

NO DOUBT?

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. (Matthew 28:17, NIV)

LIKE A RICKIE FOWLER FLATBILL, doubt is *en vogue* among the young. Of course, that means plenty in the older set secretly harbor the same ideas.

If you put a bunch of professing “believers” together in a room and really want to make them squirm, though, ask them what they do with doubt. After all, belief and doubt are essentially opposites. Or are they?

Christian culture throughout the age of modernity had one very good reason to dismiss doubt: truth. If absolute truth is your default, it’s easy to read the plain lines of Scripture without much scrutiny—and to shut down those who dig a little too deeply with quotations such as, “God’s ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts higher than ours” (Isaiah 55:9). Certainly they are, which should probably cause us to think that he can handle our questions, instead of to think that he doesn’t want to hear them.

So what are your questions and how brave are you to ask them? Would you dare say to God that you have moments, hours, even seasons of unbelief, and ask him to help you with your unbelief? Would you dare to admit this among your Christian friends? Because of our Christianly backgrounds, we ask ourselves these questions. But the young do not. They are more like the Old Testament prophets. Doubt comes with their territory.

Now maybe I’ve really turned your head. *Truly? The prophets were doubters?* Jeremiah: “I would speak with you, LORD, about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” (12:1). Moses: “O Lord, please send someone else to do it” (Exodus 4:13). John the Baptist: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Luke 7:20). Yes, the prophets had their doubts, as did kings and psalmists and apostles.

Here is what’s critical at the end of such a short reflection: Doubt can do two things. It can drive us from God, or it can press us close to him. In Matthew 28, some doubted Jesus rather than worship him. This is a normal course of unbelief; small doubts add up to a declaration of identity: “I am not one who believes.” But there are those like Jacob who, rather than wrestling with doubt, wrestle with God in their times of doubt, and leave all the more blessed for the experience. When we allow God to show himself above our doubts, we come away stronger in belief.

Opening questions What fads of the young do you actually find attractive? Would you say that doubt in general is a sign of maturity or immaturity? How about doubt in the midst of one’s faith?

READING Job 31:1-40 and 42:1-6, Mark 9:14-24, James 1:6-8

Just who is God?

Job was a righteous man whose many blessings vanished in short order. How did his laments in Job 31 express doubt yet allow for God’s hand? How did his answer to God’s assurances, which he gives in Job 42, show a different tone?

Real belief

In Mark 9, how did the father finally express the thin-line balance of his belief to Jesus? To what extent do you recognize your own heart in the father’s candid words?

Bearers of Good News

In James 1, the apostle made a strong charge to pray in full belief. How does the passage compel us to face our doubts, real as they may be?

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