

Room for Doubt

How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith

Ben Young

Small Group or Bible Study Questions

Chapter 1: You Are Not Alone

1. What are the most difficult questions you ask God?
2. Describe what it's like to wrestle with doubt.
3. How has your relationship with your earthly father affected your relationship with God?
4. What's the connection between doubt and courage?
5. Reflect on or discuss the Kierkegaard quote "Life can only be understood backwards."

Chapter 2: Sliding on Ice

1. Describe your emotional state during a time of doubt.
2. Why do we see doubt as an enemy of faith?
3. How can doubt be a positive element in your life?
4. Examine or discuss the relationship between faith, certainty, and doubt.
5. Why do most people keep their doubt a secret?
6. How has this chapter changed your understanding of faith and doubt?

Chapter 3: Throwing Dishes at God

1. How have you processed those seasons of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation in your relationship with God? Talk about those seasons.
2. The story of Job often disturbs its readers. How do you feel about this visceral story?

3. Do you believe it's okay to vent at God like Job did? Why, or why not?
4. "Pain entered into, accepted, and owned can become poetry." How can we make that a reality in our lives?

Chapter 4: Demanding Evidence

1. What evidence for the existence of God do you find outside of the Bible?
2. Given the reality that Thomas saw Jesus perform miracles, why did he doubt?
3. Think of a time in your life when you felt isolated in doubt as John the Baptist did. Describe where you were when it happened.
4. Fill in the blank. All my doubts would cease if God would _____.
5. Explain why miracles do not guarantee belief in God.

Chapter 5: Famous Doubters

1. Who are some of your heroes, and why do you admire them?

2. How do you relate to Mother Teresa's doubt about not feeling loved by God?
3. Mother Teresa, Martin Luther, or C. S. Lewis—whose doubt story surprised you the most? Why?
4. Talk about or write down some methods you've used to deal with doubt in your life. Which ones were most effective?
5. How do you feel about the way C. S. Lewis dealt with his anger toward God?

Chapter 6: Disappointed with God

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt God let you down.
2. What questions flood your mind when you are disappointed with God?
3. How do you process disappointment? What's your default response?
4. "There were others" has a haunting feel to it. How does this section of Hebrews 11 affect your view of faith?
5. Which five books of the Bible would you take to a deserted island? Explain the reason why you chose each book.

6. How can doubt strengthen your faith? What does it mean to “lean into doubt”?

Chapter 7: Searching For Certainty

1. Describe an area of cognitive dissonance in your life and how you attempt to resolve that tension.
2. How did modernism affect the Christian faith?
3. Discuss which worldview—modern or postmodern—is most compatible with Christianity.
4. How does our culture affect the way we think and live?
5. Explain the reasons why certainty sells across so many diverse cultures and religions.
6. How does certainty eliminate the need for faith?

Chapter 8: Letting Go of Certainty

1. How can clarity or certainty become an idol in our lives?

2. What are some of the ways we seek to achieve a sense of certainty? Think outside the box of religion.
3. How is our reason limited?
4. Are science and religion compatible? Explain your answer.
5. What does letting go of certainty look like for you?

Chapter 9: Burning Down the House

1. Describe the wide variety of foundations on which we build our lives.
2. How do you relate to the four layers laid out in this chapter? Describe the layers in your life.
3. List the essential elements of the Christian faith. Which ones are nonnegotiable?
4. Have you ever had doubts concerning your salvation? How have you dealt with those doubts?
5. Luther emphasized that the gospel is outside of you. What does that mean?

6. Christianity is a life experience, not a thought experiment.
Discuss that statement.

Chapter 10: The Moon Is Round

1. If you have ever attended a Twelve Step group, describe that experience.
2. Where are some safe places you go to deal with doubt?
3. What aspects of Christianity trouble you? Do these aspects create doubt?
4. What emotions surround doubt? Why is shame most common?
5. Discuss new ways to befriend doubt.
6. Do you have any “the moon is round” reminders in your life?
Write them down, or share them.

Notes

Chapter 1: You Are Not Alone

1. Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (Dallas: Spence, 1999), 20, 26–31, 47–48, 104–7.
2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals IV A 164* (1843). Full quote is “It is perfectly true, as the philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards.”
3. Julia Baird, “Doubt as a Sign of Faith,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/opinion/julia-baird-doubt-as-a-sign-of-faith.html.
4. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 117–18.

5. Jon Acuff, “The Scars Are Lighthouses,” *Stuff Christians Like*, December 4, 2013, <http://stuffchristianslike.net/2013/12/04/scars-lighthouses/>.
6. Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life: Discerning God’s Presence in All Things* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 79–80.

Chapter 2: Sliding on Ice

1. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 16.
2. Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996).
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 9–19.
4. To be clear, I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, but what I am referring to here is the naïve, wooden belief that our current manuscripts do not contain variances.
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6. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve/Hachette, 2007), 1–13.
7. Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 9–29.
8. Daniel Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer: Telling Stories to Your Inner Atheist* (St. Paul, MN: BOG Walk, 2013), 10–11.
9. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1973), 20.

10. Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1993), 66–71.
11. Gregory Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt: Breaking the Idol of Certainty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 199.
12. Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt*, 196.
13. Author paraphrase of David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 18.
14. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics*, 19.
15. Quoted in Christopher H. K. Persuad, *Famous People Speak about Jesus* (Xlibris Corporation, 2004), 181, www.xlibris.com.
16. Ware, *Orthodox Way*, 16.

Chapter 3: Throwing Dishes at God

1. Dan Allender, “The Hidden Hope in Lament,” Allender Center, Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, June 2, 2016, <http://theallendercenter.org/2016/06/hidden-hope-lament/>.
2. Noted in Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 201, ebook.
3. Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes, Life as Vanity. Job, Life as Suffering. Song of Songs, Life as Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 91.
4. Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job: An Honest Look at Pain and Doubt from the Life of One Who Lost Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 55–57.

5. Gary R. Habermas, *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 12.
6. Jennifer Michael Hecht, interview by Krista Tippett, “Speaking of Faith,” American Public Media transcript, May 3, 2007.
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8. Stephen Shortridge, *Deepest Thanks, Deeper Apologies: Reconciling Deeply Held Faith with Honest Doubt* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy, 2011), 8.
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10. Ann O’Neill, “The Reinvention of Ted Turner,” CNN, November 17, 2013, www.cnn.com/2013/11/17/us/ted-turner-profile/.
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12. Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 144.

Chapter 4: Demanding Evidence

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2. Bertrand Russell, *Bertrand Russell on God and Religion*, ed. Al Seckel (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), 11.
3. “George Müller, Orphanages Built by Prayer,” Christianity.com, accessed April 5, 2017, www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/george-mueller-orphanages-built-by-prayer-11634869.html.
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Chapter 5: Famous Doubters

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2. Frank Newport, “Mother Teresa Voted by American People as Most Admired Person of the Century,” Gallup, December 31, 1999, www.gallup.com/poll/3367/mother-teresa-voted-american-people-most-admired-person-century.aspx?version=print.
3. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta,”* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2007), 405.
4. Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 291.
5. Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 210.
6. Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 288.
7. Chris R. Armstrong, “A History of Darkness,” *Leadership Journal*, vol. 32, no. 4 (fall 2011), www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/fall/historydarkness.html.
8. Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 214.
9. Armstrong, “A History of Darkness.”
10. Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 214.

11. Armstrong, "A History of Darkness."
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13. Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2008), Kindle edition, chap. 3.
14. Mark U. Edwards Jr., "Luther as Skeptic," *Christian Century*, November 17–24, 1999, www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1493.
15. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), 58.
16. Armstrong, "A History of Darkness."
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18. Armstrong, "A History of Darkness."
19. Marty, *Martin Luther*, 409–13.
20. Marty, *Martin Luther*, 417–24.
21. Marty, *Martin Luther*, 417–24.
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30. Kilby, *Christian World of C. S. Lewis*, 19–20.
31. Walter Hooper, in preface to *Lewis, Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), vii.
32. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1952), 54–56.
33. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 2.
34. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 3.
35. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 22.
36. “H” is how Lewis referred to his wife, Joy Davidman, in the book *A Grief Observed*, which he originally wrote under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk.
37. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 27.
38. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 40.
39. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chap. 28.
40. Lewis, *Grief Observed*, chaps. 15–16.
41. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 140.
42. Madeleine L’Engle, foreword to Lewis, *Grief Observed*.

Chapter 6: Disappointed with God

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Chapter 7: Searching For Certainty

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3. Bradley Sickler, "Conflicts between Science and Religion," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, February 11, 2009, accessed June 1, 2014, www.iep.utm.edu/.
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5. Ralph Allan Smith, "The Harmony of Faith and Reason: Why Believe the Bible?," Covenant Worldview Institute, 1998, www.berith.org/essays/apol/apol01.html.
6. John Cottingham, "Descartes, Doubt and Knowledge," iTunes University, Open University, June 13, 2011, www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/philosophy/exploring-philosophy?track=10.
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9. Hart, *Faith Thinking*, 34.
10. Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 25.
11. Enns, "Benefit of Doubt."
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13. Robertson Davies, *The Manticore* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 212.
14. Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 18.
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Chapter 8: Letting Go of Certainty

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3. Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 68.
4. James Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago: Moody, 2010).
5. Thomas Nagel, as quoted in J. Budziszewski, “The Second Tablet Project,” *First Things*, June/July 2002, 28.
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7. Quoted in Dean Nelson, “Why Certainty about God Is Overrated,” *USA Today*, August 29, 2011, 7A.

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14. Enns, “Benefit of Doubt.”

Chapter 9: Burning Down the House

1. B. B. Warfield, quoted in Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 84.
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3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 22.
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6. C. Stephen Evans addresses this concept in his book *Why Believe?: Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), Kindle edition, chap 8.
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Chapter 10: The Moon Is Round

1. Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 257.
2. Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
3. This note is for any of you who may hail from the ultra-conservative perspective and are leery of this leniency of the AA program to have grace for those who don't immediately and wholly accept the complete inerrancy of Scripture. Dr. James R. DeLoach is a lifelong godly mentor of mine. He is ninety-one years old, and he was a valiant warrior in the battle for inerrancy in the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s. He once told me that, over his lifetime, he has seen untold numbers of people come to faith in Christ through the AA program, in fact more so than through any other overtly evangelistic ministry.
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Appendix: Can You Trust the Bible?

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