

A trial attorney was defending a man charged with murder. There was strong evidence pointing to guilt but there was no corpse. Knowing that it was his job to do everything to hold off a jury decision of “guilty,” the defense attorney resorted to using a trick in his closing argument.

He stood, looking as confident as he could, and said, “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for you. Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into this courtroom.” The lawyer then turned and looked at the courtroom door.

The jurors were stunned and all looked eagerly toward the door. A full minute passed and nothing happened. Finally the lawyer said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize to you for making a false statement. However, every one of you looked on with anticipation as you awaited the arrival of the person presumed dead in these proceedings. Therefore, I must ask you to deliver a verdict of “not guilty” because there was reasonable doubt in every juror’s mind as you looked at the courtroom door. The reasonable doubt is that anyone was actually murdered.” He then sat down.

The jury, now clearly confused, retired to deliberate. Within a half-an-hour, the jury returned to the courtroom and delivered a verdict of guilty.

The defense attorney was stunned! He couldn’t believe his ears. He stood up and asked, “How in the world could you find this man ‘guilty?’ Every one of you looked at the door and waited for the man presumed dead to walk into this very courtroom.”

The foreman of the jury stood up and said, “Oh, yes. Every one of us looked. But your client did not.”

Doubts – reasonable and unreasonable – we have all struggled with them at some time or another.

In fact the series we have been preaching on for the past month has attempted to provide some direction for some of those questions or doubts.

So the question for us today as we come to the end of this series of questions, answers and doubts is this;

CAN I HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT MY FAITH AND STILL BE A CHRISTIAN?

Some of the other questions we have looked at may not have definitive answers because of their very nature but this question most certainly does.

The answer is YES

Yes you can have doubts and still be a Christian.

Doubting is a common experience among Christians.

Especially when life comes crashing in around us, or we find ourselves at the end of our ropes, or we pray and it seems like God is silent.

If you have never doubted anything, it may mean that you have never thought seriously about anything.

The only way to never doubt is to never use your mind to question and try to figure anything out.

So, not only can you be a Christian and still have some doubts,

But, in my opinion, you can hardly be a Christian without doubting at times.

When you leave here today, I want you to understand 2 very important things about DOUBT.

1) Doubt can lead to faith.

If you seriously contemplate your faith and what it means to follow Jesus Christ – the chances are that you're going to have some questions, some issues, some uncertainties, some doubts along the way.

Doubting does not mean that your faith stops, it means you are trying to understand your faith at a deeper level.

We don't need to be afraid of doubts, we need to allow them to take us to deeper experiences of faith and understanding.

The Psalms are full of questions and doubts, people seeking answers, crying out for justice, looking for a deeper understanding of God.

Psalm 42 – that Pastor Chris read earlier - speaks about how this particular psalmist has doubts, and yet he will not rest until his relationship with God is restored. He continues to pray to God and let his doubt drive him to deeper levels of intimacy with God.

vs. 9 (IN the Message Bible) says, “Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God, “Why did you let me down? Why am I walking around in tears, harassed by enemies?”

vs 11 shows his growth when he cries out and says,

“I will put my hope in God!

I will praise him again –

My Savior and My God.”

The best Christians in the world have had serious doubts.

In Genesis 15:8 we find Abraham didn't know if he could trust God. Gideon did not know whether God would live up to his promise in Judges 6:17.

In Matthew we find John the Baptist in prison questioning whether Jesus was the Messiah after all (Matthew 11:3-11). And later on

in Matthew you will find some of the disciples doubting whether God really did raise Jesus from the dead (Matthew 28:17)

Thomas not only doubted, but demanded that he be able to touch Christ's wounds before he would believe (John 20:25).

One of my favorite strugglers with doubt is found in Genesis 32.

It is the story of Jacob. Jacob's name meant "schemer."

If you read about Jacob, you will see that he had schemed his way through life and was even trying to do it with God.

But God met Jacob when he was at the end of his rope – at the end of his schemes - and they wrestled.

Jacob came away from the experience wounded, but a changed man.

As a result, God gave Jacob a new name.

Perhaps you have heard of it – his name became Israel.
His name had been "schemer" but now it was "wrestler with God."

Philip Yancey writes in "Disappointment With God": "Is it any accident that God identified his chosen people as the children of Israel, 'the wrestler's children,' the offspring of one who had grappled so fiercely through the night?"

Ultimately, in spite of their doubts, all of these doubters put their trust in God – as a result - their faith grew deeper and they were changed.

How about you – have you known some doubters?

Maybe you are one of those doubters –

if so you are in some pretty good company.

Most of my faith journey has been built on doubts, wrestling with God over some issue or point, seeking to understand God on a deeper level, questioning and wondering why.

I kept trying to put God in my box, to control him or have him respond the way I thought he should, answer me according to my understanding.

I have journals filled with my doubts and questions, my seeking, my wrestling, my faith journey.

Time and time again God has reminded me that He is in control, that his ways break out of the box, that he is wild and untamed but trustworthy and true, he is unpredictable but faithful and loving.

And time and time again I have walked away, often times wounded, but always changed.

I firmly believe that God honors our struggles to understand.

In fact, all through the Bible it seems that it is **those** who struggle with God who receive his blessing.

I know that I have.

A fellow Methodist pastor named Rodney Buchanan has this to say about doubt:

"Honest doubt means that we are thinking and seeking to understand. The simple answers do not satisfy us any longer and we want to understand at a new level.

Dishonest doubt seeks to find reasons to stay at its present level of unbelief. Honest doubt wants to know more about God and experience him in new ways.

Dishonest doubt seeks to question God at the most basic level in order to avoid coming closer.

Honest doubt is seeking to come to a place of trust and rest in God. Dishonest doubt seeks to find excuses for not trusting God and excluding him from one's life."

Dishonest doubt is cynicism and cynicism will lead you away from God.

The dictionary tells us that cynicism seeks to mock and sneer.

The cynic is not really looking for answers but rather errors, he is not on a true quest but questions just to question.

Cynicism will harden your heart and mind.

The Bible will refer to this as hardness of heart.

Hebrews 3:12-15 warns us, "Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters, Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other everyday, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God....

Verse 15 goes on to say, "But never forget the warning: Today you must listen to his voice Don't harden your hearts against him as Israel did when they rebelled."

God does not harden our heart, or intentionally prevent us from believing in him, He simply leaves us to the choice we have made: to not trust him, to not believe in him, to not seek him.

Question, wrestle with doubts, wrestle with God, struggle with issues, but all the while, place your trust in God to draw you closer to him.

Your relationship with God is too important not to struggle,
Because - **doubt leads to faith.**

2)The second thing I want you to know is that:

We will never have all the answers.

It is important to struggle with God and seek the answers to your questions.

But let me warn you – some of those questions will never find satisfactory answers. Some of those questions, we will never be able to fully comprehend the answers to this side of heaven.

If you are waiting until you have everything figured out before you come to God, before you accept the gift of salvation through his Son Jesus Christ - you will never come and you will be waiting forever.

Our belief in God may be based on intelligent reasoning, but in the end we have no absolute proof for anything.

That is what FAITH is all about.

In fact, it has been said that struggling with God over the issues of life doesn't show a lack of faith -- **it is faith.**

Faith is belief and trust.

Faith is a commitment of both mind and heart.

Faith is like a muscle; the more you use it, the more powerful it becomes.

And Faith involves risk.

Hebrews 11 is the chapter in the Bible that records some of our heroes of faith.

Heroes who risked trusting God, questioning God, and seeking after God.

Hebrews 11:6 states, “So you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.”

I want to be a person who not only believes God for great things,

But trusts him in the most dangerous and important times of my life

I remember writing one year in my journal

“How BIG is my God?”

The answer I found after much discussion with God was that he was Big enough to risk placing my faith in God and in His Word.

He was big enough to handle my questions and doubts and still love me,

in fact love me more because we had spent so much time together that our relationship had grown deeper.

He was Big enough to trust, even in the midst of doubts.

In fact, I don't want a God that I can completely understand.

If I could understand everything about God and the way He works with my small finite mind, He wouldn't be much of a God worth serving, would he?

I want to serve a God who leaves me confused sometimes.....

A God who blows my mind when I try to think about Him.

Maybe that's why the New Testament writers often refer to the mysteries of God.

In a strange way there is something almost comforting in knowing God is bigger than I fully understand.

If you want to have all the answers and have God all figured out, you will never know the experience of faith.

Truth is experienced through faith as much as it is through intellectual investigation.

Faith and Doubt paradoxically live together.

One of my all time favorite authors, Henri Nouwen wrote, “So I am praying while not knowing how to pray. I am resting while feeling restless, at peace while tempted, safe while still anxious, surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness, in love while still doubting.”

As long as we are in this world we will always live in the tension between faith and despair, but it is our love for God which allows us to outlive our doubts.

In Matthew 11:12 Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men (and women) lay hold of it.”

The kingdom of heaven is for those who will struggle with God.

It is for those who ask, seek and knock.

It is for those who are willing to grapple with God.

It is for those who struggle in order to understand.

They hold the newspaper up next to the Bible – look at the brokenness in this world and say once again, “I have faith in God my Creator today.”

They question so that they might know.

They don't let the doubt rest;

they think; they read; they study; they talk to others; they pray.

They risk, they doubt, they struggle

And in the end -hopefully they proclaim along with the 42nd Psalmist

“I will put my hope in God!

I will praise him again –

My Savior and My God.”