is the hope for it all. This is what the father realized in Mark 9, and what we must realize now. If you struggle to believe this, consider that the father brought a demon to Jesus. His doubts weren't just questions or fears. They were questions and fears about real, supernatural evil. And still, he came to Jesus. And Jesus helped him.

Jesus welcomes us with an open invitation. Jesus will help our doubts in the ways we need most.

End today thanking Jesus for welcoming your questions and doubts. Use this time to express any lingering doubts to Him.



DO- PERSONAL STUDY 3

This session potentially poked a nerve, and a sensitive one at that. It dug into the shame and fear of doubt, and that's not something anyone enjoys. But it's something each of us needs. Left to our own devices, we will, well, depend on our own devices. That's where we go wrong in handling doubt. Instead, we need the nudge (or shove) to respond as the father did in Mark 9. We need the impetus to depend and the reminder that it's so much more hopeful to do so. And we need the assurance that the discomfort is worth it. That's part of the reason such stories are in the Bible, as a reminder that difficulties are real, faith is necessary, and there's real promise in that faith. Doing the hard, faithful thing is right, even when it's scary or exhausting.

Rest in that promise as you reflect on and answer these questions:

Why do we feel so much guilt and shame about doubt, especially since it's common to every person? What does this indicate about how we see Jesus and what we believe about him?

When you think about bringing doubts to Jesus, what do you truly believe will happen?

What struggles and doubts do you have that seem too great, too longstanding, too complicated for Jesus? What would it take for you to bring these to Him?

What practical steps can you take to bring doubts to Jesus? What habits can you work on developing or people can you partner with so this becomes a first response to doubt instead of a last resort?