

The Grad Experience Week 1



Dealing with Doubt and Questioning Faith

Key Lesson: *It's not doubt that is toxic to faith, it's silence.* – Dr. Kara Powell

Starting off this Grad Experience our goal is for you to spend some time discussing topics that are extremely present in your world today – and if they are not present in your high school, they will eventually be present on a college campus, workforce, or military ... or just in the general culture of the world you live in.

Our goal isn't for you to leave here each week with a definitive answer to some of life's tough questions when it comes to living and our faith, but to get you at least thinking about the topic and determining how that connects with whatever faith you claim to have.

A second goal is for this to be a safe place and for people to feel the freedom to disagree in love.

- We want you to be honest as we discuss these subjects because that's the only way we work through finding answers that strengthen our faith.
- Don't just "go along with the crowd" – if you have questions or doubts/disagreements, step up and share them.

When you see the word doubt, what comes to mind, or what does that mean to you?

Dealing with doubt is part of taking ownership of your own faith. The older you get the more opportunities you may have to experience certain people or teachings that may lead to having some doubts.

We can't answer these today, BUT If you could ask God any question about faith or life, what would it be?

Has modern science lessened our need for simple blind faith? Isn't blind faith what our parents/grandparents probably had?

Not really. There are still plenty of realms where science simply cannot provide certainty or proof.

SOME EXAMPLES:

- Science is unable to affirm or deny truth in the areas of morality or ethics. For example, (it sounds extreme) but science cannot definitively prove that the Nazi regime was evil.
- Science is not capable of establishing the certainty of aesthetic propositions, like "The sunrise was beautiful today." No scientific formula exists that can prove beauty.
- And finally, science is unable to prove or disprove philosophical claims, like "Science is the only source of objective truth."

SHOW QUOTE ON SCREEN:

“Science is useful in establishing many truths, but it can by no means verify everything. Where certainty cannot be established, faith has always been required—and all of life has its uncertainties.”

When you read that, what are your thoughts? Is it true? Why or why not?

The scientific method is one way of “knowing,” and is good at explaining or proving some things. But not all things. Agree or disagree?

Are doubt and faith really opposites? What kind of relationship exists between them?

- Actually, faith and doubt are not opposites.
- **The true opposite of faith is not doubt, but unbelief.**
- Doubt lies somewhere between faith and unbelief and having doubts does not invalidate your faith.

SHOW QUOTE ON SCREEN:

“Doubt is like a patch of ice somewhere between the two shores of a frozen river. Doubt is the ice between the two banks. A grassy bank symbolizes belief, and a rocky bank symbolizes unbelief. Doubting is the place between belief and unbelief. The ice is neutral. It can slide you closer to God or it can slide you farther away from him.” – Ben Young

Does expressing doubt as a Christian make you feel like you’re confessing a failure of belief? Why?

Let’s look at a man who expressed his doubts in front of Jesus in Mark 9, and maybe see an answer to this question.:

*A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “**I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!**” – Mark 9:17, 21-24*

While doubt can sometimes feel like expressing a failure of belief, doubt is actually an honest seeking posture that says, *“I believe, help my unbelief”*

- Instead of answering with claiming 100% belief for the healing of his son, the man answered with both hope and honest doubt. (He was on that ice between the shores of belief and unbelief.)
- *Jesus responds to the father by casting out the spirit. (vs. 25-26)*
- His doubt eventually provided a means for faith to be exercised and strengthened.

Does having doubts (and expressing them) de-legitimize my Christian witness or mean that I’m an “immature” believer?

No. Often doubt is portrayed in extremes in our culture. The secular world celebrates doubt as a virtue and sees certainty (especially in regards to faith) as a vice. In fact the world immediately takes the idea of doubt as having complete uncertainty and therefore unbelief. It generally takes it to the extreme immediately.

- For example, many unbelievers (especially in the college education world) celebrate having doubts as increasing intellectual maturity

- OR being told that “good” Christians never struggle with belief.
 - These are BOTH extremes.

It's important to understand that doubt doesn't make you a bad Christian.

Can you think of any biblical heroes of the faith that may have struggled with doubt?

- **Abraham** laughed at God when he told him he and his wife Sarah were going to become parents in their old age.
- The apostle **Thomas** doubted the resurrection as reported by the other disciples and refused to believe until he saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes and examined his wounds himself.
- The apostle **Peter**, invited by Jesus to join him walking on water, ventured out then began to sink when doubt overcame him.
- **John the Baptist** – the one who announced the coming of Jesus – in his final days even sent messengers to Jesus asking, “Are you really the one?” (John 11:1-3)

It's normal to struggle with doubt in your life. The issue is not whether you face doubt, but how you respond to it.

Is doubt the inevitable last stop on the road to “de-conversion” or unbelief?

It certainly doesn't have to be. In fact, some degree of doubt or uncertainty is necessary for our faith to become active.

Look at what the writer of Hebrews says about faith:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. – Hebrews 11:1

- In other words, faith is unnecessary IF we already have all that we hope for and belief in only what we see.

SHOW QUOTE ON THE SCREEN

“A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy--or the probing questions of a smart skeptic.”

Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton, 2008)

What do you think about this statement from Tim Keller?

Doubting doesn't guarantee eventual disbelief. **God doesn't disappear when we doubt Him.**

The life, death and resurrection of Christ isn't erased by our uncertainty. Even a man's denial of God does not change God's essence.

SHOW QUOTE ON THE SCREEN

“A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word 'darkness' on the walls of his cell.” – C.S. Lewis

What do you think about this statement from C.S. Lewis?

Doubt is simply part of the human experience in a fallen world that can as easily lead us toward God or away from him.

When it comes to doubt, how can we as a church help you now before you graduate and move out of the house?

SHOW QUOTE ON THE SCREEN

It's not doubt that is toxic to faith, it's silence. – Dr. Kara Powell

Close with possible prayer for times of doubt:

God, I am thanking you today for my doubts, believing that you can use them to deepen my faith in you. Give me the courage to examine my doubts, talk about them with others, and seek answers to the questions that trouble me. When answers can't be found, or the answers don't fully satisfy, help me to trust what I do know of you and move forward in faith, saying, "I do believe. Help my unbelief." In Jesus' name, Amen.