

- 1) Clarity on doubt
  - a. Doubt is not the same as Unbelief.<sup>1</sup>

“Doubt is not unbelief. Unbelief is rebellion against evidence that we cannot or will not accept. Doubt is stumbling over a stone that we do not understand. Unbelief is kicking at a stone that we understand all too well.” – Elmer Towns<sup>2</sup>

- b. However, even though doubt may not be the exact same as Unbelief, *prolonged uncertainty and hesitation that are not dealt with have the potential to paralyze our faith journey*. Uncertainty is not necessarily sin, but if it’s not handled in a spiritually and mentally healthy manner, it could easily clear the way to outright unbelief.

- c. Doubt is a temptation to hesitate.

“Among those who either currently or previously experienced spiritual doubt, the most common response for about half of them (45%) was to leave their church or worship gatherings. This was also the most common activity to halt even among practicing Christians (36%) and regular churchgoers (33%)...Millennials were significantly more likely than other generations to stop doing all of the above and at rates much higher than the general population.” – Barna<sup>3</sup>

Though doubt is not necessarily unbelief, it’s not insignificant because, according to this data, 45% of spiritual doubters eventually fade from church involvement. Something doesn’t have to be the unpardonable sin in order to immobilize our effectiveness for the Lord Jesus. Unless it’s removed, a blindfold can be just as limiting as blindness itself. Our posture towards doubters (including ourselves) should reflect the tone of Jude 22: “*And have mercy on those who doubt.*”

- 2) Biopsy your doubt triggers
  - a. Intellectual doubt
  - b. Willful doubt
  - c. Emotional doubt

- 3) Intellectual doubt: When I don’t believe it.
  - a. “I need proof!”

Response: Reasonableness, not proof, is the standard for belief.

- b. “Any evidence that God created the Universe?”

Response 1: Imagine a radio dial stretched across the known Universe (15 billion light years). You must tune the dial to the first “one thousandth” of an inch if you want a universe with life (“K-Life”). What best explains this level of Fine-tuning?<sup>4</sup>

Response 2: Cosmological Argument from Entropy

1. If the universe were eternal and its amount of energy finite, it would have reached heat death by now.
2. The universe has not reached heat death (since there is still energy available for use).
3. Therefore, (a) the universe is not eternal.
4. Therefore, (b) the universe had a beginning.
5. Therefore, (c) the universe was created by a first cause (God).<sup>5</sup>

c. “What about evolution?”

Response: The odds of macro-Darwinian evolution occurring are so statistically improbable that they are literally in the realm of miracles. If miracles happen, then God exists. Therefore, if evolution is true, then it proves God’s existence.<sup>6</sup>

d. “I can’t believe because Christians have done so much harm.”

Response 1: Is there a difference between an obedient Christian and a disobedient Christian?

Response 2: Without God, how do you explain good and evil?

Response 3: Have you ever considered the positive impact of Jesus’ teachings? Abolition of infanticide + Eradication of the gladiatorial games + Abolition of slavery + Starting orphanages + Building hospitals + Invention of hospice.<sup>7</sup>

Response 4: If you care about human rights and human value, you need to become a Christian because human rights and human value are best explained on a Christian worldview.

Q: Could it be possible that much of our doubt is not *purely* intellectual in nature?

4) When I don’t care: The Hard Heart

- a. Prevention is the best cure for a hard heart.
- b. Hebrews 3:12-13 illustrates the danger of a mentality dedicated to pushing back at what we don’t really want to be true: *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*
- c. If you fear having a hard heart, be encouraged. That alone is evidence that you don’t have one.
- d. Unbelief is not some kneejerk reaction to a TikTok or YouTube blasphemy challenge but a calcified posture of defiance toward God. This full-scale unbelief is a consequence of a closed mind and deadened conscience. In a sense, it’s when the ears of your soul have become deaf. It’s a state where you can no longer “hear” or “see” or discern God’s clear call of love in the good news of Jesus Christ.

5) Emotional doubt: When I don’t feel it

- a. “God didn’t show up or help me when I needed Him. I feel alone and uncared for. If God is there, why didn’t He help me?”

b. Possible non-rational causes of doubt

1. Flirting with sin

So-called “reasons” for abandoning Christianity.

- “Based on my new research, I no longer trust in the veracity of the biblical record.”
- “I’ve read [insert “new” skeptical book that rehashes old arguments against Christianity] and am compelled by the arguments, so I’m now an agnostic.”
- “I saw this video on TikTok that led me to start deconstructing my faith.”
- “God wants me to be happy, so I’ll just be led by my heart.”

2. Moral failure of an authority figure

G. K. Chesterton: “I must be prepared for the moral fall of any man in any position at any moment; especially for my fall from my position at this moment.”<sup>8</sup>

3. Absent or abusive father figure

We are designed to need fathers. Without a strong and loving father, our self-confidence and emotional fortitude often lags.

4. Divorce and family dysfunction

5. Harboring bitterness

Psalm 68:18-19: *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.*

6. Tendency to worry: “What if?”

7. Exhaustion

a. Elijah and the Big Crash

• Loss of the will to live – “*It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life*” (1 Kings 19:4a). One of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament hit rock bottom.

- Feelings of failure – “*for I am no better than my fathers*” (1 Kings 19:4b).

- Overwhelmed – “*And he lay down and slept under a broom tree*” (1 Kings 19:5).

Vince Lombardi: “Fatigue makes cowards of us all.”

b. Elijah’s coaching plan

- Eat healthy food and get some sleep – “*And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again*” (1 Kings 19:5b-6).

Vance Havner (very influential in the life of Evangelist Billy Graham) once preached on the stewardship responsibility of getting proper rest. Dr. Havner said that it was right for Christians to plan for times of rest and vacation, and that not to do so was unwise. A lady came up and piously objected, “Well, you know the devil never sleeps! The devil never takes a vacation!” Dr. Havner responded, “Since when am I supposed to be like the devil?”<sup>9</sup> Proper rest and diet can

help you last longer. It's been said: "Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap."<sup>10</sup>

- Re-emphasized the need for physical rest and care – "*And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you"*" (1 Kings 19:7).

The angel didn't try to short-circuit the process by hyper-spiritualizing Elijah's exhaustion.

- After proper rest, Elijah is emotionally and physically restored and gets back in the game – "*And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God*" (1 Kings 19:8).

Elijah's recovery time is not the point. Again, don't beat yourself up if you need more recovery time than he did. The issue here is emotional and physical fatigue are real. God wants us to be also self-controlled and self-aware. Just a chapter ago, Elijah talked about standing for God when it seemed like everyone else had bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 18:15-21). However, fatigue had caused him to forget to whisper to himself what he had preached to others. His "doubts" were more expressions of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion.

#### c. Honest Assessment

- Am I willing to admit when I'm exhausted?
- On a level of 1-10, how well am I managing my time, energy, and emotional investments?<sup>11</sup>

Jocko Willink and Leif Babin: "Prioritize and execute."<sup>12</sup>

- What I am I preaching to myself?

#### d. Coaching your Emotions

- Preach Truth to yourself.
- Put yourself in the path of Truth.

Screwtape warns: "If once they get through this initial [emotional] dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt."<sup>13</sup>

- Pursue your questions into the ground.
- Press on by remembering and looking forward.

Richard Sibbes: God suffers questions oftentimes to arise for trial of our love and exercise of our abilities. Nothing is so certain as that which is certain after doubts. Shaking settles and roots. In a contentious age, it is a wise thing to be a Christian, and to know what to pitch [set] our souls upon. *It is an office of love here to take away the stones, and to smooth the way to heaven.*<sup>14</sup>

- Verbalize my doubts and fears.

Q: What's the worst thing that could happen to me?

A: To be forsaken by God. But if I've trusted in Jesus, the worst thing that could happen to me has already happened to Him.<sup>15</sup>

- Step away from unrestricted social media.
- Step into maximal Christian community.

### Steps for your church

- Offer a “You Asked For It” styled series related to doubts about God.
- Offer a “5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Q&A” panel event.
- Give yourself a break: Invite an apologist to discuss these issues and refer people back to the message.

### Resources

- [\*The Thomas Factor\*](#) by Gary Habermas
- [\*Dealing with Doubt\*](#) by Gary Habermas
- [\*Persuasive Apologetics: The Art of Handling Tough Questions without Pushing People Away\*](#) by Jeff Robinson (2023)

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<sup>1</sup> Again, thanks to Gary Habermas for this thought expressed in his numerous writings and talks.

<sup>2</sup> Elmer L. Towns, “The Ministry of Doubt,” *The Evangelical Beacon* (September 28, 1965), 6.

<sup>3</sup> “Two-thirds of Christians Face Doubt,” *Barna Research*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 226.

<sup>6</sup> *The Great Debate: Atheism vs. Christianity*, William Lane Craig and Frank Zindler (1993: Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), VHS.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Pearcey writes, “Most people do not know that the hospice movement has Christian roots. It was the brainchild of an English medical humanitarian, Dame Cecily Saunders, in the 1960s, and it arose directly from her deep Anglican faith... The concept behind the hospice movement is that patients are whole persons, not just physical organisms. Saunders said, ‘I coined the term ‘total pain,’ from my understanding that dying people have physical, spiritual, psychological, and social pain that must be treated. ‘For many people, the greatest pain in dying is the emotional isolation... Hospice care has even changed the minds of some non-Christians. Ian Haines, an oncologist who describes himself as a secular humanist, used to believe ‘that euthanasia was the only humane solution. I no longer believe that.’” Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 114. Ian Haines, “I Believed That Euthanasia Was the Only Humane Solution. I No Longer Believe That,” *The Age*, November 20, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The G. K. Chesterton Collection [50 Books]* (Catholic Way Publishing, 2012), Kindle edition, location 4625.

<sup>9</sup> Alex McFarland, “Sometimes the Most Spiritual Thing You Can Do Is Take a Nap,” July 14, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/sometimes-the-most-spiritual-thing-you-can-do-is-take-a-nap.html>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Much thanks to Craig Groeschel for his insights.

<sup>12</sup> Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), Kindle Edition, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Seattle: Kindle Publishing, 1631, 2010), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Grateful for R. C. Sproul’s numerous expositions of this point.