

BACKGROUND STORY

Tom grew up going to church with his family. When it came time for him to “declare his faith” by getting baptized, there was no doubt he was ready. That’s what he wanted to do. It was a given. After all, it’s not like he didn’t believe. Plus, he received lots of support and encouragement to take this step from his family and the church crowd. But Tom began questioning his faith when he entered his freshman year at an out-of-state university. Suddenly he was thrust into a world filled with skeptics. They raised some of the questions he had wondered about in high school, but he had quickly dismissed them because he didn’t want to disappoint anyone—especially his parents. He wanted his faith to be true but felt uncomfortable questioning it. But now that he was far from home, he felt the freedom to entertain these doubts. It didn’t help that most of his friends, and even his professors, scoffed at the claims of Christianity. So, for the first time in his life, he gave himself permission to consider carefully the questions he had long had about his beliefs. Initially, he was fearful about allowing himself to raise issues about a faith he treasured so much. But the more he did, the bolder he got.

Isn’t the Bible outdated and full of mistakes? Why are there so many different religions? Who really knows what’s true? How could Jesus be God?

Is there really life after death or is this life on earth all there is? What evidence is there for God’s existence? Are Christians just arrogant and narrow-minded?

He began reeling as these questions swirled in his mind. But even worse, Tom felt like he had no answers. And he dared tell no one.

“BE MERCIFUL TO THOSE WHO DOUBT.”

SESSION 1: IS DOUBT ALWAYS BAD?

JUDE 1:22

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Maybe you can relate to Tom. How open and honest do you feel you (or others you know) can be around Christians about your spiritual doubts? Elaborate. What makes you (or others you know) feel safe and secure enough to be able to express spiritual questions?

2. In what ways can doubts sometimes be a good thing? Can you give an example where a doubt in your life led to something positive?

“**Doubt is but another element of faith.**” – St. Augustine

3. Do you think it is possible to have a sincere and genuine faith and yet still have questions and doubts? Why or why not? Someone once said to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief ” (Mark 9:24). What do you think the person meant by this?

4. Discuss a particular doubt about the Christian faith that you or someone else has faced and try to identify its primary cause. For example:

- Is it emotional or psychological?
- Is it relational?
- Is it spiritual?
- Is it intellectual?
- Is it volitional?

Do you think it's important to recognize different causes for doubt? Why or why not?

"Father, we can see and understand only a little about you now, as if we were peering at your reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see you in your completeness, face to face. Now all that we know is hazy and blurred, but then we will see everything clearly, just as clearly as you see into our hearts right now. And, Father, we can have confidence in that because of what you have already chosen to reveal to us. In Jesus' name. Amen."

1 Corinthians 13:12, Living Bible

"THE PROUD MAN NEEDS TO DOUBT BECAUSE THE SENSE OF HIS OWN IMPORTANCE DEMANDS IT. IT IS NOT IN HIS NATURE TO BOW TO ANYONE."

– Os Guinness

5. Read the quote by Christian thinker, Os Guinness. To what extent can our attitudes or our will influence our susceptibility to doubt our beliefs? If you can, use an example.

6. It seems undeniable that we cannot know all the answers to our faith questions in this life. On a scale from 1-10, how much does this bother you and possibly cause you to doubt? (10 means "a lot.") Do you think it's possible to lack absolute certainty and still have a faith that is adequately supported?

7. What does it mean for faith to be "blind"? Do you think it's okay—at least sometimes—for faith to be "blind"? If so, under what circumstances? Do you think it's possible to have a "reasonable faith"? How important do you think it is to have a reasonable faith? (For some relevant Bible passages, see Acts 1:3; Acts 17:2-4, 30-31; 1 Peter 3:15.)

8. Without mentioning names, is there someone in your life who is dealing with doubts about Christian beliefs? What practical steps could you take this week to encourage and strengthen them in their faith? If you are wrestling with some doubts, what practical steps could you take this week to address them?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Pray that your discussion will lead you to be more open with your questions and more open to some answers. Express your honest doubts and heartfelt need for God's guidance this week. Perhaps you could write a brief letter to God that expresses your key questions and your doubts.