Bethel University

2015

A Qualitative Study Of Doubt In The Evangelical Tradition

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BETHEL SEMINARY ST. PAUL

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DOUBT

IN THE EVANGELICAL TRADITION

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY

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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2015

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ABSTRACT

The problem this project addressed was the difficulty of some evangelical Christians to integrate doubt into their life of faith. In response to this problem the researcher examined biblical characters' response to doubt, reviewed relevant literature dealing with the history of Christians who struggled with doubt as well as the philosophic soil that has allowed doubt to flourish, interviewed evangelical Christians who dealt with doubt, and based upon these investigations developed a strategy to help evangelical Christians and pastors guide people through their struggle with doubt.

One of the most excruciating challenges for a follower of Christ is to engage in a battle against doubt and uncertainty. In the evangelical community this conflict intensifies because of the premium placed on having an absolute certainty concerning one's relationship with God and core Christian beliefs. Still others doubt but somehow remain in the faith. This project explored the difference between evangelicals who doubted and stayed in the evangelical Christian faith and those who doubted and left the fold. In this context leaving the fold refers to those who left the evangelical faith, but should not be misconstrued to mean leaving the Christian faith altogether.

The researcher conducted a qualitative project that gathered data from interviews with people who have struggled with doubt. The researcher used audio recordings, a standard set of questions along with free-form questions, and field notes to conduct the interviews. He then analyzed and interpreted the data looking for common themes and

clusters. The researcher then used the data to develop a strategy for people going through doubt and for pastors who are helping others process doubt.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most excruciating challenges for a follower of Christ is to engage in a

battle against doubt and uncertainty. In the evangelical community this conflict

intensifies because of the premium placed on having an absolute certainty concerning

one's relationship with God and core Christian beliefs. Doubt seems to be a problem

many want to ignore and not address. Doubt is kind of like evangelical pornography; it is

a shameful secret with which many are struggling but for which many refuse to seek help.

Christians are not supposed to doubt. They are expected to maintain a strong, victorious

faith. But the reality is that doubt does assail many Christ-followers at various stages of

their lives. Some evangelicals do not survive their bout with doubt and leave the faith

altogether. One study shows that 60 percent of evangelical high school students leave

their faith when they go to college.[1] They aren't the only demographic leaving the faith.

A new survey by the Pew Research Center identifies a growing number of Americans

they have labeled "nones:"

> The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling. … The overwhelming majority of the "nones" were brought up in a religious tradition. The new Pew Research Center/Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly survey finds that about three-quarters of unaffiliated adults were raised with some affiliation (74 percent).[2]

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[1] David Kinnamon, "Young Adults Disengaging from Church," *American Family Association Journal* (Nov/Dec, 2006), accessed June 6, 2014, http://www.afajournal.org/2006/nov-dec/1206noi.asp#young.

[2] "'Nones' on the Rise," *Pew Research Center Survey*, last updated October 9, 2012, accessed October, 14, 2014, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/08/none-on-the-rise/.

In a response to this new survey, CJ Werleman wrote,

> The fastest growing religious faith in the United States is the group collectively labeled "Nones," who spurn organized religion in favor of non-defined skepticism about faith. About two-thirds of Nones say they are former believers. This is hugely significant. The trend is very much that Americans raised in Christian households are shunning the religion of their parents.[3]

Still others doubt but somehow remain in the faith. The prevalence of doubt has been severely neglected in this branch of Christianity. One of the concerns this project explored was the difference between evangelicals who doubted and stayed in the evangelical Christian faith and those who doubted and left the fold.[4]

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[3] CJ Werleman, "Christian Right Has Major Role in Hastening Decline of Religion in America," *AlterNet,* last updated March 22, 2014, accessed October 22, 2014, http://www.alternet.org/belief/religion-america-great-decline-christian-right-has-major-role-hastening-it.

[4] Edward T. Babinski, *Leaving the Fold: Testimonies of Former Fundamentalists* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003).

CHAPTER ONE: DOUBTING FAITH AMONG EVANGELICALS

Statement of the Problem

The problem this project addressed was the difficulty of some evangelical

Christians to integrate doubt into their life of faith. In response to this problem the

researcher examined biblical characters' response to doubt, reviewed relevant literature

dealing with the history of Christians who struggled with doubt and the philosophic soil

that has allowed doubt to flourish, interviewed evangelical Christians who dealt with

doubt, and based upon these investigations developed a strategy to help evangelical

Christians and pastors guide people through their struggle with doubt.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research was limited to evangelical Christians who have struggled with

doubt. The biblical research was limited to a brief overview of doubt in the Old and New

Testament, and focused primarily on the battle of two biblical characters with doubt—Job

and Thomas. The literature research was limited to a concise summary of some of the

Christians in the history of the church who have wrestled with doubt. This research

included both Protestant and Catholic Christians. The literature research was also limited

to a cursory overview of some of the key philosophic movements that provided the soil

that allowed doubt to flourish in European and American societies since the

Enlightenment. The field research was limited to evangelical Christians who have

struggled with doubt. Some of those interviewed were in the process of doubt, while

others interviewed were on the other side of doubt. Some of those on the other side of doubt may currently be believers in the Christian faith, while others have rejected the Christian faith in favor of another system of belief. The research was limited to developing a strategy that would help pastors and evangelical Christians guide people through their struggle with doubt.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and an important source of knowledge. The second assumption was that doubt is a normal experience in the lives of many evangelicals. The third assumption was that the data gathered by the researcher's phenomenological project was accurate, because the mind and senses are capable of perceiving reality as it is. The fourth assumption was that doubt can actually help someone grow in his or her spiritual development. In other words, this project contains ample information dealing with doubt in a pastoral care and counseling context as well. Pastors and other care givers who work with people struggling with doubt could benefit from the findings in this project. A fifth assumption was that many biblical figures who have dealt with doubt give helpful information on this phenomenon.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was to review doubt in the Old and New Testaments, and then focus on two biblical characters' bout with doubt. The researcher chose Job in the Book of Job and Thomas in the gospel accounts as exemplars of doubt in the Old and New Testaments.

The second subproblem was to review some key figures in church history who have battled with doubt. Martin Luther and Mother Teresa were two of the leaders

examined. Although the focus of this project is the evangelical community, the researcher

chose to include Mother Teresa, since her credibility and renown supersedes the confines

of the Catholic faith. The researcher also reviewed literature about the historical

development of philosophy that revealed some possible causes of the prevalence of doubt

in Western society. This included a brief review of some modern and postmodern

thinkers who have contributed to the way in which society currently defers to doubt as a

way to knowledge.

The third subproblem was to interview evangelicals who have gone through or are

currently engaged in a battle with doubt. These interviews looked at those who are still in

the Christian faith as well as those who have rejected the faith.

The fourth subproblem was to develop a practical strategy that would help people

in their faith when they face doubt. This strategy will be helpful to pastors who are

attempting to lead people through doubt and others who are personally struggling with

doubt.

Setting of the Project

The primary context of the project will be Second Baptist Church, Houston,

Texas. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States and is currently the most

ethnically diverse city in the nation, recently surpassing New York City according to Rice

University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.[1]

Second Baptist Church was founded in 1927 in downtown Houston and moved to

the west side of the city in 1963. It has had five pastors in its 86 year history and

currently has a resident membership of 68,343. Second Baptist is one of the largest

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[1] Douglas Stanglin, "Study: Houston Area Passes NYC as Nation's Most Diverse," *USA Today*, March 6, 2012.

congregations in the United States. It is comprised of five campuses throughout the

Houston metro area. Its membership reflects the ethnic diversity of Houston and has

thousands of members from all walks of life and religious backgrounds. The church is

affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention but does not emphasize that relationship.

The primary focus of the church is to reach those who do not have a relationship with

Christ through the proclamation of practical evangelical theology.

To better relate the purposes of the church to men and women in the marketplace,

Second Baptist consistently lays out its vision using common business vernacular with a

biblical twist. The mission statement is the Great Commission as laid out in Matthew

28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."[2] The marketing strategy,

according to Acts 1:8, is to reach the city, the nation, and the world: "You will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The product is the Good News of what God has done for mankind through Jesus Christ as

stated in Romans 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the

power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." The profit is changed

lives according to 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new

creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" With an emphasis on

conversion evangelism drawn from the revivalist movements of the 20th century, Second

Baptist, like many evangelical churches, places a high value on certainty or the assurance

of salvation. Along with other evangelical tenets like belief in the inerrancy of Scripture

and in the supernatural intervention of God in history, the church sets itself diametrically

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

opposed to the modern and postmodern dogma that says people live in a closed system where things like supernatural events do not happen.

Ironically, this combination of certainty about particular supernatural beliefs and the culture's doubt and mockery of such beliefs provides fertile soil for doubt to grow in the lives of some Christians. This occurs because certainty and faith are so highly valued in the evangelical context that it is difficult for some church members to admit that they have serious struggles with doubt. The question the researcher explored is how to integrate doubts into a relationship with God that appears to require certainty.

The secondary context of the project was interviews with former evangelicals who have walked away from the Christian faith. These interviews were with various people throughout the United States who were willing to talk about where their doubts led them. The purpose of the interviews was to discern some common trends that led to them falling away from the Christian faith. The intent being that these trends would better equip the researcher and other pastors to prevent that from happening in the future.

The Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

This project is important to the researcher because of his personal battles with doubt in his own journey as a follower of Jesus Christ. From 1986 to 1993, the researcher struggled with doubt concerning the truthfulness and reality of God as presented in the evangelical Christian tradition. This battle led to years of pain, guilt, and confusion in his life as a Christian and as a young pastor. As he tried to navigate his way through the turbulent waters of doubt, he discovered that there were not many pastors and church

leaders who could guide him through this most difficult storm. Whenever he tried to explain the crisis to a fellow Christian, he was received with blank stares.

This forced the researcher to dive deeply into the field of apologetics and to seek out other resources that could be helpful. Eventually, he found two very helpful books on the journey of doubt: *God in the Dark*[3] by Os Guinness, and *The Myth of Certainty*[4] by Daniel Taylor. These works were able to clearly articulate the doubts and fears the researcher was experiencing at that time.

As time progressed, the researcher began to share his battle with doubt from the pulpit of Second Baptist Church in Houston. He was amazed at the positive feedback he received from the congregation and how his "coming clean" about his own doubt provided an open door for dialogue with people who were also wrestling with issues related to doubt. For the past twenty years, the researcher has amassed a library of books, articles, and messages on the complex subject of doubt, certainty, and faith. He has talked with numerous people both inside and outside of the church about their questions concerning the veracity of the Christian faith. This project is of the utmost importance to the researcher because of his own personal journey through doubt and how God has used that dark experience to help others. Alcoholics Anonymous has a slogan that says "only a drunk can help another drunk." This researcher believes that "only a doubter can help another doubter." Thus, this project was an attempt to come alongside fellow doubters with love, compassion, and understanding.

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[3] Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996).

[4] Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

This project was beneficial to the researcher's immediate ministry context because of the mission statement of the church and the role that he plays on the staff of this church. Second Baptist unapologetically seeks to reach people who are far away from God. Many people who are unchurched have been raised in a philosophic soil that venerates doubt and calls into question any perspective that deals with a specific metaphysical position. Tragically, many seekers and skeptics have been turned away by their evangelical friends when they voice questions about the Christian faith. This project will normalize doubt as a phenomenon that happens to most everyone. Additionally, it will provide a port of entry for the seeker to begin considering a relationship with God.

Also, the researcher oversees the theological development of all the ordained pastors on the staff at Second Baptist (currently there are 70). Some of these pastors did not have seminary training and therefore need a resource to equip them to aid congregants who are drowning in the sea of doubt. This project is also relevant to the researcher's fellow pastors as it normalizes doubt as an experience that even pastors may have to deal with in their own lives.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

Many people are struggling with doubt, but few people want to talk about it. By developing a strategy of doubt for pastors and the laity alike, many people in the church at large could be freed up to speak honestly about their experiences when the fog of doubt descends on their life.

This project will help evangelicals to see that doubt played an important role in the lives of many biblical characters like Job and Thomas. It will reveal how doubt has

been the philosophic air that people have breathed in Western culture for centuries and how that has influenced everyone's perspectives on faith, certainty, and belief. As the church at large reads the stories of people just like them who also are battling or have battled doubt, perhaps they will see themselves in the stories and know that they are not alone, and that there is hope.

This project may also be a resource to other pastors and church leaders who are dealing with people in their community, both inside and outside the church, who are battling doubt in their own contexts. This project seeks to answer a number of questions related to doubt and faith: is it possible to integrate doubt into a life of faith? Can a strong Christian still be plagued with doubt? How can one leverage doubt to strengthen, instead of weaken, faith in God?

The Research Methodology

This project was qualitative in nature, using the grounded theory methodology of research with hints of phenomenology. The researcher chose grounded theory because it allowed him to enter into the phenomenon of doubt with an open mind. This methodology also comports well with the project's object of study because it is an organic approach to developing a theory or strategy and does not superimpose a predetermined schema on the people who were interviewed. The tools used by the researcher were personal interviews, field notes, audio tapes, and observations. The primary data consisted of on-site personal interviews with evangelicals who have struggled with doubt and still identify themselves as evangelicals. Also included were on-site interviews with former evangelicals whose struggle with doubt led them away from the evangelical faith. This data included telephone and Skype interviews, field notes, and

information obtained from the interview transcripts.

Secondary data included scholarly, popular, and biblical articles and commentaries regarding doubt in the Scriptures, and scholarly and popular books and articles relating to the phenomenon of doubt in evangelicalism.

The first step was to examine doubt as an issue addressed in Scripture. In this step the researcher gave a brief theological overview of doubt in the Scripture, looked at doubt in the Old Testament narrative of Job, looked at doubt in the life of Thomas in the New Testament, and made theological observations and connections about doubt in an attempt to normalize doubt in Scripture.

The second step was to explore doubt as an issue faced by some major leaders in church history and to look at how various philosophical movements have provided fertile soil for doubt to grow in Western culture. The researcher examined doubt in key historical leaders in the church, like Martin Luther and Mother Teresa. He examined common themes in their stories of doubt, and drew conclusions and made observations about these common themes. The researcher also looked at how modern philosophers like Descartes, Kant, and Foucault have provided a cultural framework that undergirds doubt in Western society.

The third step was to gather data from conducting interviews with people who have struggled with doubt. The researcher used audio recordings, a standard set of questions along with free form questions, and field notes to conduct the interviews.

The fourth step was to analyze and interpret the data looking for common themes and clusters. The researcher then used the data to develop a strategy for people going through doubt and for pastors who are helping others process doubt.

CHAPTER TWO: DOUBTING FAITH, A THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Doubt is not just a phenomenon seen in a few isolated biblical characters, but something ubiquitous throughout the pages of Scripture. From the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, doubt is found on many pages of the Bible. This reveals how people have continued to question God during critical moments in their spiritual journey. In this chapter of the project, the researcher gives a brief overview of doubt in the Old and New Testament, focusing a spotlight on doubt in the lives of Job and Thomas, and draws some conclusions about how the Bible seeks to integrate doubt into the life of faith.

Theological Overview of Doubt in the Bible

The Creation and Fall

In the garden, before the fall of humankind, it was doubt that played a key role in Eve believing the serpent's lies over the truth of God. In Genesis 3:1 the serpent said to Eve "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" At this point in the story, Eve and presumably Adam had a decision to make. They had to decide if they would trust in what God said about eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Or would they believe in what Satan said about God's supposed dietary boundaries? Before Satan appeared on the scene, Adam and Eve appear perfectly agreeable to eating from all the other trees in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil. It is not clear how long they continued to obey God in this way, but eventually they caved in to the lies of the devil.

This leads to an important issue concerning the activities of Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit. This is a critical concern to this topic because although their doubt originates from an outside source, it appears that Adam and Eve had the preinstalled rational faculties to engage in doubt. At one point, they found themselves in between belief in God and belief in Satan. They had to choose whom they would trust. It appears this ability to ask questions, mentally or verbally, was placed inside of unfallen man and woman. Too many times doubt is seen only as something sinful to be avoided. But theoretically and practically, it is not necessarily a sinful activity. The capacity to doubt may be seen as a gift from God from the very beginning and a necessary part of human free will. The problem with human reasoning occurs when humans attempt to use this "rationalistic impulse" to determine what is right and wrong, independently from God's revelation.[1]

A key component of dealing with doubt in an effective manner is to keep God at the center of every thought and action. The Shema was intended to serve this purpose. The Shema is the prayer and statement of foundational belief to Old Testament Jews: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). It would come to be a basic reminder to keep God's ways in the forefront from dawn till dusk. Adam and Eve failed to keep God's thoughts and knowledge at the center and eventually fell prey to Satan's lies. The restoration of God's people would eventually center on the ability of God's Word to keep them in his will by being upheld at the center of the community.

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[1] Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 263.

Understanding the Fall fills out the picture of doubt's entry into the human condition. Though God placed humankind in a perfect environment, the choice was made to attain knowledge of God independently of that relationship, thus the harmony between humankind and God was broken. This brokenness led to the Fall in all areas of life including the human ability to reason. Paul says that people suppress the clearly revealed character of God in nature and became "futile" in thinking (Rom. 1:21). He explains,

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles (Rom. 1:18-23).

Reformed epistemologists like Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, and Gregory Bahnsen have put great emphasis on how the Fall distorted and damaged mankind's ability to obtain and respond to the knowledge of God as revealed in nature and Scripture. They argue that, because of the Fall, the human ability to reason in a neutral manner has been permanently and irreparably flawed. Thus, there is no neutral ground upon which a believer and unbeliever may stand.[2]

> When sinners try to gain knowledge without the fear of the Lord, that knowledge is distorted. (Romans 1:21-25; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5) This is not to say that every sentence they utter is false. It is to say that their basic worldview is twisted and unreliable. Their most serious epistemological mistake is, typically, to assert

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[2] Gregory L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998), 194.

their own autonomy: to make themselves or something other than the biblical God, the final standard of truth and right.[3]

So, the desire to assert one's rational autonomy over the knowledge of God has been present before the Fall and was intensified after the Fall. In the New Testament, Paul writes, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). Even if to the best of one's human ability one chooses to make God the center of knowledge and trust, there will always be the ongoing drag of fallen nature when it comes to understanding the world and God.

The Old and New Testaments show that humanity is riddled with incomplete and imperfect men and women who doubt and question God at various stages of their relationship with him. It appears that the ability to doubt, as in the case of Adam and Eve, was preinstalled. In other words, it was a part of being human even before the Fall. The Fall has exacerbated humankind's ability to doubt, but doubt is neither intrinsically good nor evil. To paint a better picture of the nuances of doubt, a biblical definition is needed.

Defining Doubt

Starting with the New Testament, there are six Greek words that are used to express the one English word, "doubt." *Aporeo* is always used in the middle voice and means "to be without a way, perplexed, or at a loss." This word is used regarding the absence of Christ's body in Luke 24:4, when the disciples "were doubting." It is used in the case of Paul bringing his case before Festus in Acts 25:20, when he "was perplexed" concerning the charges brought against him. *Diaporeo* is the second Greek word used which means to be "thoroughly perplexed, with a perplexity leading to despair." Acts

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[3] John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1994), 51.

1:12 uses this word *diaporeo* to say that some onlookers to the supernatural event of Pentecost "were in doubt."[4] The third word used for doubt in the NT is *diakrino*, which means to argue with oneself. The picture here is of a person who, having an internal debate about which option to choose, vacillates between the two options. James uses this word for doubt in James 1:6 when he describes doubt as being "tossed by the waves of the sea."[5]

When Jesus appeared to the disciples, resurrected from the dead and about to ascend into heaven, Matthew writes that some worshipped and others doubted (Matt. 28:17). Here he used the fourth word, *distazo*, which means "to stand in two ways" or "to be uncertain which path to take." The fifth word used to describe doubt is *meteorizo* which is used metaphorically in Luke 12:29 to mean "to be anxious," "through a distracted state of mind, of wavering between hope and fear."[6] The final word used for doubt is *psuchen airo*, which means "to hold in suspense." In other words, it means to have one's expectations raised but not satisfied in the present moment. The proverb which reads "a hope deferred makes the heart sick" comes to mind here though that word is not used here (Prov. 13:5). The word is used in John 10:24, when some Jews said to Jesus "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (NLT). So in this sense, *psuchen airo*[7] means "don't leave me hanging."

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[4] W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., 1989), 334-335.

[5] Alister E. McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 50.

[6] Vine, 335.

[7] Vine, 335.

Phrases like "uncertainty," "perplexity," "wavering," or "being in between two competing beliefs" capture the ideas that help define the meaning of doubt in Scripture. Taking these various Greek definitions into consideration, Gary Habermas defines doubt as "the lack of certainty about the truthfulness of Christianity, one's own faith, or how it applies to real life situations."[8] Os Guinness simplifies the matter to describe doubt as a state between belief and unbelief.[9] In *God in the Dark,* Guinness makes a helpful theological delineation between faith, doubt, and unbelief:

> The difference between doubt and unbelief is crucial. The Bible makes a definite distinction between them though the distinction is not hard and fast. The word unbelief is usually used of a willful refusal to believe or of a deliberate decision to disobey. So, while doubt is a state of suspension between faith and unbelief, unbelief is a state of mind that is closed against God, an attitude of the heart that disobeys God as much as it disbelieves the truth. Unbelief is the consequence of a settled choice. … There are times when the word unbelief is used in Scripture to describe the doubts of those who are definitely believers but only when they are at a stage of doubting that is rationally inexcusable and well on the way to becoming full-grown unbelief.[10]

Guinness's definition of doubt as a "state of suspension between faith and unbelief" conjures up the image of a wobbly suspension bridge. It is to be in-between belief and unbelief. This in-between state can describe when one doubts the whole existence of God—maybe God is there, or maybe God is not there. It can also describe when one doubts God's love and care or when one doubts whether God is going to provide. Whatever the type of doubt, Christians need not be alarmed that they have slipped into the full danger of unbelief. Rather, Christians can to some degree rest in the knowledge that, however uncomfortable and insecure the wobbly bridge, they remain in-between.

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[8] Gary R. Habermas, *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 5.

[9] Guinness, 26.

[10] Guinness, 26.

But while doubt can be a neutral, in-between place, it can also be unpredictably slippery. For this reason the metaphor of ice is appropriate. Ice can be slippery and it can be dangerously unstable. Without warning it can cause one to slide in one direction or another. There is no guarantee that one will land firmly on one side or the other. In the same way doubt, though a neutral suspension bridge, can cause one to slide in unpredictable directions. Thus, while those who struggle with doubt can rest to some degree in its neutrality, they must also heed its danger. This vigilance is necessary because doubt's neutrality and icy slipperiness can coexist at the same time.

Two examples of the unpredictably slippery quality of doubt are the conversion story of Lee Strobel and the de-conversion story of Bart Ehrman. Strobel, author of *The Case for Christ*, was an atheist at one time. He was a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. But what moved Strobel to believe in God, moving him from atheism to theism, was doubt. He began to doubt his world view. He began to doubt that naturalism and atheism was an adequate explanation of humanity's source, existence and future.[11] Conversely, the de-conversion story of Bart Ehrman, author of the book *Misquoting Jesus,* equally exemplifies the icy slipperiness of doubt. He was once an evangelical. He is now a skeptic. What got him to slide away from belief in God was doubt. It was when he got on the ice of doubt that he slid away from God into unbelief and agnosticism.[12]

In both cases, doubt was at work in the same way that ice causes slipperiness. In one case, doubt slid Strobel toward belief in God. In another case, doubt slid Ehrman away from God. Doubt similarly effected brothers Christopher and Peter Hitchens.

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[11] Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 9-19.

[12] Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York, NY: HarperCollins 2009), 1-16.

Christopher, an atheist, wrote the New York Times bestseller, *God Is Not Great*.[13] Peter

wrote *The Rage against God*.[14] Doubt led Christopher to slide away from belief in God to

a fiery brand of atheism. Doubt led Peter away from God, but then it slid him back to

belief in God.

Many times evangelicals view doubt as something that is always to be avoided,

but that is not necessarily the case. For someone to move from atheism to theism, it takes

doubt. But at the same time, for someone to move from theism to atheism, it also takes

doubt. Like unpredictable ice, doubt can move people in both directions. Daniel Taylor,

in *The Skeptical Believer,* writes,

> Like tolerance, doubt is not in itself automatically a good or a bad thing. It is
> neither a virtue to doubt nor a virtue never to doubt. As usual, context is crucial.
> One must ask what is being doubted and in what spirit and with what result. …
> One feature of healthy doubt is a refusal to settle for lousy answers to good
> questions. One symptom of unhealthy doubt is paralysis. When doubt leaves you
> unable to commit or act in life, then you have a diseased, disabling form of doubt,
> not really a healthy questioning.[15]

So, according to Taylor, doubt can leave a person paralyzed and trapped in the in-

between place. But it can also push another person to fight for better answers. Taylor

portrays doubt as ice, neither good nor bad by itself, since it can both threaten destruction

and catalyze creativity.

Two of Scripture's most famous gardens, Eden and Gethsemane, offer pictures of

both the healthy and unhealthy effects of doubt. Doubt drove Adam and Eve to believe in

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[13] Christopher Hitchens*, God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York, NY: Twelve/Hachette, 2007), 1-13.

[14] Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 9-29.

[15] Daniel Taylor, *The Skeptical Believer: Telling Stories to Your Inner Atheist* (Saint Paul, MN: BOG Walk Press, 2013), 10-11.

Satan's lies in the Garden. In contrast, doubt drove Jesus Christ to plunge deeper into

God's will as he sweat drops of blood in another garden. Many times doubt can be sin,

when it leads to rebellion and unbelief. For this reason the Bible does not encourage

people to remain in a state of doubt. But as just described, the restlessness of doubt can

spur creativity and even deeper faith. The difference seems to be what people do when

they find themselves on the slippery ice of doubt. Some cooperate with the slipperiness in

such a way that they allow doubt to slide them farther from God. Others cooperate in

such a way that they slide closer to God.

<p align="center">*Misunderstood Passages on the Nature of Faith and Doubt*</p>

Much of the confusion over doubt among some evangelicals springs from a faulty

interpretation of a few key passages in the New Testament, the first chapter of James and

the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

In James's letter, it appears the author argues for a type of doubtless certainty that

triggers the hand of God to give the believer what he is praying for:

> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously
> and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without
> any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed
> by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from
> the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

It would be easy to lift these verses right off the page and make a fairly strong case for

certainty, or faith without a doubt as the means to receiving what one is asking from God.

The "Word of Faith" movement is predicated on such verses. It emphasizes the believer's

responsibility to have a positive confession of faith before going to God in prayer and

asking him for something.[16] The idea is: if one asks God to do something on one's behalf,

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[16] Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 66-71.

then that person had better ask without a doubt, and with complete certainty, or God will

not answer that prayer. Most evangelicals do not go to the "name it, claim it" extreme of

the Word of Faith movement. But even they subscribe to absolute certainty when it

comes to issues like the assurance of one's salvation. When this researcher was living in

the fog of doubt for many years, this passage brought fear and despair into his life. In

retrospect, that fear was unnecessary when looking at the entire scope of this particular

passage.

A basic principle of hermeneutics is that "context is king." This means that when

discerning the meaning of a passage in Scripture, one must read as much of the

surrounding text as possible. In other words, one must always read the paragraphs before

the passage and the paragraphs after the passage. As a matter of fact, scholar and

apologist Gregory Koukl believes this guiding principle is the single most practical skill

he has ever learned as a Christian. He encourages people to "never read a Bible verse."[17]

What he means by this is always consider the context. One ought first to look at the

context of the passage within the specific chapter of a particular book. Then one ought to

look within the context of the entire book. Then one should look within the context of the

book's genre. After this, one ought to look within the context of the entire New

Testament. Finally, one ought to look within the context of the Old Testament, and thus

the entire scope of Scripture.

Gregory Boyd argues that if one reads this passage in context, it teaches the exact

opposite of its interpretation by the Word of Faith movement. Boyd writes,

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[17] Gregory Koukl, "Never Read a Bible Verse," *Stand to Reason* website, under "Articles," accessed May 2014, http://www.str.org/articles/never-read-a-bible-verse#.VEh2QRF0y01.

> To me, this broader context strongly suggests that the wavering James is talking about isn't concerned with doubt: it's rather concerned with whether disciples will rely on God for the kind of wisdom that will enable them to find joy in trials and to persevere in their faith to become mature and complete, on the one hand, or whether they'll be polluted with earthly wisdom that makes them "unstable in all they do," on the other.[18]

In this passage, James uses the Greek word *diakrino* to describe this type of wavering doubt.

Boyd makes the case that James is referring to a type of wavering between loyalties, like a father who wants to see his son's ball game at 6 pm but his boss is asking him to work late. The dad is wavering between loyalties.[19] Therefore, James is using this term to refer to wavering between seeking wisdom from God or seeking wisdom from the world when one is going through trials and various kinds of suffering. According to Boyd, he is not talking about some type of absolute, doubt-free certainty that will free the hand of God so that one can get whatever is desired in prayer. If context is king, this passage teaches the opposite of getting what one wants from God by maintaining absolute certainty in prayer requests. Rather, it speaks about how to receive wisdom from God when trying to endure intense persecution and suffering. It is in this sort of trial that James is exhorting his readers not to waiver between loyalties.

Another frequently misunderstood passage related to doubt is Hebrews 11:1-2: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." Some Christians believe that this passage provides an adequate definition of faith, that faith is being absolutely certain of what is

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[18] Gregory Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt: Breaking the Idol of Certainty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 199.

[19] Boyd, 196.

not seen. The rest of Hebrews eleven unpacks what has been called "the Hall of Fame of Faith," men and women who have overcome insurmountable odds by exercising this force called "faith." Just as with the James one passage, one could be led to believe that if one drums up enough psychological certainty in the invisible world where God dwells, one can also accomplish mighty feats of faith just like the people in the rest of chapter eleven.

Other scholars interpret this key passage in a different way. David K. Clark argues that this verse is a description of faith and not a complete definition. He uses the simple but profound analogy of trying to describe and define an automobile. Clark writes,

> Not every statement of the form "A is B" is a definition. Some are merely descriptions. Consider these examples:
> (1.) A car is an object with glass windows.
> (1) is a description. A definition delineates the exact limits of some word or thing. It gives its exact nature. A definition is a complete description that differentiates the word from all others.
> (2.) A home is an object with glass windows.
> (2) shows why (1) is merely a description. (1) is not sufficient to differentiate *car* from other objects. It is true as a description, but it is not a definition.
> (3.) A car is a four-wheeled, motorized vehicle intended primarily for carrying passengers on roadways.
> Unlike (1) and (2), (3) is a definition. It is not a perfect definition, but it does delineate *car* in contrast to all other objects in the world, while (1) and (2) do not.[20]

A careful study of the context of Hebrews bears out Clark's argument. If "context is king," then just as in the James passage, one must read Hebrews 10:32-39. This preceding passage shows that Hebrews 11:1 is an encouragement for believers to face suffering and uncertainty with confidence and strength. Clark says,

> Those who have faith will continue to look forward to what has been promised but not yet been given, even when persecution causes emotional stress and

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[20] David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 18.

cognitive uncertainty. Those who have faith do expect to see something for which they have not yet found direct evidence. But this does not mean that this is the *meaning* of the word *faith.* This confident expectation is *characteristic* of those who do have faith (emphasis in original).[21]

Therefore, biblical faith is more like marriage than it is like a psychological mind-trick. Faith is more about trusting and obedience than it is about trying to remove all doubt in order to gain the kind of certainty that will in turn move the hand of God in one's favor. When two people date each other, they are each motivated to acquaint themselves with the other's character by attraction to the other. Once they have gained enough evidence, a proposal follows, and eventually they find themselves at the altar pledging their eternal love. So, the essence of biblical faith is trusting in a person, the person of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. As couples grow in marriage, they get to know one another in a deeper and richer way, although they will never know each other completely and exhaustively. The same is true in a relationship with Christ. As the relationship grows, he is known more deeply and intimately, but knowledge of him will always be incomplete and partial. Though biblical faith does involve the mind, at the heart of faith is this trust relationship with "the God who is there,"[22] the one who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

To integrate doubt into a life of faith, one must appreciate the nuances of doubt and come to see doubt not as the opposite of faith but as a state of being in between belief and unbelief. Perhaps seeing doubt as a neutral phenomenon like the icy country of Switzerland that can slide someone closer or farther away from God is helpful. As Cook

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[21] Clark, 19.

[22] Thomas V. Morris, *Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 17-19.

and Boyd revealed, having a life of faith is more like a growing marriage rather than a groaning mental mind game to achieve some kind of psychological or epistemological certainty.

Biblical References to Doubt in the Old Testament

Though the Old Testament does not use the word "doubt" in the same way that it is used in the New Testament, one finds many instances of doubt that exemplify the author's definition of doubt as in-between belief and unbelief.

Abraham, the father of faith, slid on the ice of doubt all the way to disobedience when he chose to sleep with Hagar, who produced Ishmael (Gen. 16). Sara laughed in doubt and disbelief when she heard how God was going to give her a son in her old age although she was barren (Gen. 18). Jacob doubted whether God would protect him from his scorned brother Esau, when he wrestled with the angel by the river Jabbok (Gen. 32). Moses doubted his own ability as a speaker and a leader when God commanded him to free the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt (Exod. 3-4). When Moses went up on Mount Sinai, the Israelites began to doubt the one true God and reverted back to an Egyptian paganism as they worshipped the Golden Calf (Exod. 32). Ten of the twelve spies doubted that God would help them take the Promised Land and saw themselves as grasshoppers compared to the giants of the land of Canaan (Num. 13).

Elijah, after he had just performed a mighty miracle and called down fire from heaven to defeat the Baal prophets, curled up in fear and doubt under the juniper tree when Jezebel put out a death threat upon this man of God (1 Kings 19). David, along with other Psalmists, often found himself being tossed and turned by doubt, which he expressed in numerous Psalms. Many of his Psalms and those of others reiterate these

doubts. For example, Psalm 88 lays out a litany of doubts and closes with the bleak words "darkness is my closest friend." The Psalmist chose not to resolve the tension aroused in the Psalm with the more familiar solution "you are my rock, my fortress." Instead, he ended with just darkness.[23]

These are just a few Old Testament references to people who struggled with doubt at some point in their journey of following God. Though these people did have their bout with doubt, they went on to demonstrate great faith and obedience. Abraham climbed up the mountain to offer his son Isaac on the altar, even though he was uncertain what God would do next. Jacob got up off the wrestling mat and limped down the road to meet his brother Esau, even though he was uncertain of what lay ahead. Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" and embarked on one of the most monumental leadership paths in the history of civilization, even though it was filled with massive uncertainties and potential setbacks. Doubting David also went out and killed Goliath with a sling-shot (1 Kings 17) and became the greatest king in the history of Israel, and is now referred to as "a man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22). Elijah obeyed God's instruction and took a nap, ate some food, and passed the mantle of prophetic leadership on to his protégé, Elisha.

When one looks back at the leaders and influencers of the Old Testament, one sees a mixture of faith and doubt, of strong belief and faltering unbelief. Alcoholics Anonymous has an oft-used saying, "the road to recovery is not a straight one." This means that rather than walking forward in a simple, one-time straight line from chemical dependency to sobriety, one most often walks in jagged diagonals, sometimes falling

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[23] Paul Lim, "Suffering and Doubt: The Salutary Nature of Doubt," Lecture, University Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary 2012, podcast, accessed February 2013 on iTunes.

back during efforts to move forward. This can also be said of the road of following God. There are times when doubt led men and women to accomplish great things for God and there were times when doubt led them to apostasy and disobedience. From Abraham to Elijah, from David to Habakkuk, one discovers the phenomena of doubt, faith, and at times unbelief woven into the journeys of these men and women as they sought to follow God.

Biblical References to Doubt in the New Testament

The New Testament begins with a long-haired, camel-hair-tunic-wearing, honey and locust-eating radical in the wilderness who called for sinners to repent. John the Baptist's whole purpose was to prepare the way for the Lord. One day he was baptizing out in the river and he saw Jesus walk by and he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NASB). Later, he would go on to baptize Jesus Christ. He was thrown in prison. He was about to have his head served on a platter. While John was in prison, he heard what Christ was doing. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt. 11:2). This expression of doubt came from the same John the Baptist who earlier had affirmed that Jesus was the one, the man, the Lamb of God. This same John the Baptist was having a time of doubt. It is interesting to look at the rest of the chapter. Jesus says, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11). So Jesus' response is noteworthy. He does not condemn John the Baptist for doubting, but rather affirms who he is.

In another story, a father had a son who is possessed by demons and he wanted Jesus to cast these demons out and to heal his son. He says, "If you can do this," and Jesus says, "If I can do this?" Then the father says, "I know that you can do it—I believe—but help my unbelief." As with John's doubt, Jesus did not respond with condemnation. Rather, he healed the boy. So, as with all his interactions with people, though Jesus did not respond favorably to unbelief, He did respond to honest and sincere doubt. This desperate father was stuck between believing that Jesus could heal his son and the possibility that perhaps Jesus could not heal his son. His sincere cry, "help my unbelief" or "move me from this place of doubt to trust," moved Jesus to deliver his child from this torment.

Peter also spent time on the ice of doubt, in spite of the fact that at one point Jesus commended him for his confession of faith (Matt. 16:13-19). Peter had made prideful claims of his own ability to persevere during the Last Supper. For instance, Luke recorded him as saying "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). Matthew recorded him as saying, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will," and "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Matt. 26:33-35). But soon after these statements, Peter denied Jesus three times as he moved from belief to doubt to unbelief. After Jesus rose from the dead, he restored, forgave, and re-commissioned Peter to do mighty things.

There are other references to doubt in the Gospels, in which Jesus rebuked his disciples for doubting and not having enough faith in him. When the disciples were in the boat with Jesus crossing to the other side of a lake, a violent storm came up. In fear, the disciples woke Jesus from sleep to save them. "He replied, 'You of little faith, why are

you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm" (Matt. 8:26).

At another time in another boat, Peter saw Jesus walking on the water. He boldly stepped out on the water to meet Jesus, but then became afraid and began to sink. Jesus reached out and caught him and said, "You of little faith, … why did you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). Later, the disciples tried to heal a boy that was possessed by demons. They were unsuccessful and discouraged. They asked Jesus why they were not able to heal the boy. "He replied, 'Because you have so little faith'" (Matt. 17:20).

As described earlier, doubt slid New Testament figures closer to God as well as away from them. For example, Paul in the conversion story was full of zealous certainty about his cause. He was so certain that he persecuted Christians by ravaging the church, overseeing the execution of Stephen, and hunting down believers for their destruction. But on a road trip to Damascus, while full of this certainty, he was blinded by the light. He heard a voice from heaven, and then asked a question—an expression of doubt— "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus spoke to him in the midst of this doubt (Acts 9:5). This knockout blow to Paul may represent one of the quickest bouts with doubt. But Paul struggled with doubt in future years as well. Many years later, Paul pleaded with God in prayer to take away a thorn and wondered why God had not removed it. God merely replied he would give him the grace to handle it.

First century Jewish monotheists like Paul had to "doubt" and "rethink" their entire theology in light of the resurrection and incarnation. The story of the disciples meeting the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus is the perfect case in point:

> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then

enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

First century Jews, starting with the disciples, were forced to re-examine their entire worldview and interpretation of the Scriptures because of Jesus' resurrection. Boyd explains this phenomenon when he writes: "With his life, ministry, teaching, and especially his sacrificial death, Jesus provided a picture of God and his kingdom that forces us to reframe everything that led up to him."[24] In other words, the entire preceding Scriptural narrative and its meaning changes because of Jesus' surprise ending. Anyone can relate to this based on their experience with Hollywood's storytelling trick of ending a movie with such a surprise that it forces viewers to go back and re-examine the entire film based on the revelation at the end.

This need for re-examination reinforces the argument that doubt must precede more faith. If doubt had not been present, the very first disciples and all the new believers in Acts could not have begun a relationship with Jesus Christ. There had to be a point when they were in-between belief and unbelief in the old interpretation in order to move into faith in the new interpretation.

One could argue that at the most profound moment in biblical revelation, when Jesus Christ hung on the cross, he entered a time of doubt. As he was suspended between heaven and earth he cried out, "'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')" (Matt. 27:46). In this holy, mysterious moment, Jesus took on the sin of the world, and darkness covered the earth as he became sin in our place. Peter Enns elaborates on this expression of Jesus' while on the cross,

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[24] Boyd, 177.

But think of this from another angle. Jesus himself had his moments where he doubted God and God was very distant from him—God abandoned him—and he knew his Bible very well. In the garden and on the cross, Jesus said what psalm after psalm says: "God where are you? I don't see you anywhere. Are you even there? I am giving up all hope."[25]

No doubt, many evangelicals would disagree with Enns' view that Jesus expressed doubt. Some state that it would be impossible for Jesus to doubt. Denny Burk, professor of biblical studies at Boyce College, wrote, "To say that Jesus had doubts and fears is to make him into a transgressor. But that is not at all the biblical depiction of Jesus."[26] But one must still account for Jesus' loud, crying "question of forsakenness." It stands alone as an inexplicable glimpse into the humanity of the Savior.

What Burk and other theologians fail to grasp is that Enns has renewed an ancient interpretation of Scripture in which the Psalms are considered to express prophetically what was on Jesus' heart and mind while he walked on earth. In other words, Jesus' words and utterances reiterate what God the Holy Spirit had already voiced through King David and the other psalmists. Jesus re-lived the Psalms, with their full range of emotions. He re-lived their high points of exultation and triumph, as well as their low points of despair and doubt. In this way, Jesus showed solidarity with humanity, fully identifying himself in all its joys and all its suffering. Thus, his anguished cry "why have you forsaken me?" demonstrates his complete solidarity with the human suffering of doubt.

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[25] Peter Enns, "The Benefit of Doubt: Coming to Terms with Faith in a Postmodern Era," lecture given at Asuza Pacific University, November 16, 2010, accessed June 2014, http://peterennsonline.com /2010/11/24/the-benefit-of-doubt-coming-to-terms-with-faith-in-a-post-modern-era/, 8.

[26] Denny Burk, "Did Jesus Experience 'Doubt' and 'Fear'?," accessed August 20, 2014, www.DennyBurk.com online blog post April 4, 2012. http://www.dennyburk.com/president-obama-on-jesus-doubts-and-fears/.

Many theologians would still ask "How can this be? How can God the Son doubt in God the Father?" Dietrich Bonhoeffer described this paradox well when he said, "Of the humiliated one we say, 'This is God.' He makes none of the divine properties evident in his death. On the contrary, we see a man doubting God as he dies. But of this man we say, 'This is God.'"[27] Greg Boyd attempts to describe the tension of this event when he writes, "Though the plan that involved this sacrifice had been settled in the Trinity for ages, it seems that in this singularly hellish moment Jesus had become foggy about it. And so the Son of God questioned the Father, 'Why?'"[28] Boyd is saying that in this moment, the clarity with which the Godhead had previously decided the Son's sacrifice had been obscured, resulting in this moment of Jesus' doubt. Bonhoeffer and Boyd are both grappling with the full humanity and deity of Christ in this watershed moment in salvation history.

Just like in the Old Testament, the New Testament records the stories of men and women struggling with doubt and faith. Even Jesus himself in his humanity struggled immensely in the garden and on the cross with a form of doubt as he wrestled to understand what his Father was doing. The presence of doubt in the New Testament is an undeniable fact. Sometimes Jesus admonished the doubt in his disciples and other times he administered words of comfort for those who doubt, as He did to John the Baptist and to the father whose son was afflicted.

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[27] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1960), 106.

[28] Boyd, 94.

Suffering Induced Doubt: Job

Some scholars believe that Job is the oldest book in the Bible. That is good news for the doubter because it deals with the oldest problem in the world: why bad things happen to good people. Mike Mason, in *The Gospel According to Job,* writes: "It is fascinating to think that as we open this text we may be faced with the earliest of all written accounts of a human being's relationship with Yahweh, the one true God."[29] What is more fascinating are the existential questions and real life doubts that this book addresses which still ring true thousands of years later. David Atkinson suggests,

> Job faces us with big questions: both personal and pastoral. … Why suffering? Can there be any point, any meaning in so much underserved pain? Or it may touch us at the level of our relationship with God: where is God after the holocaust? What does my faith in God amount to in the light of my young next-door neighbor's inoperable cancer? Can we continue to speak of the love, care and compassion of God at times when all the evidence around us might suggest that he has let us down?[30]

Though many talk about the patience of Job, not many talk about the doubt of Job. Philosopher Peter Kreeft writes, "Job is the most demanding man in the Bible, the Doubting Thomas of the Old Testament."[31] This demanding man was also a godly man of tremendous wealth and influence in the land of Uz (Job 1:1-3). Within a brief period of time, Job lost everything except his wife and the air in his lungs. All ten of his children were killed, his business collapsed, and his body was stricken with sores from head to toe (Job 1:13-2:8). Throughout the narrative, Job falls into an extreme state of doubt and

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[29] 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), 19.

[30] David Atkinson, *The Message of Job*, The Bible Speaks Today Commentary, The Old Testament Series, ed. J.A. Motyer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy Press, 1991), 9.

[31] Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes, Life as Vanity. Job, Life as Suffering. Song of Songs, Life as Love* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 91.

questioning of God as he tries to hold on to a tiny thread of faith in light of the storm that has devastated his life. Job reveals how pain and suffering cause many to wallow in the mire of doubt and uncertainty.

In the book of Job, the term "dramatic irony" needs to be unpacked. Throughout the book the central character in the story, Job, is trying to figure out why he is suffering so much. Job never receives the answer to this question, but God rebukes Job in the end of the book and somehow Job is satisfied. The dramatic irony occurs in the first chapter because the author of this book gives the reader a view behind the curtain. The reader knows that the source of Job's pain and suffering is due to a wager God has with Satan to see if Job will trust God for nothing. Throughout the book, Job is in the dark about the cosmic bet, but the reader has some inside information that achieves the author's ironic intentions.[32]

> Job's initial response to the devastation that fell upon him was remarkable:
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> At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (Job 1:20-22).

In the early stage of his great suffering, Job did not react like a stoic, but mourned by tearing his robe, shaving his head, and falling to the ground in worship to proclaim the sovereignty of God in the midst of his pain.

Once he had lost his health, his response was similar when he replied to his wife's request to curse God:

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[32] Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 248.

He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:10).

Job did not charge Satan or himself for wrongdoing, but he painfully proclaimed his trust in God as the ultimate source of good and evil.

However, in the third chapter of Job's story, the slippery ice effect takes over and Job begins to slide on the ice of doubt. Verse one reads simply, "After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth" (Job 3:1). No one knows how long it took Job to slide from his rock solid faith in God to the slippery and risky place of living in between belief and unbelief. The story does not reveal the timeline. What follows here is perhaps "the bleakest chapter in all of Scripture."[33]

Then from chapter three to chapter thirty in this narrative, Job unleashes a flood of complaints, laments, and doubts in the face of God. The more his three friends blame Job for his suffering, the more defiant Job became toward God and his friends. Gary Habermas comments that,

> He seemed to gain momentum as he went. He expressed what today would be called a death wish, stating his preference to have died in childbirth (3:11; 10:18-19). Then he requested that God slay him (6:8-9). He charged God with oppressing him, while approving the actions of the wicked (10:3). … Then he demanded that God just leave him alone (10:20-21) and stop trying to frighten him (13:21). After all, he thought God had destroyed any hope that he might have had (14:19).[34]

Throughout this section of the story, Job shakes his fist at God, demanding that he would have a day in court with him, so that he could defend his case against the Almighty (13:3). Job became frustrated as he cried out for an appointment with God and he felt God responded to him with absolute silence (19:7 and 30:20).

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[33] Mason, 55-57.

[34] Habermas, 12.

This middle section (chapters 3-30) of Job seems to be ignored within many evangelical contexts. It has been this researcher's observations over the past 30 years that when Job is taught in the church, the first two chapters, showing Job's courage, faith, and patience in the face of such calamity, are mentioned. Then the last few chapters are commonly mentioned, when God shows up and gives Job a lesson in cosmology. But the chapters in-between are almost never mentioned. Jennifer Michael Hecht, historian and author of *The History of Doubt*, puts it this way:

> Certainly, one never dwells much on how this whole thing was a sort of careless bet with the devil. But even more than that, the idea that Job's questions about justice are never addressed, you know, the religious interpretations of this story just gloss over that and gloss over the rebellion and just say, "Look, Job was given many trials and in the end came back to God." And that's not the story as written. When you read the story, it seems to be much more a howl against the injustice of the world.[35]

In many ways Hecht, though an atheist, is correct in her assessment. The middle section in this story, in which Job laments, questions, and "howls" against God, appears to be glossed over in some evangelical communities. This "very human section" of the book of Job needs to be highlighted so Christians can know that it's okay to ask real questions to God "out loud" when trying to endure intense suffering. Recently, the researcher watched a Word of Faith teacher in a local church admonish a Sunday School class for looking at Job as a negative book. He smiled and said, "Haven't you read the last chapter?" As if all the blessings God gave Job in the end somehow made up for the hellacious calamity that had befell him.

Job-like stories still abound today. Years ago, Professor Jerry Sittser was riding down the road with his wife, mom, and four small children. A drunk driver swerved in

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[35] Jennifer Michael Hecht interview by Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*. American Public Media, transcript. May 3, 2007.

his lane hitting him head on, killing his wife, his mother, and his four year old daughter. At the age of 40, Sittser lost nearly everything dear to him in a flash. He was left to raise three traumatized children alone. The drunken driver was later acquitted because of a careless error made by Sittser's attorney. Out of this horrific experience, Sittser penned an honest and compelling book called *A Grace Disguised*. In this book, he carefully describes how one maintains personal trust in God in the face of catastrophic loss.[36] However, for others who go through the tunnel of chaos and suffering like Job, it does not hold up so well.

Many years ago a young teenager watched a Billy Graham crusade on TV. He was enraptured by the evangelist's message and decided to turn his life over to Jesus Christ and become "born again." This young man continued to grow in his relationship with God and felt like he had a call from God to go into the mission field. That was until his sister developed a terminal disease that ate away at her body. This committed Christian watched his sister slowly die. His faith slowly died too in this season. This young man went on to renounce his faith in God and became an atheist. This is the story of cable television billionaire Ted Turner's Job-like experience on the ice of doubt.[37] Suffering polarizes people. It slides one either closer to God or farther away from him. It can be a disturbing, paradoxical "grace disguised" or a lethal injection resulting in unbelief.

When one examines the perplexing, disturbing, and painful story of Job, all kinds of questions surface. These questions concern the fairness of God, his nonresponse to

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[36] Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 24-27.

[37] Ann O'Neill, "The Reinvention of Ted Turner," *CNN.com* Online, November 17, 2013, accessed May 19, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/17/us/ted-turner-profile/.

Job's questions, and the purpose the almighty had in mind to allow Job to go through so much miserable pain and suffering. Carl Jung, one of the fathers of modern psychoanalysis, sees the perplexing nature of Job in this way when he wrote:

> The Book of Job places this pious and faithful man, so heavily afflicted by the Lord, on a brightly lit stage where he presents his case to the eyes and ears of the world. It is amazing to see how easily Yahweh, quite without reason, had let himself be influenced by one of his sons, by a doubting thought, and made unsure of Job's faithfulness. With his touchiness and suspiciousness the mere possibility of doubt was enough to infuriate him and induce that peculiar double-faced behaviour of which he had already given proof in the Garden of Eden, when he pointed out the tree to the First Parents and at the same time forbade them to eat of it. In this way he precipitated the Fall, which he apparently never intended."[38]

Carl Jung, Jennifer Hecht, Philip Yancey, and countless others through the years have pondered and preached on the painful and many times paradoxical elements present in this book. These are all legitimate doubts and questions that cannot be answered in one project. But to strip it all away, Job confronts the reader, especially parents, with the most dreaded fear of all—the death of a child. Job faced this pain ten times over as he lost all ten of his precious children in one fell swoop. There is no greater fear than the death of one's child—the continual pain and suffering it brings is both incalculable and indescribable.

Stanley Hauerwas, in his book *God, Medicine and Suffering,* tells the real life stories of children dying of leukemia. Hauerwas juxtaposes these tragic real life journeys of dying children and their parents with Peter De Vries's novel *The Blood of the Lamb*.[39] This novel tells the story of a struggling first generation Dutch immigrant, Don Wanderhope, and the horrific loss of his brother, his wife, and nearly his faith. But the

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[38] Carl G. Jung, *Answer to Job: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 11* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), Kindle edition 13.

[39] Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1994).

real pain occurs when his only hope left in this world, Carol his precious daughter, slowly

dies of leukemia. Carol died on her birthday, a day in which Don was hopeful that

doctors were going to provide a drug that would extend her life. When he arrives at the

hospital, Carol is dead. He leaves and goes to a local bar. At the bar he remembers that he

left Carol's birthday cake—white icing, with Carol's name written in blue—in her room.

He went back up to the room, got the cake, and stumbled in to St. Catherine's Catholic

Church, a place this former Calvinist had frequented during his daughter's illness. He

screams "No" to a deaf heaven when he is racked with unbearable pain. He takes the

birthday cake and hurls it at the crucifix in the church. Bright blue icing and white

frosting drip from the face of Jesus onto to the floor.[40] Hauerwas writes,

> So Wanderhope's anguished "No!" was perhaps his most determinative act of
> faith. In that "No" he joined that great host of the faithful who believed that the
> God they worshiped is not a God who needs protection from our cries of pain and
> suffering. Ironically, the act of unbelief turns out to be committed by those who
> refuse to address God in their pain, thinking that God just might not be up to such
> confrontation.[41]

Job is best interpreted in light of the middle section, the in-between time, when

Job lays out his case before God and screams at a heaven that seems silent. The Book of

Job can be seen as a person's beginning-faith or belief in chapters 1-2, then the person's

journey through doubt in chapters 3-30, and then belief again in chapters 31-42.Though

now Job's belief is modified, his view of God changed because he has come out on the

other side.

In Job 42:1-6, Job is mysteriously satisfied by God's non-answers to Job's

questions. In the end, Job is humbled by God's all-powerful and all-knowing nature and

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[40] Hauerwas, 84.

[41] Hauerwas, 84.

acknowledges his place as a mere mortal, one who is capable of only partial knowledge.

Perhaps Job was simply overwhelmed by the "Godness" of God. Jerry Sittser writes:

> I also realize that Job stopped asking questions not because God was a bully but because Job finally beheld God's unfathomable greatness in his immediate experience. … Job ultimately found meaning in the ineffable presence of God, which he could not fully comprehend with his intellect but could only experience in the depths of his being.[42]

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The story of Job instructs one on doubt in several ways. First, it reveals that from the dawn of time suffering has been and will be one of the major causes of doubt. Raw suffering, and the doubt that so often ensues, produces both saints and skeptics. It tends to be a polarizing experience.

Second, the loss of a child is one of the most cruel forms of suffering that one can endure. Job endured it ten times over.

Third, Job somehow embraced the necessity of paradox and contradiction in his relationship with God. Impressionist artist Stephen Shortridge explains:

> If I don't accept God's hand at work in the contradictions I experience, they're not mystery, just misery. In the midst of contradiction, I may be tempted to not trust God, but yielding to such temptation would throw me into the deception of trusting myself, whom I know better. Sure, uncertainty is uncomfortable, at best, but I suggest avoiding people who claim the ability to "clearly" explain the mysteries of God. They've clearly not met Him.[43]

It appears that Job chose to avoid his three friends who had the mystery of pain and suffering all figured out and embrace the Mystery that is God himself.

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[42] Sittser, 116-117.

[43] Stephen Shortridge, *Deepest Thanks, Deeper Apologies: Reconciling Deeply Held Faith with Honest Doubt* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2011), 8.

Fourth, Job screamed, cried, questioned, despaired, and demanded as he slid on the ice raging against God. God never answered his questions but God also never questioned his anger. And perhaps Job's "willingness to address God in his pain" or to "doubt out loud" gave him the space to somehow come out on the other side believing in God. In other words, Job ultimately stayed faithful in his "marriage" to God. Kreeft summarizes the status of their relationship at this stage,

> Job thinks God has let him down, so in a sense God has become nothing to him. That is a mistake, but Job at least knows it must be all or nothing. God is infinite love, and the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Job stays married to God and throws dishes at him; the three friends have a polite non-marriage, with separate bedrooms and separate vacations. The family that fights together stays together.[44]

If anyone has struggled to integrate doubt into a life of faith it would be Job. There are many lessons from the Book of Job concerning the issues of suffering, evil, and the nature of God himself. But for this researcher's purpose the main lesson was this: it is permissible to doubt out loud when one is processing such deep and personal questions. Job ranted and railed against God. But he came out on the other side with a bigger God than he ever imagined. If evangelicals are going to learn how to honestly and authentically process painful doubt in a life of faith, they need to re-think and re-experience the story of doubting Job, the man who threw dishes at God, but continued to boldly follow him. In this way, evangelicals can have some hope, like Job, of emerging out of their trial of faith with a bigger God than they ever imagined.

A Biblical Character Study on Doubt in the Life of Thomas

On his ninetieth birthday, renowned atheist and Nobel Laureate Bertrand Russell was asked by a friend at dinner, "What will you do, Bertie, if it turns out you're wrong?"

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[44] Kreeft, 88.

… "I mean, what if—uh—when the time comes, you should meet Him? What will you say?" Russell replied, "Why, I should say, 'God, you gave us insufficient evidence.'"[45] The disciple Thomas is perhaps the most famous doubter in all of Scripture and is known by many as "Doubting Thomas." After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the other disciples reported to him that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead. Thomas said that he would not believe their story but instead demanded a direct personal encounter with Jesus in order for him to believe. In other words, Thomas did not take his friends at their word, but instead wanted empirical evidence in order to assuage his doubts. If Job was a story about doubt caused by suffering, Thomas was a story about doubt caused by "insufficient evidence." However, it would be ill-advised to look at Thomas merely through this lens. It will be better to look at him holistically. It is a challenge to do that with Thomas, because, as with almost any character in the New Testament, there is very limited data available about him. But the information that is available describes a man who, though a doubter, was also courageous.

The Gospel of John is where one finds all the pertinent data about the disciple known as Thomas, a name which literally means "twin." Much has been written in recent years about the so-called Gospel of Thomas, but it is beyond the scope of this project to engage with that non-canonical book. Other investigations, like Darrell Bock's book *Breaking the Da Vinci Code,*[46] and Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright's book, *The Meaning*

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[45] Bertrand Russell, *Bertrand Russell on God and Religion*, ed. Al Seckel, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), 11.

[46] Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 61-97.

of Jesus,[47] helpfully demonstrate the irrelevance of Gospel of Thomas to the Thomas of the New Testament.

Thomas appears in John eleven when the disciples are contemplating a trip back to Bethany to see Lazarus, who was very sick. Jesus waits two days before informing his disciples that he wants to return to this region of Judea to be where Lazarus is, though he is now dead. Jesus hints to his disciples that a miracle may be on the horizon. The disciples warned Jesus: "But Rabbi, … a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" (John 11:8). After Jesus told his followers plainly that Lazarus was dead, Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." So here Thomas demonstrates his commitment to follow Jesus despite the cost of his very life.

Some commentators are quick to put Thomas on the psychoanalyst's couch in this narrative and describe him as someone with a morose personality. They do this in order to provide an explanation as to why he doubted the resurrection (John 20), but there does not appear to be enough evidence to make such a claim.[48] Another way to look at Thomas' claim is through the lens of courage. In all of the gospel accounts, only Peter and Thomas make the claim that they are willing to die for Christ. Though they both faltered and fled when Jesus was crucified, according to tradition they both died for Christ. The point of bringing in this passage is to show that Thomas was not a mere doubter but a mere man. He had moments of bravery and moments of questioning and doubting. It appears that John included this sound bite of Thomas to give a more

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[47] Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1999), 11-14.

[48] James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005) 1606-1607.

complete picture of the man. Bruce Milne comments, "As spokesperson, Thomas reflects a whole-heartedness which will find later expression (John 20:28). He also unwittingly lays out the terms of following Jesus: *Let us also go … that we may die with him.* The invitation to follow Jesus is precisely that" (italics in original).[49] At least in the Gospel of John, none of the other disciples made such a bold declaration of commitment to Jesus at this time. So, in this passage there is a glimpse of a man who verbalizes his thoughts and does not hold them inside. That will be an instructive piece while investigating the following passages.

The next time that Thomas is encountered is in John 13, after Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. After the foot washing, the disciples share a Passover Meal and Jesus tells them that one of them will betray him. Judas leaves the meal, but the disciples thought it was because he was going to buy some things in preparation for the Passover. Jesus continues to share with his disciples that he will not be with them much longer and that he is going to a place where they cannot go. Peter and the others are perplexed at what Jesus is saying and Peter makes a bold claim that he would die for him. Jesus then predicts Peter's betrayal and then assures them not to be afraid, "You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:1-2). Then Jesus tells them that he will come back for them and take them to this place. He adds the final assurance, "You know the way to the place where I am going." It is then that Thomas joins in the conversation and says to Jesus: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:4-5). Thomas seems to be trying to cut through Jesus's

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[49] Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 161.

ambiguity by saying, "If we do not know where you are going, then how can we know the specific map?" In other words, "If we cannot put the city into the GPS, then how will we ever get the address and the specific route to that destination? If we do not know the ultimate destination (the where), then how can we know the GPS coordinates (the way)?" Jesus responds, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7). Thomas once again verbalizes his question to Jesus rather than holding it inside.

John Calvin, who appeared to be no fan of Thomas, rebuked the disciple in this passage for not trusting what Jesus said. He believed that Thomas was asking a question that Jesus had already answered.[50] But another way to interpret this critical conversation with the disciples (minus Judas now), is to highlight the boldness with which Thomas asked the question. He did not hold back but bravely asked that Jesus would clarify his statement on where Jesus planned on going and how that related to them. Furthermore, Thomas' question sets up one of the most famous quotes of Jesus: that he is the way, the truth, and the life and no one gets to the Father except through him. This boldness that achieves clarity for the benefit of all seems to be the attitude that arises again later in the passage in question (John 20), when Thomas will boldly step out and ask for literal proof that Jesus has really risen from the dead.

In these initial passages, one could view Thomas as a person who was willing to say out loud what they were all thinking and feeling. He did not shy away from saying he

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[50] John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John* Part 2 11-21, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 76.

would die with Jesus when they returned to Bethany. Nor was he afraid to ask a "stupid

question" during the Passover meal. In both incidences, Thomas spoke out to his

comrades and even to his leader, Jesus. It is difficult to know whether Thomas was

asking a legitimate question or if he was already revealing a tendency to doubt the word

of others. Thomas' greatest challenge would lie just around the corner.

The longest and most famous passage about Thomas is John 20:19-30, during the

post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. It is from this passage that Thomas comes to be

known the best to posterity and it is from this passage that he earned the moniker,

"Doubting Thomas." What happens in this chapter is instructive and critical for doubt and

for the entire Christian movement. On the first day of the week, Sunday, Mary

Magdalene visits the tomb, finds that it is empty, and believes someone has stolen the

body of Jesus. Grave robbery was fairly common in first century Palestine, so when she

ran back to report it to Peter and John, this was not altogether surprising news.[51] Then

Mary returned to the tomb where she encountered Jesus raised from the dead. In her

conversation with Jesus, she does not recognize him at first, much like the disciples on

the road to Emmaus, but when Jesus says her name, "Mary," she realizes it is the Lord

and goes back to deliver the news to the disciples.

That evening, the disciples hid behind locked doors because they were afraid of

the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus appears to them, speaks a word of greeting, shows

them his hands and side, and breathes on them to receive the Holy Spirit. John says the

disciples were "overjoyed" when they saw the Lord. Thomas was not at this gathering.

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[51] N.T. Wright, "The Resurrection of Jesus" (lecture, Arizona State School of Law, Tempe, AZ, April 28, 2014).

Calvin scolds Thomas at this point, saying that he missed this blessing of the Spirit because he had distanced himself from all the other disciples.[52]

As James Montgomery Boice observes, it is interesting that the disciples did not believe Jesus was alive until he appeared to them. When Mary returned and exclaimed that "she had seen the Lord," the text does not say the disciples were "overjoyed" at this point because they believed her report. Like Thomas, it appears that the disciples wanted proof for themselves, though it seems that they did not verbalize this request.[53]

The disciples came to Thomas to tell him the good news about the fact that they had seen the Lord (John 20:25). However, Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Thomas laid down his criteria for belief: he must see the nail marks, touch the nail marks, and put his hand into his side, in order to believe. It is obvious that Thomas does not believe at this point. He is doubting. Thomas refuses to believe the reports of his friends. He does not close off the possibility of believing, but rather lays down a set of evidences that will be necessary for him to believe. Long before David Hume and Immanuel Kant influenced the modern mindset, Thomas laid down his empiricist challenge to the other disciples. N. T. Wright comments,

> Enlightenment historiography has often placed itself in the position from which the doubting disciple began. Like Thomas, it protests that it has not shared the deep Christian experience of those who now believe, who look as though they are living in cloud-cuckoo-land. It insists on 'hard evidence,' on 'scientific proof.'[54]

Once again, Calvin calls Thomas out for his doubt. He says,

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[52] Calvin, 202.

[53] Boice, *The Gospel of John,* 1606.

[54] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3)* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 715.

Thomas' stupidity was astonishing and monstrous. He was not content with the mere sight of Christ, but wanted to have his hands also as witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Thus he was not only obstinate but also proud and insulting towards Christ.[55]

Despite the fact that Calvin's interpretations were *ad hominem* attacks on someone he never met, the question that it raises is worth asking: why did Thomas doubt? Thomas had been with Jesus for three years and had seen the blind, deaf, and the possessed healed and delivered. Thomas saw Jesus walk on water and he had seen the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Why did Thomas doubt? Perhaps more puzzling is the context: Thomas had just seen Jesus raise a dead man from the grave. So why was it so difficult for Thomas to believe? Why did Thomas doubt? It further deepens the mysteriousness of his doubt to note that Thomas did not hold an anti-supernatural bias, despite the fact that he cried out for some empirical standards of evidence in order to slide from doubt to belief. He was not an advocate of an early form of philosophic naturalism.

There are several options to explain the doubt. It is possible that he doubted because of his supposed melancholy temperament, that he was so depressed and despondent that he thought the news was too good to be true. Perhaps he did not want to get his expectations up, since "a hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). Jerry Sittser comments on the overwhelming power of grief to spur doubt. Grief is so strong, he argues, that it not only causes doubt, but is evidence that the resurrection could not have been a fabricated story. He writes,

> The death of Jesus crushed them. They were no more ready to be joyful and courageous than I was after I saw my loved ones die in the accident. They could no more invent the idea of the resurrection in the weeks following his death than I

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[55] Calvin, 209.

could in my grief. They had no more energy and imagination to create a new religion than I did after suffering my tragedy.[56]

So, to follow this train of logic, Thomas was especially crushed and therefore unwilling to believe in the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Another possible reason for the doubt could have been Thomas's reaction to the gruesome torture of crucifixion. Thomas had more than likely seen scores of crucifixions in his lifetime, as that was a normal form of execution for the Romans. Perhaps Thomas reasoned that Tabitha and Lazarus did come back from the dead, but they did not endure nor have the marks of crucifixion.

Another explanation could be that Thomas was simply an individual who never trusted the word of others. He simply had to discover the truth for himself and unless he saw and touched the marks, no matter how much he loved his fellow disciples, he would not believe.

It is not clear why Thomas held back and doubted. It is clear that Thomas did doubt and that he did not keep his doubt a secret. He verbalized his doubt in front of his enthusiastic, resurrection-believing friends, thus earning the nickname Doubting Thomas. Just as he articulated his desire to die for Christ in Judea, just as he voiced his question about not knowing the way in the upper room, Thomas spoke his mind. He did not hold it inside. As the story unfolds, Thomas was about to have his doubts answered.

One week following Jesus' first appearance to the disciples, he appears to them again, in the same room, and the doors were locked. This time "Thomas was with them." "Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my

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[56] Sittser, 166.

side. Stop doubting and believe'" (John 20:26-27). Jesus, once again, shows amazing

humility here by condescending to Thomas' request. Jesus permitted Thomas the skeptic

to have the empirical evidence that he had demanded by letting him look at and touch the

wounds. Jesus used the word "diakrino," the word for doubt which means "to hold back."

He also uses the word "pistos," which literally means "faithful." Jesus did not start his

conversation with anger that the disciple doubted, even though a gentle rebuke was

forthcoming. Christ did not want his disciple to remain on the ice in a state of doubt.

Instead, he offered Thomas the freedom to investigate his body, if that was the proof that

he needed to slide toward belief.

As far as the record shows, Thomas never took Jesus up on his offer. Instead, he

uttered one of the greatest statements of Christ's divinity as he dropped to his knees and

said my "kyrios" and my "theos." Kyrios is the Greek word for "Lord." It was a

subversive claim against the statement "Caesar is Lord," an affirmation required to be

regularly uttered in order to prove one's Roman citizenship. Paul, who is the earliest

historical source testifying to Christians' affirmation of Christ's deity, put the word

kyrios in the Philippians 2:6-11 creed, in verse 11.[57] Wright explains the significance of

the use of the word kyrios when he writes that the Philippians 2 passage is

> a fiercely monotheistic text which declares that to YHWH and YHWH only (the
> Septuagint of course having kyrios for YHWH) every knee shall bow and every
> tongue shall swear; and Paul declares that this will come true when every knee
> and tongue do homage to Jesus. "Jesus, Messiah, is kyrios," they will declare – to
> the glory of God the father.[58]

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[57] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God,* 571.

[58] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God,* 571.

The word "theos" is also the word for God. The fact that Thomas uttered these words out loud, "Lord and God," and that Jesus and the other disciples did not protest, was an amazing statement of faith by Thomas, and one of the only places in the Gospels where a disciple directly refers to Jesus as God. Thomas' doubt, whether it was right or wrong, led him to utter this incredible claim.

This expression of faith is followed by Jesus' gentle admonishment of Thomas: "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29). Thomas' request for more evidence was granted by Jesus. Thomas benefited from being able to see the risen Lord right before his eyes. However, this statement was aimed at the billions of other disciples in the future who would believe without seeing. In verses 30-31, John states that the reason he wrote this gospel and included this story of Doubting Thomas, was so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." It is obvious that John used this story of Thomas' doubt to help those Christians and non-Christians deal with doubt. Thomas' doubts reveal the desire of many skeptics and believers who want visible evidence to answer the questions they have about God. He did not have to include this story in the gospel. He could have left it out like the other Gospel writers did and make it look like all of the disciples believed immediately after the resurrection. But Thomas's story lends credibility to John's account by demonstrating that not everyone's faith was immediate. This offers hope to all who struggle to quickly resolve their doubt with faith.

Some commentators see verse 31 as the end of the Gospel of John and believe that chapter 21 was a later edition.[59] If that is correct, then the story of "doubting" Thomas and his bold confession of Jesus as "Lord" and "God" is the crescendo to the entire gospel. Thomas' cry of "my *kyrios*" and "my *theos*" is the lived-out manifestation of John's prologue in chapter one where he lays out the preexistence and the incarnation of the Son of God.

Thomas is found again in another resurrection appearance on the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus restores Peter after breakfast (John 21). Thomas appears again before Pentecost (Acts 1). Some traditions explain that Thomas went on to die for the faith at the hands of four soldiers who pierced him with their spears.[60] This martyrdom proves the existence of the real faith at which Thomas arrived, as Blaise Pascal wrote "I believe only the histories, whose witnesses got themselves killed."[61]

Thomas's story, like that of Job, reveals a man in process in his relationship with God. Thomas showed great faith as well as great doubt as a disciple of Jesus. Ultimately, through his apprenticeship, doubt, and bold confession of Jesus as "Lord and God," Thomas stayed faithful in following God to the very end of his life. The fact that John included this story in his gospel, and perhaps concluded his account with this dramatic story of Thomas sliding from doubt to faith again reveals that John anticipated that doubt would surround the resurrection accounts. That was the blessing for those who lack the empirical evidence Thomas received. Thomas also was willing to voice his faith, his

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[59] J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John,* ed. A.H. McNeile (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1985), 687.

[60] Glenn Warren Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2005), 217.

[61] Blaise Pascal, *Penseés,* trans, W.F. Trotter, (New York, NY: P.F. Collier and Sons, 1910), Section IX, Part I, no. 593, 197.

questions, and his doubts "out loud" to Jesus and his community. The struggle some Christians have with doubt could be the inability to express those doubts to another Christian. Thomas did isolate himself at first, but eventually he was willing to doubt in community with his fellow disciples.

Conclusions

The theological foundation for doubt is strong. Many believers in the Old and New Testament struggled with doubt. Even Jesus in his full humanity experienced what one might call doubt as he cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). In this chapter, the researcher grounded doubt in the nature of being human and the fall of humankind. Doubt is a multifaceted phenomenon that is sometimes sinful and sometimes neutral. The best theological definition of doubt is to be in-between belief and unbelief. It is a state of mind that, like an icy field, can cause one to slide closer to or further away from complete belief or unbelief.

A sweeping overview of doubt in the Old and New Testament showed that doubt is not an isolated incident in Scripture. The researcher focused on Job as an example of a person in whom doubt was caused by inexplicable pain and suffering. This biblical profile gave a holistic view of Job as a man of great faith and a man of great doubt. Job's willingness to address God openly and honestly in the midst of his "suffering doubt" was instructive. Job revealed that it is okay to be real and raw and to vent one's pain and frustrations with God.

The disciple Thomas demonstrated a different kind of doubt, a doubt caused by "insufficient evidence." The researcher attempted to give a well-rounded picture of Thomas as a man of great faith who had a season of great doubt. Thomas' willingness to

process his doubt out loud in community was instructive. Thomas, much like Job, was not afraid to voice his doubts to his friends. Both Thomas and Job had been let down by God and both were willing to verbalize these frustrations and questions. If evangelicals are to learn how to incorporate doubt into their relationship with God, they need to see the importance of verbalizing these doubts in the context of community. The fact that Jesus condescended to meet Thomas in his questioning highlights Jesus' humble attitude toward doubters.

CHAPTER THREE: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DOUBT IN CHURCH HISTORY
AND MODERN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Struggling with doubt is found not only in the pages of the Bible but also in the pages of church history. From Augustine to Luther, from Pascal to Mother Teresa, many leaders of the church have battled with seasons of intense doubt. When one examines the literature found in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions, stories of bouts with doubt frequently arise. In the Western world, church history merges and overlaps with major philosophical movements. Therefore, it is necessary to explore some of the philosophic soil from Descartes to Foucault that has contributed to the growth of doubt in modern times. This chapter of the project looked at doubt through a few leaders in church history and delved into some of the modern day philosophers that have contributed to a "culture of doubt" in the Western world. This chapter revealed that the struggle of doubt was not isolated to Scripture, but found throughout the history of the church and modern, Western society.

A Few Doubters from Church History

Augustine

Some argue that Augustine was the most influential leader in the history of the Catholic and Protestant churches. J. I. Packer said that the Reformation was merely Augustine's doctrine of ecclesiology versus Augustine's doctrine of soteriology.[1]

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[1] J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 158.

Long before Descartes came on the scene with his famous credo, "I think, therefore I am," Augustine wrote these words:

> Nobody surely doubts that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges. At least, even if he doubts, he lives. If he doubts, he remembers why he's doubting. If he doubts, he has a will to be certain. If he doubts, he thinks. If he doubts, he knows he does not know. If he doubts, he judges he ought not to give a hasty assent.[2]

In another of his famous works he wrote:

> I love this being and this knowing. Where these truths are concerned, I need not quail before the academicians when they say, "What if you should be mistaken?" Well, if I am mistaken, I exist.[3]

Augustine was raised by a devout Christian mother, Monica, and a pagan father, Patricias. Augustine went through many stages of doubt and belief in his journey to Christianity. He was a Neo-Platonist; he was a Manichaean; he pursued truth. His mother prayed diligently for him. He lived with a woman for at least 9 years and had a child out of wedlock. He lived as a believer in Neoplatonism, but he had questions about it. He was experiencing doubt in these beliefs. This doubt led him to embrace Manichaeism.

Evan Getz observed how Augustine did not have a Damascus Road experience but rather "a gradual letting go of old beliefs followed by an uneasy trust in a new account of reality."[4] When Augustine lived in Milan, Italy, he encountered the preaching of Ambrose. Although Augustine wanted a faith that allowed for a certainty that was mathematically precise, Ambrose offered him mysteries and allegories. Augustine

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[2] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, ed. Edmund Hill (NY: New City Press, 1991), Book X, Chapter 3, 299.

[3] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. D. S. Wiesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), Book 3: 533.

[4] Evan Getz, "Doubt, Faith, and the Heart" *School of Christian Thought Blog*, October 16, 2013, accessed June 2014, http://christianthought.hbu.edu/2013/10/16/doubt-faith-and-the-heart/.

struggled with letting go of his old beliefs of Manichaeism and embracing the new beliefs of Christianity. Faustus, a bishop of Manichaeism, could not satisfy the doubts and questions of Augustine.[5]

So gradually, through Ambrose's sermons, his mother's prayers, and the futility in looking for truth in pleasure, God began to work on Augustine until he reached a tipping point. One day in the garden, he heard the sing-song voices of children saying to take up and read. In response, he turned to Romans 13, read the passage and was converted to the Christian faith. But he had to spend a lot of time on the ice doubting before he slid to belief in Christ. Augustine represents a seeker, a doubter, who kept exploring until he found peace with God. He famously wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in [God]."[6] Getz correctly sees the value of Augustine's pre-conversion doubt: "Double-mindedness, like heartbreak, may be necessary to disabuse us of false accounts of reality. St. Augustine had to wrestle with the conflict between Mani and Christ, but the loss was met with a more beautiful and true supply of grace."[7] Augustine's story revealed a positive example of how doubt can actually lead to salvation.

Martin Luther

One of the most influential figures of the western world and the leader of the Protestant Reformation was a young monk turned revolutionary, Martin Luther. Born in 1483, Luther transformed the Christian landscape and reluctantly spearheaded a movement that forever changed the map of the Christian faith. Though Luther was best

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[5] Getz.

[6] Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. Edward Pusey (New York, NY: Harvard Classics, P. F. Collier and Sons Co., 1909), Book 1, 7.

[7] Getz.

known for his radical faith and individual courage to stand up to the religious hierarchy

of his day, Martin Luther wrestled with doubt throughout his life.

One biographer of Luther, Martin Marty, said, "He makes the most sense as a

wrestler with God, indeed, as a God-obsessed seeker of certainty and assurance in a time

of social trauma and personal anxiety, beginning with his own."[8] According to Mark

Edwards, "The young Luther's doubt was driven by his fear of death and his doubt that

there was a God who can and will raise the dead, but the older Luther's doubts and fears

drove him to embrace an epistemology of absolute certainty while lashing out at anyone

who would disagree."[9] He explained Luther's struggle in this way:

> In Luther's discovery of justification the Christian was liberated from the self-imposed requirement to present a perfect mental attitude to God, to confuse belief with knowledge, faith with the direct intuition of an observed world. Whereas in the earlier Luther the fear of death was the ultimate form of unbelief, the Luther who discovered justification by faith understood that no matter how great our faith, it cannot be strong enough to stave off terror before death.[10]

Some believe that Luther's doubts were fueled by the abuse he received from his

parents as a child. His mother beat him to a point where blood was drawn and his father

frequently flogged him. This has led some scholars to conclude that Luther's harsh view

of God as only a God of wrath was a projection of his earthly father onto his heavenly

father. Erik Erikson writes, "This early doubt later was projected on the father in heaven

with such violence that Martin's monastic teachers could not help noticing it.[11] New York

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[8] Martin Marty, preface to *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), Kindle edition 3.

[9] Mark U. Edwards, Jr., "Luther as Skeptic," *Christian Century,* (Nov. 17-24, l999), accessed June 2014, http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1493.

[10] Edwards.

[11] Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958), 58.

University professor Paul Vitz has written about this phenomenon in his book, *Faith of The Fatherless,* wherein he tracks the horrific childhoods of many renowned atheists in an attempt to argue a similar point.[12]

Though Luther received a profound sense of peace when he discovered that the righteousness that God demands from people he gives to them in Christ, he still struggled with doubt throughout his life. Just a couple of years after the Reformation of 1527, Luther entered an intense season of doubt and darkness, where he heard a tormenting inner voice that caused him to vacillate on his beliefs. The pressure of possibly leading thousands of people into the fires of hell plunged him into utter despair.[13]

Anfechtungen was the German word he used to describe the spiritual attacks that "kept people from finding certainty in a loving God."[14] Luther experienced many seasons of *anfechtungen*, this almost untranslatable word that he employed which combined elements of doubt, the dark night of the soul, and the feeling that God has turned his back on one. Marty writes:

> Since *Anfechtungen* were rooted in profound doubt, Luther thought that the alluring world and the devil had to be the immediate agents of the taunting. But— and this was much more disturbing— since God was the final determiner of everything, God must either be the stage manager for the drama of doubt or the main actor in causing it. Whenever he reflected on this, Luther said he was left without hope in an abyss of despair.[15]

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[12] Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 20, 26-31, 47-48, 104-107.

[13] Chris Armstrong, "A History of Darkness," *Leadership Journal* vol. 32, no. 4, (Fall 2011), accessed June 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/fall/historydarkness.html.

[14] Marty, Kindle edition 409-413.

[15] Marty, Kindle edition 417-424.

Though Luther frequently wrestled with *anfechtungen*, he saw much benefit to this phenomenon as a means of grace, where God strips one of all certainty and forces one to cling to the Word of God alone.[16]

<p style="text-align:center">*C.S. Lewis*</p>

One of the greatest defenders of the Christian faith has to be the prolific author and Oxford professor C.S. Lewis. He was born in Belfast on November 29, 1898 and died on November 22, 1963, the same day that The United States' President Kennedy was assassinated and notable British author Aldous Huxley died. The best estimates are that of his 38 books, more than 200 million copies have been sold,[17] many of his works being turned into movies that have grossed over 1.5 billion dollars around the world.[18] Lewis possessed an uncanny ability to present a logical, rational case for the Christian faith, while simultaneously creating fictional, narrative stories that embodied the essence of the gospel. He was a prolific writer, whose books influenced both modern and postmodern readers with vivid imagination and cleverly phrased arguments. If one had to list the most influential Christians in the past 50 years, C.S. Lewis would be listed among them, along with Billy Graham and Mother Teresa.

Lewis was raised in a modest home in Ireland, but at the age of nine his mother died and he was shipped off to boarding school in England. *Surprised by Joy* was a brief autobiography of Lewis' younger years. Clyde S. Kilby summarizes the book and Lewis' journey well:

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[16] Marty, Kindle edition 417-424.

[17] M. J. Porter "Wheaton College to Screen C.S. Lewis Documentary" *Daily Herald,* October 20, 2001, accessed June 2014, http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-79384514.html.

[18] "Box Office MoJo," accessed June 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/chart/?id=chroniclesofnarnia.htm.

It is less an autobiography in an ordinary sense than an account of his religious ups and downs from childhood—of the almost complete lack of religion in his early experience, of his childhood prayer to the Magician God whom he wished to heal his dying mother and then go away, of his first hectic efforts in boarding school to create a satisfying spiritual realization, of his glad retreat into atheism, and then of the long and tortuous return through nature, spiritualism, and philosophy to Theism and finally to Christianity.[19]

One of his tutors at the boarding school was William Kirkpatrick, whom Lewis called "The Great Knock." Kirkpatrick drilled the adolescent Lewis with question upon question, which forced him to give reasons and justifications for nearly every word the young boy uttered. The Great Knock's continual grilling of Lewis turned the young lad into a persuasive debater.[20] This hardened, rationalistic skeptic made a lasting impression on Lewis, but little did The Great Knock realize that he was inadvertently training one of the greatest Christian apologists the Western world would ever know.

As an atheist, Lewis adequately defended his naturalistic view of the universe and came to see Christianity as synonymous with "ugly architecture, ugly music, and bad poetry, and God a great 'Transcendental Interferer.' He wanted to tell God and everybody else that his innermost being was marked 'No Admittance.'"[21] At the same time, Lewis continued to be haunted by this feeling he called "*sehnsucht.*" In German, this means "a longing for a deep, lasting joy." Through the influence of G. K. Chesterton, Nevill Coghill, George MacDonald, and J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis slowly and painfully began to doubt his scientific materialism. Gradually he began to embrace a type of Platonic God, a

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[19] Clyde S. Kilby, *The Christian World of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995), 13.

[20] C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (Orlando, FL:Harcourt Inc., 1995), 132-133.

[21] Kilby, 16.

kind of philosophical absolute he differentiated from "the God of popular religion."[22] As an Oxford professor he spent much time alone in his room in Magdalen, feeling the pursuit of the One he was earnestly trying not to meet.

Then, in the Trinity Term of 1929, Lewis bowed the knee and admitted that "God was God." He described himself that night as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."[23] Lewis explained that this conversion experience "was only to Theism, pure and simple, not to Christianity. I knew nothing yet about the Incarnation."[24] As time passed, one sunny morning Lewis traveled to Whipsnade and said, "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."[25] From that day forward, he began his journey with God in which he produced more than 58 books, both fiction and nonfiction, several of which gave an intellectual defense of the Christian faith.

Soon after Lewis's life-changing trip to the zoo, he wrote a letter to a friend explaining how, despite the many differences between the denominations and even the big divide between Protestant and Catholics, there existed "an enormous common ground" he called "mere Christianity."[26] His most well-known apologetic book was *Mere Christianity* in which he unpacked the now well-known trilemma concerning the identity

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[22] Kilby, 18-19.

[23] Lewis, 221.

[24] Lewis, 222.

[25] Kilby, 19-20.

[26] Walter Hooper, in preface to Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), vii.

of Jesus Christ. Lewis put it plainly that anyone who claimed to be God was either a Liar,

a Lunatic, or Lord,[27] an argument that has persuaded many.

Like Augustine centuries before, Lewis' slow-motion conversion process

involved much doubt and questioning. This was necessary to move him from his atheistic

certainty and toward Christianity. Like the biblical character, Job, his personal pain and

suffering would bring on a season of excruciating doubt and despair.

Late in his life, this bachelor married American writer Joy Davidman Gresham

but nearly four years later Joy died of cancer. Lewis knew Joy had cancer before they

married, so he had no false expectations that she would live a long life. After she died,

Lewis wrote down his feelings of grief and doubt in a book called *A Grief Observed*. He

had already published a book on pain and suffering entitled *The Problem of Pain*, a

rational theodicy, but *A Grief Observed* was raw and personal. Throughout this short

book, Lewis cried out in Jobian fashion at a God who seemed silent.

> Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows.[28]

Lewis questioned the goodness of God because he allowed his precious wife to go

through such intense pain. He wrote,

> Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I

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[27] Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1952), 54-56.

[28] Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle edition 2.

dread is not "So there's no God after all," but "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer."[29]

His complaint is similar to Job's questioning God's justice and allowance of such senseless pain and agony.

As he tossed and turned in his grief, Lewis questioned whether or not it was rational to believe in a good God or to see him as "the Cosmic Sadist, the spiteful imbecile?"[30] In the midst of his heartache, after the death of his wife, Lewis wondered why this event caused him to doubt everything concerning his Christian faith. He wrote:

> Feelings, and feelings, and feelings. Let me try thinking instead. From the rational point of view, what new factor has H.'s death introduced into the problem of the universe? What grounds has it given me for doubting all that I believe? I knew already that these things, and worse, happened daily. I would have said that I had taken them into account. I had been warned—I had warned myself—not to reckon on worldly happiness. We were even promised sufferings. They were part of the programme. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn,' and I accepted it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not in imagination."[31]

Lewis was saying, "It's one thing to read about grief, it's another thing to experience it yourself." He was admitting that it is one thing to comfort others in their pain, it's another thing to be in the pain oneself. After much agony and doubt, Lewis appeared to find some sense of resolve or meaning in Joy's death and the spiritual aftermath that he was experiencing.

Lewis compared his faith in God before the death of his wife to a house of cards. In other words, nearly everyone's faith in God is a house of cards until they go through

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[29] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 3.

[30] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 22.

[31] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 27.

some type of suffering or significant trial. He believed the only way to achieve an

authentic faith was to see one's house tumble to the ground. He wrote,

> But of course one must take "sent to try us" the right way. God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. In this trial He makes us occupy the dock, the witness box, and the bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down. Getting over it so soon? But the words are ambiguous. To say the patient is getting over it after an operation for appendicitis is one thing; after he's had his leg off it is quite another."[32]

Lewis continued this line of thinking and applied it to both Christians and atheists. He

believed that a person never knows whether or not they are a true Christian or a true

atheist unless it becomes a matter of life and death. He even used torture as analogy to

discover the true beliefs of an individual. He said,

> Bridge-players tell me that there must be some money on the game "or else people won't take it seriously." Apparently it's like that. Your bid—for God or no God, for a good God or the Cosmic Sadist, for eternal life or nonentity—will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high, until you find that you are playing not for counters or for sixpences but for every penny you have in the world. Nothing less will shake a man—or at any rate a man like me—out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth.[33]

Lewis explained this with a simple but profound analogy:

> The reason for the difference is only too plain. You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?[34]

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[32] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 40.

[33] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 28.

[34] Lewis, *A Grief Observed,* Kindle edition 15-16.

Again, one must "read behind the headlines" to grasp a more complete picture of

C.S. Lewis and these other giants of faith in the history of the church. Lewis, like Job and

like Luther, shows that struggle, doubt, and raw grief are all a part of a faith journey with

the God who is there and at times the God who feels like he's not there. Madeleine

L'Engle summarizes the helpfulness of Lewis' doubt in this way:

> I am grateful, too, to Lewis for having the courage to yell, to doubt, to kick at God
> with angry violence. This is a part of healthy grief not often encouraged. It is
> helpful indeed that C.S. Lewis, who has been such a successful apologist for
> Christianity, should have the courage to admit doubt about what he has so
> superbly proclaimed. It gives us permission to admit our own doubts, our own
> angers and anguishes, and to know that they are part of the soul's growth.[35]

Mother Teresa

Gallup released a list of the most widely admired people of the twentieth century.

The list included Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. But

topping the list at number one was an Albanian nun, Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, known to

the world more simply as "Mother Teresa."[36]

Mother Teresa was known around the world for her selfless life of service and

sacrifice to the sick and dying in the slums of Calcutta, India. Born in 1910, in Skopje,

Macedonia, she began her journey as a novitiate in Dublin with the Sisters of Loreto,

around 1928. She was a high school teacher in Calcutta from 1931-1948, until she helped

found the Missionaries of Charity to serve the poorest of the poor with the love of Jesus

Christ. Eventually, her amazing work in this hellacious city led to worldwide recognition

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[35] Lewis, *A Grief Observed.* Foreword by Madeleine L'Engle. Kindle edition 64-67.

[36] Gallup Poll Survey, "Mother Teresa Voted by American People as Most Admired Person of the Century." December 1999, accessed June 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/3367/mother-teresa-voted-american-people-most-admired-person-century.aspx?version=print.

and she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.[37] When she received the award, Mother

Teresa said in her acceptance speech,

> [Jesus] makes Himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the sick one, the one in prison, the lonely one, the unwanted one and he says: "You did it to me." He is hungry for our love, and this is the hunger of our poor people.[38]

Mother Teresa is still an iconic figure of piety, self-sacrifice, and faith. She was

quickly beatified (sainthood) by the church in 2003, only six years after her death.[39]

However, throughout her life she felt plagued by the darkness of doubt. She wrote: "I feel

just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not

really existing."[40]And in another personal letter, she struggled with accepting the love of

Jesus: "Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is

so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear."[41]

Mother Teresa's doubt, her *anfechtungen* or dark night of the soul, perplexed her

throughout her ministry. She did not tell any of her close friends about her struggle with

the darkness of doubt, with the exception of her spiritual confessors—Archbishop Périer

and Father Neuner. Her confessors tried to help her get to the bottom of her doubt, in

other words, what was causing this saintly nun to plunge into seasons of darkness. Périer

suggested that it was given to her "like a thorn in the flesh" to prevent her from getting

prideful about how successful her mission was in Calcutta. Mother Teresa at first

believed Périer's account, that it might be pride or some other sin that was bringing this

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[37] Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta,"* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C. (New York, NY: Doubleday Religion, 2007), 405.

[38] Mother Teresa, 291.

[39] Mother Teresa, 405.

[40] Mother Teresa, 210.

[41] Mother Teresa, 288.

darkness upon her life. But it was Neuner who would provide an answer that eventually satisfied this troubled nun.[42]

Father Neuner told her, "It was simply the dark night of which all masters of spiritual life know."[43] He counseled her that there was no human remedy or action that she could take to eliminate these seasons, but instead she needed to see this darkness as a type of solidarity with Jesus, "who in His passion had to bear the burden and darkness of the sinful world for our salvation."[44] Neuner emphasized the hiddenness of God and how her longing for God's presence actually proved that he was there. Ultimately it was this dual identification that Neuner offered to Mother Teresa that was most helpful. Her bouts with the darkness of doubt could first of all allow her to identify with Christ and his feelings of betrayal and rejection. Second, they would allow her to identify more deeply with the rejection, the emptiness, and the pain of the poor in Calcutta that she was trying to help.[45]

Many in the Christian world were divided over the discovery of Mother Teresa's doubt. Chris Armstrong reported that "the Christian world drew a collective breath of shock when, in 2007, we discovered through a posthumously published book that Mother Teresa of Calcutta had undergone a severe, intense dark night that persisted through almost her entire ministry."[46] But perhaps some in that same world were relieved by the revelation. In other words, some Christians certainly thought to themselves, "If it is okay

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[42] Armstrong.

[43] Mother Teresa, 214.

[44] Armstrong.

[45] Mother Teresa, 214.

[46] Armstrong.

for Mother Teresa to have doubts about God, perhaps it is okay for me." She was one of the most admired women in the world. She gave her life to serve the poor and dying in one of the biggest hellholes on the planet. Perhaps there is hope for lesser known and far less accomplished Christians if a Christian of such stature and influence as Mother Teresa can doubt.

Mother Theresa's doubt is a remedy for suffering doubters because the problem for many of them is this—they doubt alone. This loneliness makes them feel that if they do not have certainty about God or their faith in God, then they are on the verge of losing faith altogether. At best, many feel as though they are second-class Christians. But when modern day heroes of the faith like Mother Teresa express doubts, it gives permission to doubt and validates those unsung doubters who perhaps feel alone in their doubts. Again, like Job, Mother Teresa persevered in her relationship with God and was able to doubt out loud to her spiritual director. Her story has the power to infuse courage and faith into fellow doubters who are slipping on the ice.

Summary

Augustine, Luther, Lewis, and Mother Teresa all experienced doubt. The enormity of their impact on Christianity and Western Civilization is without debate. Though it was painful and at times paradoxical, they integrated their doubts into their faith journeys. To help modern-day evangelicals navigate the sometimes turbulent seas of doubt, the doubt stories of these people must be told and retold to the next generation. Doubt is not a four letter word, it's a five letter experience that is found throughout the pages of Scripture and throughout the pages of church history.

A Culture of Doubt: Looking at the Philosophic Soil of Doubt

Doubt has been around for a long time, perhaps since the dawn of time. One could travel back to Athens and trace the history of doubt through Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle or begin with the doubters of the Hellenistic period, the Cynics, Epicureans, and Skeptics.[47] But that is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, it is the intent of this researcher to give a brief overview of modernism and postmodernism, the two major philosophical movements in the past four centuries that have created a culture of doubt in the Western world. This section will look at some of the key leaders in these movements that have shaped the academic and popular contemporary epistemologies.

Modernism and Some of Its Key Leaders

The epistemology of modernism was a cultural movement many trace back to the Enlightenment period which began in late seventeenth century Europe. Modernism stressed the ideas of reason, logic, and the scientific method as primary ways of knowing as opposed to tradition and the authority of the church.[48] Though many of the leaders of modernism were Christians, or at least claimed to be Christians, their epistemologies eventually provided the foundations for skepticism toward Christian faith and outright atheism. While expressing skepticism toward religious belief, modernism's advocates believed that they could arrive at certainty about the nature of the universe through logic, reason, and empirical, scientific experimentation. It was by these navigation devices that people could sail confidently through the waters of reality, completely apart from any revelation of God. Pierre-Simon Laplace typified modernism's sentiments after he gave

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[47] Hecht.

[48] Enns.

an account of the history of the cosmos to Napoleon. When asked by Napoleon why he had made no mention of God in his account; "Sir," Laplace quipped, "I have no need of that hypothesis."[49] One could compare the certainty of modernism to the certainty with which many regarded the Titanic's unsinkable nature. It was said, "Not even God himself could sink this ship."[50] This certainty was considered unassailable by any religious faith.

Rene Descartes

An important predecessor of the modernism of the Enlightenment was Rene Descartes. His massive philosophical influence would provide the superstructure for John Locke, David Hume, and other promoters of modernism to build upon. Descartes (1596-1650) garnered the title "the father of modern philosophy" because of his unique faith in the ability of the human mind to solve all problems and thus build a structure of knowledge that was indubitable.[51] Descartes sought to establish a body of knowledge that was certain, in order to rescue the people of his time from the doubt created by Galileo's invention of the telescope.[52] Galileo's telescope confirmed the heliocentric theory of Copernicus and demonstrated that, "contrary to all appearance and the dictates of common sense, the star which we call our Sun did not 'rise' in the morning and 'set' in the evening. It was not, that is to say, circling around us, but rather we around it."[53] This

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[49] Bradley Sickler, "Conflicts between Science and Religion" *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, posted February 11, 2009, accessed June 2014, http://www.iep.utm.edu/s-rel/.

[50] National Archives and Records Administration, "Titanic," accessed July 2012, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/titanic.html.

[51] Ralph Allan Smith, "The Harmony of Faith and Reason: Why Believe the Bible," 1998, accessed June 2014, http://www.berith.org/essays/apol/apol01.html.

[52] Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 29.

[53] Hart, 25.

discovery unseated earth as the center of the universe and nearly destroyed the often

repeated maxim "seeing is believing."[54] The methodology that Descartes employed was

one of systematic doubt.

Descartes' method started with a distrust in knowledge passed down by those in

authority coupled with a distrust in knowledge received through the senses. This came

from the recent inventions of Galileo, by which it became clear that humans had been so

massively deceived before the invention of the telescope.[55] In order to build this edifice

of certain knowledge, Descartes began by asking the simple question, "Am I absolutely

certain this is true?"[56] He believed that by asking such questions that arise from doubt,

one could eventually push past the untrustworthy knowledge derived from authority and

sensation, and delve into what was unquestionably true.

S. J. Winchester explained it this way: "Descartes and [Gottfried Wilhelm]

Leibnez held that there had to be innate ideas and principles in the form of explicit mental

representations for there to be beliefs and knowledge derived from sensory experience."[57]

In other words, sense experience would be unintelligible without some "pre-installed

software," or the pre-existence of certain unquestionable ideas. These innate ideas

included things like time, space, and the ability to place items in certain categories.

Without these pre-existing ideas, it would be like trying to build a house without setting

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[54] Hart, 26.

[55] Hart, 29.

[56] John Cottingham, interview, "Descartes, Doubt and Knowledge" iTunes University, *The Open University*, accessed June 2014, http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/philosophy/exploring-philosophy.

[57] S. J. Winchester, "Locke and the Innatists," *History of Philosophy,* vol. 2, no. 4 (1985): 412.

foundations or without even the benefit of the force of gravity to hold the bricks and the

sticks to the ground. John Cottingham saw Descartes' doubt operating on three levels:

> 1. Level One: Doubt the senses because they are an unstable source of knowledge. Descartes used the classic example of a stick in water, which appears crooked. One's sight tells you the stick is bent but in reality it is straight.
> 2. Level Two: Doubt propositions you might think were impervious to doubt. The computer screen in front of you may seem obvious, but Descartes would say that you could be dreaming and in reality you are at home asleep in your bed.
> 3. Level Three: Doubt all sensory information because it might be created by a Malignant Demon that has deceived the mind. Like the movie the *Matrix,* Descartes theorized that there may be no external world at all, it may just be a demonic illusion on a grand scale.[58]

There is also the Deceiving God Hypothesis, in which Descartes asks,

> 1. How can I know that God made it the case that there is in fact no earth at all, no sky, no extended thing, no figure, no magnitude, but that all these things nevertheless seem to me to exist just as they do now?
> 2. How do I know that I am not also deceived each time that I add together two and three, or count the sides of a square?[59]

After doubting everything known and available to him, Descartes finally arrived

at a foundation which he perceived could not be shaken: *cognito ergo sum* which means

"I am thinking, therefore I am." No matter how strongly and thoroughly he pushed doubt

to its limits, he could not doubt that he was a thinking being. Even if he doubted, he was

still thinking, which in turn proved his existence. From this simple foundation, Descartes

began to build his structure of certainty.[60] Because Descartes was also a mathematician,

he

> wanted all of his knowledge to be possessed of the same degree of certainty as is to be found in the propositions that a triangle will always have three angles which add up precisely to 180 degrees … no proposition which could not be

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[58] Cottingham.

[59] Avner Cohen, "Certainty, Doubt, and Anxiety: Towards a Theory of the Psychology of Metaphysics," *Metaphilosophy,* 12, no 2 (April 1981): 131.

[60] Smith.

demonstrated with this degree of assurance was worthy of human credence or could suffice as an object of knowledge.[61]

Though Descartes desired to alleviate humankind from the despair created by uncertainty by establishing this sure body of knowledge, he actually arrived at the opposite conclusion which David Hume would discover later, that there is no certainty to be had, and that "the only alternative seemed to be a refusal to commit oneself to any one spot for very long for fear of sinking without a trace."[62]

Locke and Hume

John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) sought to reboot empiricism in order to counterbalance Descartes's optimism in the reasoning of the human mind. As Descartes suspected empirical knowledge to be unstable, Locke and Hume suspected human reasoning to be guilty of the same fault. Locke postulated that human minds were a *tabula rosa*, a blank slate upon which people would write their experiences. In Locke's "An Essay of Human Understanding," he argued that babies are not born with "abstract and moral principles."[63] Thus, Locke argued that human internal experience differed from the objects they observe in the external world. The difference was based upon the perspective that the individual knower adopts. Hart comments that Locke believed

> what we 'see' is not the thing itself but rather a representation or appearance of the thing which our brain produces when certain stimuli are supplied by our sensory organs. Such representations will vary according to our closeness to the object, the angle from which we view it and so on, while the thing itself remains unchanged.[64]

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[61] Hart, 31.

[62] Hart, 34.

[63] Winchester, 411.

[64] Hart, 36-37.

Therefore, according to Locke, people only have an indirect knowledge of the world and never know the world as it truly is.[65] This demanded a highly rigorous effort to more perfectly know the external world. The scientific method would eventually be constructed to meet this demand.

David Hume picked up Locke's account of empiricism and pushed it further. This Scottish skeptic produced a scathing attack on miracles,[66] uncovered a fatal flaw in the methodology of induction,[67] and pessimistically concluded that even his rigid empiricism could be a complete house of mirrors.[68] His attack on miracles was based on his radical empiricism which demanded that one has experiential evidence of a phenomenon or it is worthless and to be discarded.[69] When it came to induction, Hume concluded that one could not observe causation, but could only infer it. Therefore, the belief that the sun will rise tomorrow is just a belief based upon past experience but it cannot be scientifically proven.[70] Hart summarizes the bleak conclusions of Hume's empiricism:

> what Hume was forced to concede was that, since the mind of the knower could never penetrate beyond the ideas or representations of reality granted by the senses, and since there was no basis for speaking of genuine knowledge of anything which was not granted in experience, in the strictest sense there could be no knowledge of the world 'out there' at all.[71]

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[65] Hart, 38.

[66] Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 225.

[67] Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1977), 95.

[68] Hart, 40.

[69] Nash, 227.

[70] Holmes, 95.

[71] Hart, 39.

Ironically, although the modern scientific method was founded on the views and methods of Descartes, Locke, and Hume, the skeptical epistemology of these thinkers ultimately undermined it. Failing to provide a certain ground for knowledge, these thinkers sewed seeds of doubt of the modern scientific method itself. Avner Cohen concluded that on some level there is a good deal of similarity between Descartes' rationalism and Hume's empiricism:

> Consequently, both Hume and Descartes are looking for what one may call a transcendental certainty: a certainty that does not refer to something in the world, but a certainty about the reality of reality (so to speak) or the reality of existence. The desired certitude, will, hence, be entirely independent for the actual phenomenal world.[72]

Despite having a similar end game goal in mind, there was still this seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the rationalism and empiricism that needed to be resolved in order to save science, a resolution provided by Immanuel Kant.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) started what some call a Copernican Revolution in the field of epistemology. His titanic influence on modern philosophy, science, and phenomenology can hardly be overestimated. Kant sought to synthesize the two warring schools of rationalism and empiricism in order to save the scientific method from skepticism.[73] Lesslie Newbigin said that "Immanuel Kant was perhaps the greatest thinker in the centuries following Descartes."[74] Though like Descartes he was seeking to

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[72] Cohen, 133.

[73] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007), preface.

[74] Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 25.

provide room for faith in God in the world of reason, he actually laid the ground work for further skepticism.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's *magnum opus*, he introduced a new form of reasoning called the transcendental argument. He said,

> Transcendental philosophy is the wisdom of pure speculative reason. Everything practical, so far as it contains motives, has reference to sentiments, and these belong to empirical sources of knowledge. If we wish to carry out a proper division of our science systematically, it must contain first a doctrine of the elements, secondly, a doctrine of the method of pure reason.[75]

In other words, Kant contended that an *a priori* knowledge of certain, pre-loaded categories like time and space, cause and effect had to necessarily exist in the mind in order for sense experience to make any sense whatsoever. He said,

> Reason is the faculty which supplies the principles of knowledge *a priori*. Pure reason therefore is that faculty which supplies the principles of knowing anything *a priori*.[76]

Therefore, this type of knowledge does not come only through empiricism or only through rationalism. Rather, these pre-loaded categories were necessary preconditions to get both reason and sense experience off the runway in the first place.

One of Kant's most famous and influential distinctions surrounded the idea of noumenal and phenomenal realms. He argued that the phenomenal realm was the world of senses and experiences, which were confirmed by reason, and the pre-loaded transcendental categories that exist in the mind. Kant called this realm and its type of knowledge "facts." The noumenal realm was that platonic area of metaphysics which revealed how things really are, even though these things cannot be perceived by senses or

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[75] Kant, 158.

[76] Kant, 9.

confirmed by reason. Therefore, this kind of knowledge cannot be proven. Kant called

this realm and this type of knowledge "faith."[77] Thus, the fact/faith dichotomy was

forged.

In a world that was threatened by rationalistic skeptics, Kant sought to provide

room for faith, but the final result was the expulsion of faith from the market place of

ideas. Ravi Zacharias said,

> In many ways, Kant is the single progenitor of modern man's confidence in the
> power of reason to grapple with material things and its incompetence to deal with
> anything beyond the material. All that is manifestly real is rationally justifiable,
> and all that is ultimate is rationally indefensible.[78]

When he implied that "ultimate reality is unknowable," this statement would become

indelibly etched in the soul of the Western mind and plunge the modern world deeper

into this "culture of doubt."[79]

A Turn toward Postmodernism

If modernism could be compared to the Titanic, postmodernism could be

compared to the deconstructing iceberg that sank the ship. Postmodernism is the

intellectual movement that tore a gash in the underside of modernism, causing it and all

its certainty to sink. Ironically, postmodernism sprang from modernism, since skepticism

undergirds both. Peter Enns states it well:

> It has been said that postmodernism is simply modernism taken to the next step:
> it's being skeptical about modernist skepticism. So, modernism celebrates the
> triumph of western rationalist positivistic Enlightenment ways of knowing, and

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[77] Kant, 512.

[78] Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 202.

[79] Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 25.

postmodernism says that there are different ways of knowing that aren't western but just as legitimate.[80]

So, modernism was the unsinkable ship of certainty produced by the twin forces of rationalism and empiricism. But ironically, the skepticism behind both of these forces proved to be modernism's undoing. Skeptics simply followed the logical next step of questioning the legitimacy of rationalism and empiricism. Thus, in postmodern thinking, the skepticism unleashed by modernism turns on itself and deconstructs all previous forms of epistemology.

Nietzsche and Wittgenstein

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was one of the first philosophers to fearlessly describe how modernism and the entire Enlightenment project was truly a sinking ship by boldly proclaiming that "God is dead."[81] In his book, *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells the parable of a madman running through a town proclaiming that God is dead and humans are the ones who killed him.[82] In this often quoted section of the book, Nietzsche did not mean that God is literally dead but rather that humans who have adopted modernism no longer feel that they need God to give meaning to their lives. Roy Jackson explains Nietzsche's message, pointing out that "although Nietzsche is also critical of religion, it is more the modern condition, or 'modernity' that he finds

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[80] Enns, 8.

[81] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books/Random House, 1974*)*, 167.

[82] Nietzsche, 181.

unsatisfactory."[83] Jackson shows how Nietzsche is writing a critique of modernism, not

religion:

> In fact, Nietzsche—rather like the madman—was sincerely religious and spiritual, for religion can provide a vision and meaning to life. But the people of Nietzsche's time have replaced God with a faith in science or other modern-"ism" which fail to provide us with the same kind of meaning.[84]

In other words, Nietzsche believed that modernism robs humanity of meaning. He

thought it ultimately destroyed faith in God. Because belief in God gives meaning to life,

modernism in Nietzsche's estimation destroyed meaning in life. In this way, Nietzsche

was one of the first to demonstrate skepticism for modernism's skepticism. This laid the

groundwork for postmodernism.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) was an Austrian philosopher whose system of

epistemology paved the way for the agnostic doubt that dominates universities and public

discourse today. He contributed to the deconstruction of modernism's certainty by his

theory of "language games." By the phrase "language games," Wittgenstein meant that

language was far more limited than proponents of modernism had formerly admitted. He

argued that language could merely define a limited area of knowledge, like specific

empirically identifiable objects, and not the big picture of metaphysical reality. If

language is this limited, then it is inadequate to explain grand meta-narratives about life

in general, like those devised by modernists. Therefore, modernism's great truth, that

humanity can achieve understanding of the world with certainty, is beyond the scope of

language and thus beyond the scope of certainty. Wittgenstein's argument applied to any

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[83] Roy Jackson, "Nietzsche: God is Dead," *Teach Yourself.com*, accessed June 2014, http://www.teachyourself.com/subjects/Philosophy-Politics-and-Religion/God-is-dead.aspx.

[84] Jackson.

attempt at a meta-narrative, including Christianity or any other truth claim. The argument goes that it is impossible to use language to try to define metaphysical reality, because objects like God cannot be empirically verified.

In addition to calling into question modernism's meta-narrative, Wittgenstein introduced doubt into Western thinking by opening the door to the idea that the universe is essentially meaningless. If one reduces the knowable and verifiable to the physical world alone, doubt about the universe's meaning is apt to follow. Without a grand meta-narrative to contextualize all the particulars of the universe, one's purpose and reason for living is easily undermined. Even though there is some evidence that Wittgenstein himself tended to lean toward belief in the Christian God, his epistemology paved the way to the doubt of postmodernism.

He also demonstrated how language can be used as a vehicle of power and control.[85] In other words, if one has the power to write, define, and articulate the words expressed in a given culture, then they have the power to influence and persuade that culture. The current descriptions of the abortion debate are contemporary examples of this: Is a person "anti-abortion" or "pro-life?" Is one "for women's reproductive freedom" or does one "kill babies in a mother's womb?" The use of language to frame the issues powerfully influences beliefs about such issues. In another example, the same incident might be described by two very different headlines: "Israel Battles Terrorists" or "Israeli Bombs Kill Children in Attack." Those who control the language and how it is used can control a culture or a country.

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[85] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 6.

Postmodernism has inherited Wittgenstein's suspicion of language used to control and influence. For example, postmoderns argue that much of the language in the United States used to describe different racial groups like "Indians" and "Orientals" is full of loaded terms that keep people on the margins. This view of language also impacts how many postmoderns see entire meta-narratives like Christianity. From this perspective, the Judeo-Christian worldview can be seen as merely a collection of words that has shaped the culture in the Western world. By its mere use of language, Christianity has controlled entire moral paradigms, some of which have been exclusive and oppressive. To reverse this exclusion and oppression, many postmoderns seek to coin a type of language and discourse that will be more inclusive.

Postmodernism and Its Leaders

With the foundation laid by Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and the existentialist thinkers, postmodernism began to put some significant cracks in the Titanic of modernity. However, unlike the real Titanic, which took three hours to sink to the bottom of the ocean, it would take decades for this worldview to sink entirely, if it is even possible to speak of modernism as entirely sunk. Modernism and the scientific method promoted doubt in order to find objective certainty and "truth," but postmodernism sees objective truth as ultimately illusive. Postmodernism, on some level, represents a worldview that calls for infinite questioning and doubting. Enns wrote,

> A postmodern mindset is less interested in final answers to ultimate questions and more comfortable with framing questions, celebrating differences, etc. Truth is not absolute, but local. Postmodernism is not a reaction to religious authority as much as it is a reaction to modernity (hence, post-modern). And in some respects, I think the postmodern critique has been necessary and effective.[86]

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[86] Enns, 7.

Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida

Defining postmodernism and summarizing its terms is problematic for many,[87] though the three-word definition of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) can be a starting point when he described the postmodern condition as "incredulity toward meta-narratives."[88] Lyotard elaborates,

> This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimization corresponds most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and the university institution which in the past had relied upon it.[89]

In other words, no person or culture has a "grand story" or a "meta-worldview" that is true for all people at all times. The Cartesian worldview of reason, the empirical worldview of Darwin, and the Christian worldview of Paul are just "local truths" and "local stories." Lyotard feels this whole "postmodern condition" throws the modernists project of achieving "rational certainty" into question, if not ruin.[90]

> Lyotard defines postmodernism this way:

> What then, is the postmodern? What place does it or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the questions hurled at the rules of image and narration? It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday (*modo, modo,* Petronius used to say) must be suspected?[91]

In other words, postmodernism is a part of the modern because it is its immediate successor. And it simply takes modernism's most logical next step by, in the spirit of

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[87] Enns, 7.

[88] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Theory and History of Literature, Volume 10)*, (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota, 1984), xxiv.

[89] Lyotard, xxiv.

[90] Lyotard, xxiii.

[91] Lyotard, 79.

modernism, calling into question modernism itself. This Petronius to whom Lyotard refers, an ancient satirist of Emperor Nero's era (AD 27-66), wrote in the *Satyricon* "A man who is always ready to believe what is told him will never do well."[92] This is the spirit of postmodernism, to always disbelieve what one receives. So, according to Lyotard, postmoderns challenge not only what was bequeathed to them by modernism, but the very methods by which modernism came to its conclusions.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) focused his energies on how power structures form and how they control the way in which "reason, knowledge, and truth"[93] are defined. Foucault viewed most power structures as repressive and often showed how the monarchies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created technologies of power which included the army, the police, and fiscal administration. But most importantly, according to Foucault, this "economy of power" led to an ongoing circulation of power throughout the entire society. Power and its abuse begat more power and its abuse. Foucault believed that postmodernism's critique of power structures could lead to their undoing and therefore to liberty for those oppressed by them.

Contrary to the rationalists and empiricists of modernism, Foucault understood truth as something subjective, not objective. He believed this because he saw that behind so much of the oppression of power was the idea that truth was objective. He argued that the objectivist viewpoint made truth claims into instruments used to gain and maintain power. "Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked with a

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[92] Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. P. G. Walsh (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), Section 43.

[93] C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998), 94.

circular relation with systems of power which produce it and sustain it. A 'regime' of truth."[94] Here Foucault shows his hand in deconstructing the idea of objective truth. He does this by framing truth as a mere power play. This postmodern perspective casts doubt on any worldview, be it secular or Christian, that claims to possess objective truth—that is, truth that is true for all people at all times. The postmodern critique used by Foucault and other postmodern thinkers is based on the epistemology of doubt. Rather than trying to discover real, objective truth, like the Cartesian experiment, postmodernists like Foucault perpetuate a type of infinite agnosticism. They justify this by pointing out the inability of the mind and the senses to discover an all-encompassing, objective system of truth.

Foucault's concern with power is also highly relevant to tracing the philosophic soil of doubt in Western culture. Because he thought every truth statement to be a means of obtaining or perpetuating power and control, he believed that the best way to throw off power and control was to doubt truth statements. This was applicable to any truth statement, whether from rationalism, empiricism, or the biblical worldview. Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Anton Zijderveld write about this perspective this way:

> There is no hierarchy of truth as between the different narratives. Because all narratives are equally valid, at least in principle, it's futile to debate which narrative is closer to truth. Instead, one must "deconstruct" all narratives, which means to show up their grounding in this or that power interest.[95]

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[94] Michelle Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1980), 119.

[95] Peter L. Berger and Anton Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic* (New York, NY: HarperOne 2009), 55.

It was this deconstruction, or doubting, of narratives, that exposed the naked power plays

underlying them, thus liberating people from their control. This connection was

Foucault's great contribution to doubt in the Western mindset.

A contemporary philosopher who reinforced Foucault's view was Jacques Derrida

(1930-2004). Some believe that Derrida will be remembered as one of the most

influential philosophers of the twentieth century, along with Wittgenstein and

Heidegger.[96] Derrida is widely known for his method of reading texts in a manner known

as "deconstruction," a term which has been misused and misunderstood by many.[97] Saul

Newman described Derrida's method in this way:

> Deconstruction may be seen as a critique of the authoritarian structures in
> philosophy, in particular "logocentrism"—that is, philosophy's subordination,
> throughout its history, of writing to speech. The privileging of speech over writing
> in philosophical texts is an example of what Derrida calls the "metaphysics of
> presence" in Western philosophy. It is an indication of how far philosophy is still
> grounded in the metaphysical concepts it claims to have transcended."[98]

Newman sees Derrida following the same lines of Wittgenstein and Foucault, when it

comes to the concepts of language and power. In other words, Western philosophy has in

a sense deified the use of descriptive language to discover truth and has put its "faith" in

this philosophical language to set up an all-encompassing metaphysical system. Derrida

uses doubt to strip the Western philosophers of their supposed certainty by showing that

their confidence in language is mistaken. Derrida and other postmodern thinkers propose

a type of perpetual doubt, like an airplane that chooses to eternally circle an airport and

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[96] Mark C. Taylor, "What Derrida Really Meant," *New York Times (*October 14, 2004), accessed May 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/14/opinion/14taylor.html?pagewanted=printand _r=0.

[97] Saul Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 27, no 3. (2001): 4.

[98] Newman, 5.

never land. With so many different cities, towns, and villages to land in, with so many people, languages, and unique customs to contend with, why should one ever land the plane? From the postmodern perspective, the most honest philosophical perspective to take is to critique all other planes that do reach their destination, while one perpetually circles the globe.

Derrida's approach became highly influential in a variety of academic disciplines throughout the Western world. It was also influential on late twentieth and early twenty-first century religious views. Derrida became fascinated with the subject of religion in his later years and wrote about how religion is based upon uncertainty, not certainty. Mark Taylor described Derrida's teaching about religion:

> Derrida reminded us that religion does not always give clear meaning, purpose and certainty by providing secure foundations. To the contrary, the great religious traditions are profoundly disturbing because they all call certainty and security into question. Belief not tempered by doubt poses a mortal danger.[99]

This "mortal danger" was the danger of absolutism, or the total control of society by a religious idea or institution. Derrida saw value in doubt and uncertainty because they safeguard the world from the dangers of absolutism. If people doubt, their doubt erodes the foundations upon which absolutism is built.

Taylor further explains that Derrida did not advocate for "unbelief" as the antidote to blind belief. Rather, he argued for "a different kind of belief."[100] He described it this way: "one that embraces uncertainty and enables us to respect others whom we do not understand. In a complex world, wisdom is knowing what we don't know so that we can

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[99] Taylor.

[100] Taylor.

keep the future open."[101] In other words, Derrida argued for a kind of belief mixed with

doubt. This mixture was the key, according to Derrida, of respectfully co-existing with

others in a life too complex to understand everything.

A related key component of postmodernism is perspectivalism. This means that

every theory, every idea, every person, and every people group approach life from a

particular perspective or worldview. These worldview assumptions represent a bias

which cannot be ignored when evaluating research or history. Thus, for example, one's

interpretation of a historical event is controlled by his or her perspective. A military event

was a glorious victory if seen from the perspective of the winner. But it was an

unspeakable tragedy if seen from the perspective of the loser. Since a common

postmodern sentiment is that "history is always written by the winners," perspectivalism

would dictate that the official record of the historical event be examined with suspicion.

It is only a perspective and not fact. Perspectivalism would further seek to counteract the

potential oppression of winners imposing their power on losers by giving a voice to the

oppressed and marginalized people throughout history and in the world today.[102]

Perspectivalism can lead to either healthy or unhealthy doubt. On the unhealthy

side, it could cause one to doubt whether the objective truth claims in the Bible are valid,

since the authors are culturally and religiously biased. Perpectivalism could lead to a

perpetual state of doubt about any truth claims given the reality that every human views

history, experience, and reality through his or her own set of lenses. On the healthy side,

it could give one a sense of epistemological humility when presenting the truth claims of

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[101] Taylor.

[102] James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 225.

Scripture. To ignore the context, various translations, and variances in the Bible and act as if all the authors are writing from an objective perspective is not only naïve; it negates the human element of divine inspiration. If there is a God, and he has revealed himself through a book and through a person, he can speak objective truths through subjective individuals. Acknowledging the various perspectives of the authors and how that played into their writing of Scripture is realistic and healthy. For so long evangelicals assumed the same starting point for knowledge as any modernist would. They would claim that there is objective truth and it can be found using human reasoning and senses. This assumption was both implicit and explicit, depending on who one reads. At the same time, the default apologetic approach for most evangelicals has been to challenge seekers and even believers to just "examine the facts" of the Christian faith. This challenge gets made as if the facts of the Christian faith can be examined in the same way one would conduct a science experiment. Perspectivalism ushered in some healthy doubt to counter this modern but failed epistemology.

James Sire in *The Universe Next Door* gives a balanced critique of postmodernism and in doing so helps summarize four key elements of this non-worldview's worldview. He explains first of all that postmodernism represents "the rejection of all meta-narratives." Second, it claims that "we have no access to reality (that there are no facts, no truths-of-the-matter) and that we can only tell stories about it." Third, it holds to "the indeterminacy of language (a text can be read in a variety of ways, some contradictory)." And finally, postmodernism deconstructs "the autonomy and

sufficiency of human reason."[103] These four elements can be found in most expressions

of postmodernism throughout the culture.

Even when all four of these elements cannot be detected overtly, postmodernism

has strongly influenced the popular mindset. For example, the slogans of postmodernity

may be represented in familiar sound bites like "that may be true for you, but not true for

me," "all paths lead to what you call God/ultimate reality," "that's just your

interpretation," and "you need to be more tolerant."[104] Sentiments like this are ubiquitous.

They have unsettled many evangelicals who were more at home with modernity. Enns

wrote:

> The war between Christianity and Postmodernism is so intense because
> Christianity in our culture is comfortable in the modern paradigm.
> Fundamentalism is modernist Christianity. A cocky Christianity that has all the
> answers [and that] can casually sweep away pressing problems in the world with a
> wave of the doctrinal hand isn't "pure" Christianity but a modernist version of
> it.[105]

In other words, a Christianity made up entirely of certainty is just a modernized version

of Christianity. Lesslie Newbigin, the famous missions theorist, agreed with Enns,

criticizing parts of the evangelical church for attempting to match Enlightenment

certainty with its own brand of Christian certainty.[106] Both atheistic and Christian

modernists believed they had obtained objective truth that was unquestionable, that could

give one a sense of certainty. This kind of certainty can have disastrous effects. For

example, some former evangelicals like Bart Ehrman left the fold because they did not

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[103] Sire, 239-240.

[104] Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation: Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 25-27.

[105] Enns, 8.

[106] Newbigin, 18.

find the rational certainty they were promised by their evangelical pastors and professors.[107] But other evangelical thinkers like Gregory Boyd and Daniel Taylor discovered a more resilient faith.[108] They found the search for certainty empty and were able to incorporate their uncertainty and doubt into a robust faith.

Within the Western world at large, modernism gave secularists who wanted a sense of certainty a savior, an epistemological certainty that can be gained through both reason and the scientific method. Modernists seized upon this certainty and did a wonderful job of marginalizing Christian beliefs by presenting the scientific method as the only legitimate form of knowledge and mocking Christian truth claims as myths and fairy tales. This led some Christians to a type of doubt that led to unbelief. The postmodernists came on the scene and revealed the biases of the so-called detached, objective observer. They showed how scientists and rationalistic philosophers were just as biased as any religious believer. Postmodernism appears to discourage any attempt at finding truth external or internal and instead preaches a gospel of perpetual doubting and questioning. In this way, both modernism and postmodernism utilized doubt in different ways to undermine some basic tenets of the Christian faith.

It is beneficial here to have a grasp of the philosophical soil that has allowed doubt to flourish in the Western world. Every society contains certain norms, habits, and values that are assumed. Those assumptions are presuppositions that make up someone's worldview. Most people are too busy just trying to survive and put bread on the table to consciously analyze such assumptions. One of the assumptions in Western culture is to

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[107] Ehrman, 1-16.

[108] Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty*. 17-18, 152-153.

question and to doubt. For centuries, Westerners have favored the mind and the sciences

as reliable ways of knowing what is really real. Therefore, when someone begins to slide

on the ice of doubt it is helpful to know where that doubt comes from and why someone

from this culture may ask certain questions about reality that other cultures may not.

When people get sick, they want to know what they have and how they got it. When

people go into a time of doubt, it is helpful to know what they have and how they got it.

Understanding just a little bit of the philosophic soil of doubt can help pastors diagnose

the type of doubt someone is experiencing. Doubt is a nuanced word in the Bible and the

experience of doubt is also nuanced. Seeing how others have processed doubt in the

modern and postmodern eras can help doubters understand that they are not alone in the

questions they are asking and it may point them to possible answers for their doubts.

Conclusion

Many evangelicals tend to struggle with doubt alone. They remain isolated and

afraid to speak these doubts out loud for fear of being judged by others and the shame

that accompanies seasons of doubt. It may help people come to grips with their own

doubts and incorporate them into their faith to understand that some of the great leaders

in the history of the church, like Augustine, Luther, Lewis, and Mother Teresa,

experienced times of great doubt. It may give some doubters a context which will put

their questions into perspective to have a brief understanding of the history of doubt in

Western culture from Descartes to Derrida. Pastors and parishioners might be helped by

having a concise understanding of the search for certainty that modernism attempted and

a quick overview of the embrace of uncertainty that postmodernism bequeathed to

Western culture. This could help them understand why doubt is so prevalent in the world today.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

The problem this project addressed was the difficulty of some evangelical Christians to integrate doubt into their life of faith. In response to this problem the researcher examined several subproblems. First, he investigated a theological overview of doubt from the Bible and other theological sources. This overview looked at doubt in the Old and New Testament, with a special emphasis on doubt as experienced by Job and Thomas. The theological section sought to normalize doubt and gave the nuances of doubt as presented in the Scriptures.

Second, the researcher gave a literature review of doubt as experienced by major leaders throughout church history and gave a brief overview of Western philosophy from Descartes to Derrida in order to show how the modern and postmodern culture contributes to doubt. The "doubt biographies" of church history revealed that doubt has not been an uncommon experience among respected Christian leaders and the philosophical overview provided some reasons as to why doubt has flourished in Western culture.

Third, the researcher conducted twelve in-depth interviews with people who have experienced doubt in an evangelical context. The interviews were designed to help the researcher understand the process of doubt from the "lived experiences" of the individual doubters. The goal was to produce a theory about the nature of doubt among evangelicals. The researcher spent many hours researching and deliberating on the best methodology for the fieldwork.

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore how some evangelical Christians process doubt. The purpose of this study was to investigate, from the doubters' point of view, how they processed doubt in their lives. The results were organized around the causal conditions, strategies, and resulting consequences of those strategies.

Choosing a Methodology

Given the psychological, sociological, and theological nature of the subject of doubt, the researcher decided to use a qualitative approach to gathering data. The researcher initially planned on using the case study method because it seemed to be the most time efficient way to gather data for the project. After reading *Case Study Research* by Robert Yin, the researcher presented this methodology in his proposal to his advisor. The advisor recommended the researcher look at grounded theory as a better fit for the project. After this conversation with the advisor, the researcher consulted numerous articles and books on grounded theory and phenomenology. After much thought and deliberation, the researcher chose grounded theory as the primary research method, though phenomenology greatly influenced how the researcher framed certain questions and conducted the interviews.

Grounded theory was chosen as the primary methodology because it allowed the researcher to interview with an open mind the people who experienced doubt. Grounded theory also represents an organic research methodology because it seeks to develop a theory from the ground up rather from the top down. In other words, the theory would emerge from the actual experiences of the doubters rather than from the preconceived theories of the interviewer. This inductive method allowed the researcher to understand doubt from the interviewees' point of view rather than from his own. Phenomenology

does not seek to generate a theory but only to describe a certain phenomenon from the lived experience of the person interviewed. This method is very open ended. It attempts to come alongside the people interviewed in a non-judgmental manner to better understand how they processed an experience like doubt. Given the personal and sometimes shameful nature of doubt, the researcher utilized questions emerging from phenomenology simply to give the interviewees freedom and permission to share their own doubt stories in an accepting environment.

From a philosophical perspective, the researcher chose a variation of grounded theory championed by renowned grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz. After consulting journal articles and Charmaz's book, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, the researcher chose her approach over the classic theorists' approach advocated by the developers of grounded theory, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Charmaz's modification of Glaser and Strauss's approach allowed for more flexibility in the interviews and coding process. Her type of grounded theory remained loyal to the ideas and methods presented by the founders of this methodology, but also contained an appreciation for how the postmodern critique influenced this and all research styles. Charmaz explains,

> A constructivist approach means more than looking at how individuals view their situations. It not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher's view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it. Granted, different researchers may come up with similar ideas, although how they render them theoretically may differ.[1]

Charmaz's approach acknowledges the postmodern critique that all forms of research are value laden and filtered through the subjective interpretations of the researcher.

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[1] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*: *A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2006), Kindle edition 130.

Adele Clarke, another grounded theorist who sides with the constructivist approach, desires to reposition "the researcher away from the 'all knowing analyst' to the 'acknowledged participant.'"[2] When delving into a sensitive topic like doubt, this researcher felt the need to come alongside those he interviewed as a "co-doubter" rather than to appear like a scientist in a white lab coat who was detached and "objective."

As the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted, the researcher discovered several challenges to this process. He agreed with grounded theorist Brene Brown who claimed there were three difficulties of using this methodology:

1. Acknowledging that it is virtually impossible to understand grounded theory methodology prior to using it,
2. Developing the courage to let the research participants define the research problem, and,
3. Letting go of your own interests and preconceived ideas to "trust in emergence."[3]

Especially during the analysis and interpretation stages, letting go of preconceived notions was challenging. In addition, it was tempting to force the data into an existing category. For example, initially the researcher wanted to use a deductive approach in which he proved that doubt was caused by three major factors: suffering, the search for certainty, and unanswered prayer. But this deductive preconception did not hold up to the emerging grounded data. After more research of the methodologies and consultation with his advisor, he finally landed on a grounded theory approach, with some influence from phenomenology as well. He believed that the inductive, experiential method was

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[2] Adele Clark, prologue to *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2006), xxviii.

[3] Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), Kindle edition 252.

ultimately a better fit than a deductive, rationalistic method because of the nature of his subject matter.

The Interviews

The primary source of data came from one-on-one interviews with evangelicals who had been through a season of doubt. The researcher had a prior relationship with most of the interviewees and the majority were current or former members of Second Baptist Church, though there were a few exceptions. Because of the emotional content of the subject matter, it was almost imperative that a relationship had been previously established. In the case where there was no prior relationship, one interviewee stated that he probably would not have agreed to the interview if the researcher had not mentioned his own personal struggle with doubt. Confidentiality was a high concern for some of the participants. Therefore, an agreement of confidentiality was signed by all interviewees and their names were replaced with alpha numeric coding in the body of the research project.

The researcher chose to conduct most of the interviews at a neutral site or in a place that was comfortable for the interviewees. He chose to wear blue shirts in order to have a calming appearance and he positioned himself in a place of listening rather than in a place of power to further put the interviewees at ease. Most of the interviews were in person, but some were via Skype and phone conference. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher jotted down field notes in some cases, but many times he chose to put down the pen in order to be fully present to the participant. The interviews lasted anywhere from one to two hours.

The researcher developed his list of questions based on Charmaz's guidelines listed in chapter two of her book *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Charmaz states,

> For a grounded theory study, devise a few broad, open-ended questions. Then you can focus your interview questions to invite detailed discussion of topic. By creating open-ended, non-judgmental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge.[4]

A list of questions used in the interviews appears in Appendix A. Although not all questions were used in every interview, certain core questions were used in each interview to maintain validity. The questions were designed to help the researcher understand doubt from the lived experiences of the interviewees. Grounded theory is predicated on trying to understand a process and develop a theory from the data that emerged from the interviews. This long list of questions helped the researcher unearth core grounded theory questions that centered around interviewees' first experience with doubt, what caused the doubt, what actions were taken in response to the doubt, and what were the consequences of those actions.

Theoretical Memoing and Coding

A key component of grounded theory is theoretical memoing. Memoing simply means jotting down thoughts, ideas, and connections throughout the process of the interviews. Memoing is a critical piece of this methodology that allows the researcher to observe patterns, trends, and anomalies as they emerge from the data itself. Without theoretical memoing, it would be difficult to construct a grounded theory.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed into manuscripts for open, axial, and selective coding. The researcher manually coded all the open codes using constant comparison analysis to establish validity. During open coding, the researcher

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[4] Charmaz, Kindle edition 26.

coded most manuscripts line by line looking for unique insights into the data. Following

the lead of Charmaz, the researcher used gerunds when doing the open codes to

emphasize the actions taken by the participants in response to doubt. Open coding may be

equated to having an open mind to new ideas and processes that could emerge from the

data.

After manually coding all of the transcripts, the researcher downloaded the open

codes into a computer program called Dedoose. From there the data was broken down

into axial codes. The axial coding stage allowed the researcher to hone down some core

categories pertaining to the subject of doubt. After the axial coding stage was completed,

the researcher sought to identify some core concepts, or selective codes that described the

phenomenon of doubt in this evangelical context. The Dedoose program provided the

means to break down the vast amount of data into categories that could measure the

scope and intensity of some of the phenomenon described by the interviewees. The

researcher used some of this data to develop charts and graphs in order to help visualize

and conceptualize the information.

Secondary data was obtained through emails, text messages, and journal writings

submitted by some of the interviewees. These bits of data were also coded to see how

they fit into the overall picture of the project. The researcher triangulated the data by

taking into consideration the transcripts, memos, and field notes gathered in the process.

Waiting for Emergence

Throughout this stage of the research project, the wisdom of Brene Brown to "let

the research participants define the research problem"[5] and to trust that a theory would

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[5] Brown, Kindle edition 252.

emerge rang true. If a researcher came to a project with years of knowledge about a particular phenomenon like doubt, it would prove difficult to bracket off this knowledge and trust that a theory would emerge independent of his or her own expertise. A temptation throughout was to force data into a pre-existing category or try to make the data fit an *a priori* assumption by the researcher. The beauty of grounded theory was that it allows the researcher to admit his or her bias up front. The more one is in touch with his or her own bias, the better equipped he or she would be to let the data speak for itself.

One of the weaknesses faced by some grounded theorists would be to commit a logical fallacy known as a hasty generalization. A hasty generalization is reasoning from the few to the whole. In other words, in the case of evangelical doubt, there is no way that twelve people can speak for millions of evangelicals who experience doubt. At the same time, there is much to learn about doubt from these interviews that would speak to a large number of people who have experienced doubt in a similar context. One of the critiques of grounded theory is that it springs from the modernist positivist tradition of objective research. That was why this researcher received guidance from both the modern and postmodern, grounded theorists.

Throughout the interpretative process, the researcher asked the simple question, "What is going on here?" In other words, what is the main concern of the participants? How are they trying to resolve their doubt? What core variable explains most of their concerns? Barney G. Glaser says,

> The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior that is relevant and problematic for those involved. The goal is not voluminous description, nor clever verification. As with all grounded theory, the generation of a basic social process (BSP) theory occurs around a core category.[6]

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[6] Barney G. Glaser, "Basic Social Processes," *Grounded Theory Review* 4, no. 3 (June 2005): accessed November 2014, http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2005/06/22/1533/.

This effort to formulate a BSP around a core category was the researcher's goal for continually asking "What is going on here?"

Through constant comparative analysis, the researcher looked for common themes and clusters among those evangelical doubters who had stayed in the fold and those who had left. During this stage, the researcher waited for a basic social process to emerge from the data. Memos helped provide a chronological journey of how the researcher's insights and early theories evolved over time.

Another method of analysis was to take each participant's story through the grid of four stages by using note cards. The researcher placed the interviewees' names across the top of a book shelf in his office and wrote out the words "cause," "doubt begins," "actions," and "consequences" on note cards that descended down the book shelf. This allowed the researcher to visualize the experience of each individual doubter and look at what caused his or her doubt, how he or she responded to the doubt, and what were the consequences of those responses.

Then the researcher divided the doubters into "stayers" and "leavers" to conduct a side by side evaluation of the two groups. Similarities and differences were noted, as well as how the evangelical community responded to their doubt.

<div style="text-align: center;">Conclusion</div>

In summation, the researcher believed that grounded theory was the correct methodology to address this particular problem of evangelical doubt. This methodology allowed him to approach the field interviews in an objective manner and let the data speak for itself. The memoing provided a means to track the development of a theory in a chronological and organic fashion. Theoretical memoing encouraged the researcher to

continually interact with the data as it was obtained in the field and to inject his own thoughts as they appeared to him. The open, axial, and selective coding forced the researcher to immerse himself in the interviews in an in-depth way. This method of analysis served as a funnel to narrow the descriptors down to a few categories before the main problem under consideration emerged.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter reports on the fieldwork aspect of this project which sought to evaluate doubt in an evangelical context. Using grounded theory methodology tempered with some phenomenology, the researcher attempted to understand doubt from the lived experiences of the various individuals interviewed for this project. The goal was to develop a theory from the ground up that would explain the process of doubt as a basic social process. This explanatory theory revealed the main concern of most of the evangelical doubters in this study and showed how they sought to resolve this concern.

The data used to construct this theory came from the transcripts of the interviews, theoretical memos, and various written accounts from the participants themselves. To qualify for the interviews, participants needed to have come from an evangelical tradition and to have experienced a season of doubt. The length of the season of doubt varied from several months to many years. Twelve people were chosen for the interviews: eight men and four women (see table 5.1). The names of the participants were concealed by using the alpha numerical codes DP1 – DP12, DP meaning "Doubt Prospect" because every person is always a prospect for doubt as his or her life continues to unfold. The researcher intentionally selected two primary groups of doubters. The first was comprised of those who doubted and stayed in the evangelical fold. The second was comprised of those who doubted and left the evangelical fold. Six out of the twelve remained in the evangelical community, one converted to Catholicism, and five left Christianity altogether (see figure

5.1). Similarities and differences were discovered among the two groups of doubters who sought to resolve a common main concern. This chapter unpacks the results of the fieldwork and attempts to reveal what is really going on inside the minds of these particular evangelical doubters. Open, axial, and selective coding were used to generate various categories, clusters, and ultimately the main concern of the interviewees.

Table 5.1. Doubt Study Participant Demographics and Outcomes

ID#	Age	Gender	Background Denomination	Current Status
DP1	42	Male	Evangelical Pentecostal	Stayed
DP2	49	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Left
DP3	41	Female	Evangelical Baptist	Stayed
DP4	48	Female	Evangelical Baptist	Left
DP5	60	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Left
DP6	42	Female	Evangelical Baptist	Stayed
DP7	44	Female	Evangelical Methodist	Stayed
DP8	50	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Catholic
DP9	47	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Stayed
DP10	24	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Left
DP11	48	Male	Evangelical Baptist	Stayed
DP12	56	Male	Evangelical Methodist	Left

Figure 5.1. Percentage of Participants Who Stayed or Left the Evangelical Faith
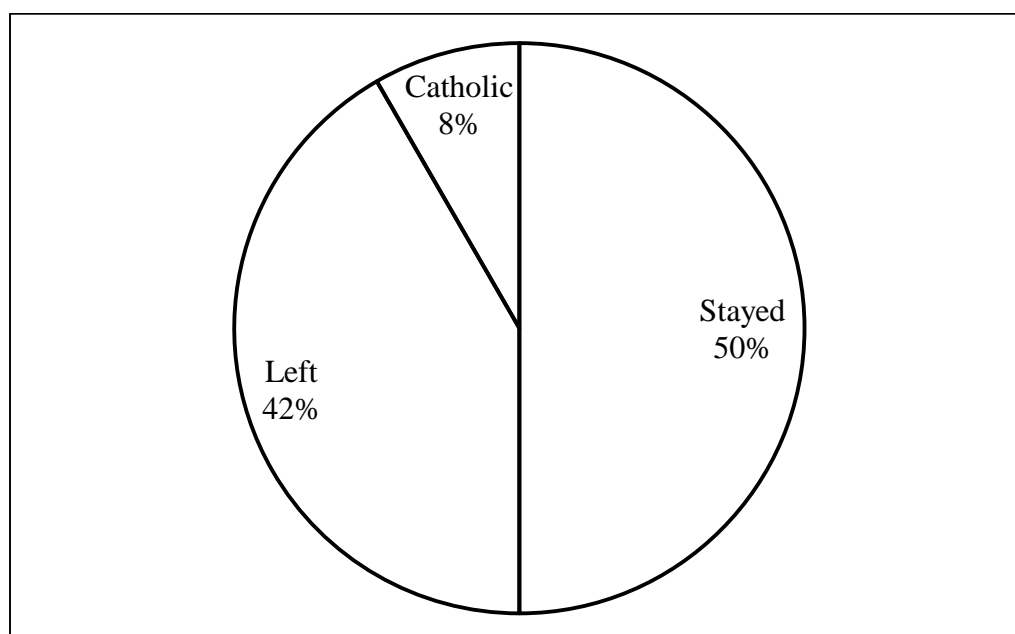
It would be impossible to include all of the coding in this chapter because the open coding phase alone contained 20 pages of codes, properties, and quotes from the participants. Therefore, the researcher gave an example of an open coding section (see table 5.2) before displaying the axial and selective codes that were derived from the pages of open coding.

<div align="center">**Open Coding**</div>

The key to open coding was to remain "open minded" to new ideas and ways of describing doubt. The open coding stage of this process was time consuming and tedious, but it forced the researcher to remain close to the data in order to ensure the theory would emerge from the interviews themselves and not from the presuppositions of the researcher. The first step was to go through all of the transcripts and code the documents line by line or paragraph by paragraph. The first stage of coding was written out by hand on the actual transcripts and then entered into a computer spread sheet. The data came from the list of questions that appears in the appendix. It was divided into four questions: "Describe your first doubt," "What caused your doubt?" "What actions or strategies were taken in response to your doubt?" and "What were the consequences of those strategies?"

The first question was more of an open ended phenomenological question and the remaining three questions were classic, grounded theory inquiries that focused on the actions taken by the participants. One of the goals of the research was phenomenological in nature; to understand doubt from the lived experiences of the interviewees. Some of the words and phrases used to describe doubt by the interviewees were:

> Feeling alone, oppressed, depressed, death by a thousand paper cuts, in a pit, feeling tons of shame, gripping a tight rope on a high wire, deep dark place, feeling paralyzed, oily and slippery, erosion of faith, wrestling, shattering, civil

war, trauma, years of combat, "Existential crisis of here I am. Someday I will die. What is the meaning?"

All of the words and phrases above seem to describe a lonely, painful place that was full of angst and inner turmoil. The emotive and graphic language used to explain their doubt revealed the anguish experienced by those who stayed in the faith as well as those that left. When one's foundations to existence are shaken, such powerful emotions and analogies borrowed from conflict should be expected.

Throughout the open coding stage, the researcher looked for commonalities and differences between the various interviewees. Also, during the open coding stage of the research, the researcher intentionally changed the order of coding. For example, on the first question, he started in chronological order of the interviews. This was a mixture of different kinds of evangelical doubters between those who had left and those who had stayed. On the second question, which dealt with the issue of causation, the order was reversed chronological order. On the third question, which addressed the consequences of the strategies, the researcher divided the groups between those evangelicals who left and those evangelicals who stayed. This method was chosen to start the process of constant comparison analysis.

Searching for certainty, experiencing betrayal, keeping doubt a secret, processing pain and suffering, and feeling disappointed with God were a few common themes that emerged. As grounded theorists sift through their data, a couple of questions are asked incessantly: "What is the primary concern of the participants?" And "how are they seeking to resolve this concern?" A key component to grounded theory is to look beyond the obvious statements of the interviewees in order to determine social-psychological

processes. The following example of open coding demonstrates how this method works

by listing the code, the properties, and the actual words of the interviewees.

Table 5.2. Open Codes: Describe Your First Experience with Doubt

Open code	Properties	Examples of participants' words
Experiencing betrayal	Seeking trust, feeling disappointed by God, others, seeking validation, being invalidated, feeling confused	Completely rejected, seeking unconditional love
Observing others' experience	Comparing lack of experience, equating faith with family, socially identifying faith	Aha moments, eroding faith, feeling paralyzed, wrestling with questions, struggling with person of Jesus
Seeing God as distant and harsh	Feeling separated, feeling guilty, not measuring up, perfectionism	Deep dark place, God way over there, recognizing evil within, God will kibosh and judge
Dealing with hypocrisy in leaders	Feeling judged, fighting with parents, legalistic, leaders not willing to question	Committing unpardonable sin, denying the Holy Spirit, hating her pastor as child
Viewing others' faith as simplistic	Trying hard to please others, wanting parents approval	Formulaic faith, you just have to believe, having feminist approach, I always doubted simplicity
Struggling with perfectionism	Reflecting on family influence, desiring acceptance	Longing for unconditional love, weighing options
Grieving over loss	Feeling disappointed with God, not making sense of double loss	
Reconciling Christian belief with gay lifestyle	Feeling confused, feeling disappointed, seeing faith as not working, not feeling certain	Upholding Christian right and wrong, the absolute truth, making him abominable, caused to relook at everything
Struggling with biblical contradictions	Desiring certainty, wanting faith to make sense, feeling cognitive dissonance, doubting salvation	Stopped reading Bible, understand mind of God, sins counted against you
Comparing his experience to others	Desiring certainty, feeling different, desiring to fit in with friends	

Axial Coding

In the axial coding stage, the myriad of open codes were broken down and

grouped into a few categories and clusters. There were six axial categories in this study.

First, one of the overriding categories that affected all of the participants was the

issue of certainty. Each participant seemed to desire epistemological certainty in his or

her journey with God. A common phrase that two of the doubters heard in their

evangelical community was "You've got to know that you know that you know." This phrase was linked to one's salvation, so if one did not have this level of 100 percent certainty about God, Jesus, and his or her salvation, then that person was going to hell. Another participant had a visceral reaction to the very mention of the word certainty in the interview, stating, "Certainty is a dangerous word." This lack of certainty for many stemmed from reading the Bible and observing contradictions. This pushed many of the doubters to seek out evidences through apologetic authorities like C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, Gary Habermas, and Hugh Ross. With the exception of one participant, no one held on to certainty after experiencing a season of doubt. Nearly all of the interviewees saw certainty as something ultimately elusive. The one exception was the doubter who left evangelicalism for Catholicism. This person claimed to ground his certainty in the sacraments alone.

Second, another key axial category was the processing of pain and suffering. Grief over the death of a family member, divorce from one's spouse, watching one's family of origin disintegrate, and seeing a friend unable to overcome a destructive lifestyle all sent many of the participants into a season of doubt. Fifty percent of the interviewees mentioned painful events as a catalyst to their doubt, while the other half drifted into a season of doubt apart from a specific event. There was not a correlation between leaving versus staying in the evangelical faith and having one's doubt provoked by an experience of suffering or by encountering through drifting.

Third, isolation and secrecy were mentioned as a common factor among all of the doubters. Nearly all the participants stated that they felt all alone in their doubt and that there was no one with whom to talk. This attitude was fueled by the evangelical

environment of certainty. Most of the participants felt like there was something wrong with them because they seemed to lack the certainty that all of their peers at church possessed. Fear of being kicked out of the proverbial club or being misunderstood prevented them from expressing their doubts out loud to their parents, friends, or leaders at church. The vast majority of participants, both those that stayed and those that left, longed for a safe a place to doubt.

Fourth, eleven out of the twelve doubters came to the conclusion that they must live with uncertainty. Coming to this conclusion was a long and painful process as the various participants gradually let go of certainty. Whether one stayed an evangelical or not was irrelevant to this realization that certainty was not to be found in this life. Those doubters that stayed had to find a way to redefine their faith or to integrate doubt within their faith. Those doubters who left chose uncertainty or epistemological agnosticism as an overarching worldview. To quote one doubter who left; "The only thing I am certain of is that nothing is certain."

Fifth, seeking validation through community emerged as a common category among the participants. The doubters who left the fold found a new community of skeptical friends and scholars to support their newfound "faith." Those who stayed in the fold found a new community of evangelical friends and scholars who could embrace their doubt. Sociologist Peter Berger refers to this phenomenon as plausibility structures. He explains it succinctly: "Beliefs become plausible if they are supported by the people around us. We are all social beings, we were created as social beings and much of what

we think about the world depends on support by important people with whom we live."[1]

In other words, human beings innately seek out other human beings that will buttress

their own beliefs and values.

Sixth, for the doubters who left the evangelical fold, viewing Christianity as

pragmatically ineffective became a major concern. Several doubters said they simply

found that Christianity no longer worked for them. Another participant attempted an

experiment to live for a week as if God did not exist. After the week ended he found that

he was better able to handle life without God and that he felt much happier. Table 5.3 that

follows shows the axial codes in relation to the open codes and the final selective code.

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[1] "Rethinking Secularization: A Conversation with Peter Berger" An interview by R. Albert Mohler, Jr., posted October 11, 2010, accessed December 8, 2014 http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/10/11/ rethinking-secularization-a-conversation-with-peter-berger-2/.

Table 5.3. Axial Codes

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective code
Seeking certainty, searching for more evidence, finding contradictions in Bible, asking classical intellectual questions, desiring a sure foundation, striving to reconcile Bible incongruencies	Desiring epistemological certainty	Resolving cognitive dissonance
Divorcing from spouse, grieving a death, assessing problem of evil and suffering, feeling explosion of family origin, experiencing betrayal, seeing hypocrisy in Christians	Struggling with painful events	
Keeping doubt a secret, experiencing shame, feeling different	Avoiding shame through isolation	
Reconciling doubt, letting go of certainty, experiencing God's grace, transforming faith, faith 2.0, grounding faith in essentials, seeing doubt in DNA, recognizing God can handle doubt	Living with ambiguity and uncertainty	
Finding a new community of skeptics or fellow Christian doubters, desiring a safe place to doubt	Seeking validation through community	
Assessing Christianity doesn't work anymore, viewing Christian evidence as lacking, reading skeptical scholars, praying without results, experiencing tension with Christian family, struggling with perfectionism, fighting habitual sin, seeking freedom from sin, viewing faith as performance, seeing God as legalistic, comparing faith to others, seeking greater faith experience, viewing others' faith as simplistic	Pragmatically viewing Christianity as ineffective	

Selective Coding

The selective code represented the main concern of the majority of participants in this study. In other words, it was the main problem they were trying to resolve and how they attempted to resolve it. For this particular project, cognitive dissonance was the main problem all the participants attempted to resolve. Leon Festinger, the "father of cognitive dissonance," wrote:

> This theory centers around the idea that if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent. Two items of information that psychologically do not fit together are said to be in a dissonant relation to each other.[2]

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[2] Leon Festinger, "Cognitive Dissonance," *Scientific American* vol. 207, no. 4 (1962): 1062-1093, accessed December 10, 2014, http://www.nature.com/scientificamerican/journal/v207/ n4/pdf/ scientificamerican 1062-93.pdf.

For the doubters, the cognitive dissonance happened in their attempt to hold two

contradictory thoughts or ideas at the same time. This state of mind makes a person

uncomfortable and desirous to remove this sense of discomfort and disharmony.

In each case, the participants experienced different degrees of cognitive

dissonance during their season of doubt. If doubt is the state of being in between belief

and unbelief, then cognitive dissonance describes the inner, psychological and

sociological turmoil of the individual doubter. The evolution of this main concern slowly

revealed itself to the researcher over a three-month period of immersing himself in the

data and writing out theoretical memos to track his progress. The illumination of the main

concern led to the development of the following theoretical model that explained the

process that some evangelicals go through when they are processing doubt, which can

also be restated as an attempt to relieve cognitive dissonance.

Figure 5.2. Theoretical Model of the Process of Doubt
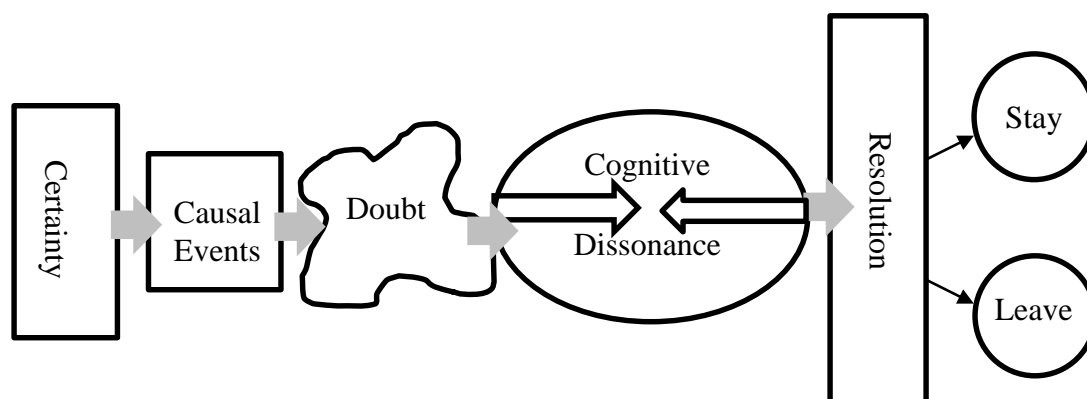
Note that the starting point in the theoretical model is certainty. The participants

in this study were raised in an environment of evangelical certainty and when different

events disrupted this certainty, the participants sought ways to get it back. Not all

interviewees had a sense of certainty about their beliefs, but certainty was a commodity of high value in their evangelical communities.

In this study, the two main causal agents of doubt were painful events and drifting. Six out of the twelve mentioned some type of painful event that catalyzed their doubts, while four drifted into doubt. Fifty percent of those who experienced a traumatic event stayed in the evangelical fold while the other half left. As table 5.4 shows, the causation of doubt was nearly identical in those that stayed and those that left. Drifting could be described as having questions about one's evangelical faith that could never be resolved or discussed with anyone. These participants tended to drift into a season of doubt over many years.

Whether through painful events or through drifting, all of the participants in this study found themselves in a place of doubt, which led to a state of cognitive dissonance. The cognitive dissonance caused by doubt tended to be a very painful time for both groups of doubters. Some of this dissonance was caused by trying to maintain two ideas in their minds that seemed to be contradictions. Many of the doubters struggled over classical Christian questions about the existence of God, the problem of evil and suffering, and the person of Jesus Christ. For those who stayed, there was never an apologetic answer that resolved all their questions and brought harmony to their dissonance like the proverbial silver bullet.

The most common strategy to try to remove the dissonance was secrecy and isolation. The researcher viewed this ineffective way of coping as a strategy because eleven out of the twelve participants talked about the importance of keeping their doubt a secret. Because of the high premium placed on certainty, the majority of the participants

said they kept their doubts a secret because of shame. Another common strategy was

prayer. Most all of the interviewees were very open about how they tried to pray the

doubt out. In some cases, the "ineffectiveness of prayer" actually produced even more

doubt.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the participants got to a place where they

let go of certainty or learned to live with uncertainty. There was only one possible

exception in this study. When a person goes through doubt and cognitive dissonance, his

or her sense of certainty is broken. Timothy Mavergeorge is the director of a large

Christian counseling center. He says when someone loses his or her sense of certainty, a

grieving process goes into effect.[3] Mavergeorge compared this type of loss to Elisabeth

Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief that includes "denial," "anger," "bargaining,"

"depression," and "acceptance." In processing the uncertainty caused by the cognitive

dissonance, doubters may go through these stages before arriving at a place of

acceptance.

The last phase of the model was about community. One participant that struggled

through doubt but stayed in the faith spoke of the critical role community played in her

journey:

> That's something that is tangible. They were right when they said you have to
> have community. You have to have that place to live out that faith. It's not
> something you do on your own. I wanted to do it all on my own in my own head
> and house. I didn't want to do it with other people. But having those questions,
> but still serving in community, being part of the community was part of that
> journey.

All of the doubters sought to find support within the evangelical community or outside

the evangelical community. Either way, both groups continued to live with a sense of

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[3] Timothy Mavergeorge, interview by author, Houston, TX, December 4, 2014.

uncertainty. Those who stayed within evangelicalism sought out pastors and friends who were able to embrace their doubts rather than reject them. Those that left the evangelical camp sought out community among fellow skeptics and like-minded people who were committed to an agnostic worldview.

Table 5.4. Side-By-Side Summary of Doubters Who Stayed and Left

	Doubters Who Stayed	Doubters Who Left
What caused the doubt?	Experiencing pain and suffering, Feeling disappointed with God, Comparing one's own faith to others' faith, Observing hypocrisy	Experiencing pain and suffering, Feeling disappointed with God, Comparing one's own faith to others' faith, Observing hypocrisy
What actions or strategies were taken in response to the doubt?	Seeking reconciliation of cognitive dissonance, Keeping it a secret, Talking about it, Turning to Christians for help	Seeking reconciliation of cognitive dissonance, Keeping it a secret, Suppressing it, Turning to secularists for help
What were the consequences of those strategies?	Living with uncertainty, Integrating faith and doubt, Becoming less judgmental of others, Experiencing God's grace	Living with uncertainty, Embracing a pragmatic worldview, Viewing Christianity as too narrow, Lacking experiential grace

This side-by-side comparison reveals some of the similarities and differences between those that stayed and those that left. One interesting observation was that of causation. The various events that catalyzed the doubt were nearly identical between those evangelicals who stayed and those that left. Both groups experienced pain, suffering, and betrayal. Both groups observed fellow Christians who let them down. Both groups tended to compare their level of certainty with the level of certainty of their peers. Both groups experienced disappointment with God. This common theme among the participants derived from a sense that God's promises did not seem to work for them.

One interviewee said that he felt like "God delivered a truck load of empty goods." This is after years of strict discipline, fasting, and claiming the promises of God from the Bible. Another interviewee claimed the promises of Psalm 91 for months when he was going through a trial, but in the end God did not come through and he felt abandoned by God. Both of these participants came back to God and the church, but their expectations of God had been greatly altered. The similarities between the causation of doubt in the two groups was telling. Ultimately, whether one stayed or left the faith depended upon one's response and willful choices.

Because doubt created such cognitive dissonance, the participants tried a variety of strategies to rid themselves of this feeling of being divided. One previously mentioned negative strategy was isolation. So many of the participants said they felt like they were the only one who had these doubts. Others talked about how taboo doubt was in their community or commented on how they had never heard a single sermon dealing with the topic of doubt.

A major difference for those who stayed in the fold was that they found someone who would listen to their doubts in a nonjudgmental way. Also, they were able to find people in their evangelical communities who had been through a similar experience. Those that left the fold never found such support. One participant who left the church had never verbalized his doubts to someone in an evangelical context. He tried to suppress his doubts, pray them away, and ignore them, but he simply could not rid his mind of these "nagging doubts." Another interviewee that left never found someone to process her doubts with. She found some semblance of help in the Catholic Church but only felt condemned when she would bring up these issues with her evangelical friends.

According to the research it appears that the evangelical emphasis on certainty creates an environment that discourages doubters from expressing their doubts.

The two groups possessed similarities and differences when it came to the consequences of those strategies. Both groups came to the realization that they would have to live with uncertainty. The choice was to live with uncertainty with God or to live with uncertainty without God. One participant used an analogy to describe what it was like living with uncertainty:

> I want it to all be neat and contained in a nice little box, and you put it all together, and everything has its place—this goes here, and this goes here. But some things aren't going to fit, whether that's understanding how the dualism of sovereignty and free will co-exist. Some of that may have to just hang out a little bit. We may not get our heads around it, you know? Good and evil. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Those that remained in the evangelical faith found a way to integrate doubt into their life of faith. They came to peace with themselves and with doubt. Many expressed that doubt was simply a part of their spiritual DNA which enabled them to embrace a healthier view of themselves and the issues of shame that so often accompany doubt. Another key component of this integration was understanding that God was not threatened or bothered by their doubts. This realization came over a long period of time of studying and processing this with a nonjudgmental friend or pastor.

In contrast, those that left the fold could not see the possible coexistence of doubt and faith. Because many of them viewed faith as synonymous with certainty, they could not comprehend how doubt and faith could actually complement each other. They felt like God had let them down, the Bible was full of too many contradictions, and prayer was a waste of time. Rather than processing these issues, they concluded that taking God out of the equation would ease their dissonance. According to about seventy percent of

those interviewed, leaving the faith made them happier. One participant said it felt like a burden had been lifted off her shoulders.

Another major difference between the two groups was the grace factor. Five out of six of the doubters who stayed talked about experiencing the grace of God as a major reason they remained in the fold. Many of these doubters previously had a perfectionistic mindset about their Christian practice. When they encountered the grace of God in a fresh way, it gave them hope. It also allowed them to accept themselves before God, "doubts and all."

For those who left, grace never entered the conversation. One interviewee who left for atheism quoted Ephesians 2:8-9 as evidence that God did not give him this faith. Another participant who left seemed obsessed with the concept of hell and viewed God as judgmental. The researcher does not intend to infer that those who left the fold are not gracious people, quite the contrary. The majority of those who left the church were very kind, open, and eager to engage in this subject matter. For those who stayed within the evangelical fold, grace appeared to be a key factor. At the same time it was obvious that grace seemed to be missing in the stories of those who left.

Another fact not illustrated in the side-by-side summary was where the various leavers ultimately landed. Two of the leavers described themselves as agnostic, two as atheist, one Buddhist, and one Catholic. Many of the leavers struggled to find a term that would fit their current philosophical and religious state. One man who became agnostic described himself as a "Bapnostic." By this, he wanted to communicate that he had doubted from a particular evangelical framework. Some of the interviewees who left the fold wanted to continue some form of engagement with the researcher. One participant

sent the researcher a video link of a comedian who talked about her journey of walking away from God and still another participant sent the researcher this quote: "One added comment: What is the salvation experience? It's a chemical reaction created in the brain brought on by emotional manipulation. Christianity has a way of hooking people mentally and emotionally. It's the greatest story of all time."

How the Church Responded

By and large, the church did not respond in a helpful manner to those who were struggling with doubt. The main problem was that to express doubt out loud was viewed by the participants as unacceptable or even taboo. In the six interviewees who left the fold, five out of six did not find an empathetic evangelical friend or pastor that would help them process their doubt. Fifty percent of the doubters who left never told anyone until they were past the point of no return.

By contrast, those that stayed in the fold eventually found a person(s) to help them process their doubt. One doubter found a professor who would listen to his doubts, another doubter found a pastor who listened to her doubts in a kind, nonjudgmental way. Another interviewee talked about the importance of a godly, elderly mentor who validated his doubts. Initially, all of the participants commented on a negative experience with the church. Many felt they were patronized and dismissed. Others were told "you just have to have faith." One of the doubters felt deep-seated betrayal by the very pastor who led him to Christ. However, for those who stayed, they eventually found someone who would be there for them and help them process their doubts. All of the interviewees, those who left and those who stayed, lamented that they felt they had no safe place to

process their doubts. One participant who stayed in the fold summarized how a caring

community of friends helped her through this season of doubt. She said,

> They did not pretend to create facts where facts were not possible. They did not try to insist on dogmatic belief. They very patiently listened and guided me to explore these questions for myself. But most important of all, they listened. The questions tumbled out in a disorganized heap. I was all over the place in terms of questioning the intellectual factors, the philosophical factors, and the rationale for a "God" in the first place, the problem of evil and suffering, apostasy, antinomy of free will and sovereignty. In some ways I had to go back to the very beginning of "what is truth." I explored God in a very intellectual capacity not allowing for any relational pursuit. Again and again I tried to reduce God to an intellectual or even philosophical schema; but that left me with a God based on my own-self-obtained knowledge (too limited), scientific datum (too austere), or humanistic philosophies (too hopeless). I was attempting to make this about me and my effort.

This quote underscores the importance of empathetic rather than judgmental listening on

the part of the evangelical community.

Conclusion

The research data collected in this project came from the field interviews,

theoretical memos, and other documents sent to the researcher by the participants. The

data was coded using open, axial, and selective coding. Six main categories gleaned from

the open codes were that these participants desired epistemological certainty, processed

painful events, avoided shame through isolation, lived with uncertainty and ambiguity,

sought validation through community, and, for those who left the fold, viewed

Christianity as pragmatically ineffective. The selective code revealed that the main

concern all of the participants were attempting to address was cognitive dissonance.

A grounded theoretical model on doubt was developed from the data to show the

process these evangelicals went through in their journey with doubt. The model allowed

the researcher to view someone's journey through doubt that ultimately ended in the

decision to live with uncertainty in the context of community. Some chose to live with uncertainty with fellow evangelicals, while others chose to leave evangelicalism for an alternative community.

A side-by-side summary of those who left and those that stayed revealed commonalities and differences between the two groups. This summary focused on classic grounded theory questions of what caused the doubt, what were the actions taken in response to the doubt, and what were the consequences of these actions. Causation among the two groups of doubters was virtually identical. The big difference between those who stayed and those who left rested on two primary factors: The first was whether or not the doubter found an accepting friend(s) to help process the doubt. The second was whether or not the doubter experienced the grace of God in a fresh way.

From the data drawn from this fieldwork, the researcher concluded that the church could do a better job of providing a safe place to doubt. In some participants' journey through doubt, the church was involved in their lives and responded in a helpful way. But by and large, the church did not respond this way, or these particular individuals were too fearful to bring up their doubts for fear of rejection. As a matter of fact, many of the doubters in both groups attempted to engage someone in the church and were rejected. This data provides for the creation of more effective pathways to assist people in dealing with their doubt.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND STRATEGY

Introduction

The problem this project addressed was the difficulty of some evangelical

Christians to integrate doubt into their life of faith. In response to this problem the

researcher examined a biblical overview of doubt, reviewed relevant literature dealing

with the history of Christians who struggled with doubt as well as the philosophic soil

that has allowed doubt to flourish, and interviewed evangelical Christians who have dealt

with doubt. The fieldwork section looked at the similarities and differences between

those doubters who stayed in the evangelical fold and those who left. A grounded theory

model was developed based upon the data gathered in the interviews.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out a basic strategy to help evangelical

Christians and pastors guide people through their struggle with doubt. There are two

strategies. The first strategy is for pastors who are helping others process doubt and the

second is for people who are actually going through a season of doubt. This chapter also

reveals how the theological, historical, philosophical, and personal interviews are

connected. In other words, this chapter shows how all the elements of this thesis tell one

story.

Summary of Biblical Study, Literature Review, and Field Work

Throughout the pages of the Bible, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of

Gethsemane, one can find men and women struggling with doubt. The theological section

gave a sweeping overview of doubt in the Scriptures and grounded this phenomenon in

humankind's nature and the Fall. The researcher argued that men and women were wired

for doubt even before the Fall, but obviously The Fall exacerbated the tendency to

question God. Making necessary distinctions between faith, certainty, and doubt was a

crucial piece to this project. The researcher revisited passages on faith in the letter to the

Hebrews, chapter eleven. He also examined doubt in James, chapter one, in order to show

necessary nuances between doubt, faith, and certainty. The conclusion of this exegetical

section was to recast faith as a trust relationship with another person, as in marriage. The

researcher argued that this viewpoint is more faithful to Scripture than the viewpoint of

faith as a purely cognitive endeavor intended to achieve absolute certainty about

particular propositions concerning God.

One of the primary goals of demonstrating how doubt is rooted in Scripture was

to normalize it as a neutral phenomenon and show how doubt was integrated into a life of

faith by Job and Thomas in the Bible. Doubt is a multifaceted word in the Bible. At

times, it can be sinful. But it has other meanings. Job revealed how pain and suffering

serve as a major cause of doubt in the life of a believer. Job ranted and railed against God

for many chapters in this story and somehow came out on the other side. Job poured out

question after question that God never chose to answer, yet when God did appear on the

scene, Job was mysteriously satisfied. This story was instructive because it

communicated that God is big enough to handle the torrents of anger that Job brought

against him. Job doubted out loud. He cried. He raged. He chose to have an authentic

relationship with God rather than live with stoic indifference. When asked about how to

help those struggling with doubt or disappointment in God, Philip Yancey wrote:

> When I speak to college students, I challenge them to find a single argument
> against God in the older agnostics (Bertrand Russell, Voltaire, David Hume) or

the newer ones (Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris) that is not already included in books like Psalms, Job, Habakkuk, and Lamentations. I have respect for a God who not only gives us the freedom to reject him, but also includes the arguments we can use in the Bible. God seems rather doubt-tolerant, actually.[1]

Perhaps if more evangelical leaders would teach and write about a doubt-tolerant God, the people in the pew would not feel so isolated and alone in their doubts.

Many people interviewed for this project experienced being disappointed with God, especially in the area of unanswered prayer. It could be helpful to note that God did not answer Job's prayers the way he desired. Job forces Christians to face the reality that believers and unbelievers all go through the same intense pain and suffering. It is the normal Christian life and normal life on this planet. Because evangelicals have tended to place such a premium on absolute certainty, they have unintentionally ignored large portions of the Bible that give believers the permission to doubt and cry out to God in a transparent way.

The account of Thomas's doubting the resurrection is one of the most popular stories of doubt in the Bible. Thomas had the gall to question his fellow disciples in their belief in the resurrection and demanded empirical evidence in order to believe. Jesus granted Thomas' request in the upper room appearance and only gave him a gentle admonishment for his doubt. Jesus does not grant people such empirical evidence today and neither did he give such evidence to the millions of people in first century Rome. The story of Thomas is instructive because like Job, Thomas was willing to doubt out loud in the context of community.

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[1] Philip Yancey, "Faith and Doubt," accessed December 8, 2014, http://philipyancey.com/q-and-a-topics/faith-and-doubt.

The fieldwork interviews revealed that in the midst of their doubt, the participants did not feel like they had such freedom to verbalize their doubts. Some interviewees never articulated their doubts to another person until they had already left the fold. Derek Rishmawy writes,

> Many evangelicals struggle with the tension of hiding their intellectual doubts from their church for fear of being rejected by their community or their pastors. And yet hiding doubts is precisely how they begin to fester and grow to an unmanageable (and damaging) size.[2]

Thomas teaches the believer and perhaps the unbeliever to express doubts in the presence of others so they will not fester. One wonders what would have happened to Job or what would have happened to Thomas if they had kept their doubts to themselves, battling internally with intense cognitive dissonance.

The literature review section examined doubt by looking at some of the influential leaders in the history of the church, such as Augustine, Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis, and Mother Teresa. Millions of believers have been affected by these prolific leaders, but the doubt-side of their faith has been virtually neglected. Reading about their struggles with doubt should give modern day believers (and doubters) hope and the realization that they are not alone. Among the research participants, one of the most common negative strategies of dealing with doubt and cognitive dissonance was to stay in the shadows and not tell anyone about their doubt. But when one reads about such titans of the faith like Martin Luther and Mother Teresa struggling with doubt, it normalizes the doubts that a contemporary person is facing.

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[2] Derek Rishmawy, "Should Evangelicals Care about Gungor's Doubts?" *Christ and Pop Culture,* (posted August 5, 2014), accessed December 10, 2014, http://christandpopculture.com/evangelicals-care-gungors-doubts/.

Another part of the literature review section gave a brief philosophical overview in the Western world to demonstrate how modernism and postmodernism laid the groundwork for a culture of doubt. Understanding the philosophical soil that has produced a society prone to doubt and skepticism was necessary for the researcher to show why this propensity to question everything has flourished in the years following the Enlightenment. Modern philosophers like Descartes and Kant gave the impression that humans could attain certainty through reason and empirical investigation. Descartes, though a Christian, developed a method of doubt that led to the marginalization of belief in God and the supernatural. Evangelicals engaged this quest for certainty by grounding their beliefs in what they came to consider the absolute, objective truth of the Bible. In other words, evangelicals became as equally concerned with certainty as the secular intellectuals of the day. The assumption, made by both evangelical Christians and secular thinkers, was that if one cannot prove something rationally and empirically, then it does not count for real knowledge.

Postmodern thinkers like Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault challenged the rational objectivity of the entire Enlightenment project. This philosophic movement deconstructed the perceived certainty of the modernist tradition. Postmodernism replaced objectivism with subjectivism and ushered in an age of epistemological and ethical relativism. The positive effects of postmodernism was that it seems to provide a place at the table for all worldviews and it had the courage to admit that the certainty claimed by so many modernist thinkers was actually a mirage.

The one-on-one interviews with various evangelical doubters revealed the influence of these titanic philosophical movements. The quest for certainty prevalent in

the stories of most interviewees was reflective of the modernist optimism that mere humans could achieve absolute certainty. Much of the cognitive dissonance the participants experienced could be linked to the rationalistic mindset that everything, especially God and the Bible, should make logical sense if it were accepted as truth. The trite evangelical epistemological phrase, "You've got to know that you know that you know," reflected a more Cartesian than biblical model of knowledge. The postmodern undercurrent of the interviews appeared when the participants came to embrace uncertainty. These doubters let go of the quest for having all the answers and chose to live with uncertainty. Four out of the six that left the evangelical fold talked about how Christianity just did not work for them anymore. This statement was an example of the postmodern sentiment that people will begin to make decisions about their lives on a pragmatic rather than a theological basis.

The theological, historical, philosophical, and personal accounts of those interviewed tell one story: The story of being finite and human. There exists a long line of doubters from Job to Thomas and from Luther to Lewis, leading all the way to the twelve men and women interviewed for this project. Doubting is not unique to a person or a time period. It is the nature of being a finite human living in a complex world filled with pain and disappointment and questions about existence that will never be answered. Doubting is biblical, historical, and normal for many Christians who are trying to follow God in their lifetimes. It takes courage to face uncertainty and to live with doubts that will never completely go away.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, recently admitted his own personal doubts. The New York Times reported that, "He told an audience at Bristol Cathedral that

there were moments where he wondered, 'Is there a God? Where is God?' Then, asked

specifically if he harbored doubts, he responded, 'It is a really good question.'"[3] This

authentic and vulnerable moment of coming clean was pounced upon by atheist reporters

and Muslim scholars in the UK who publicly attacked the leader of the Church of

England for making such an honest admission.[4] On the other hand, millions of Christian

doubters who have had similar thoughts were probably relieved by Welby's courageous

statement of faith. Paul Tillich says it well, "Doubt is overcome, … By courage. Courage

does not deny that there is doubt, but it takes the doubt into itself as an expression of its

own finitude. Courage does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction. It

includes the risk without which no creative life is possible."[5]

Two Flex Strategies

Introduction

In his book, *Benefit of the Doubt*, pastor and scholar Gregory Boyd talked about

how most evangelicals have a belief system about the Bible that is similar to a house of

cards. Therefore, when a person starts to doubt one part of the Bible, like how Jonah

stayed alive in the belly of a fish for three days or how the serpent spoke fluent Hebrew

in Genesis chapter three, then their entire theology crumbles to the ground. Boyd refers to

this as an "all-or-nothing"[6] mentality that demands one to have absolute certainty about

everything that is written in the Scripture. In this house of cards system, there is no

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[3] Julia Baird, "Doubt as a Sign of Faith," *New York Times*, posted September 25, 2014, accessed December 11, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/26/opinion/julia-baird-doubt-as-a-sign-of-faith.html.

[4] Baird.

[5] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001)*,* 117-118.

[6] Boyd, 16.

middle ground and no room for doubt. The problem with this construct is that it has zero flexibility.

Perhaps a better way to look at one's beliefs was suggested by one of the interviewees, who is a sociologist and a consultant to pastors by trade. He suggested that evangelicals need to develop a belief system that is "earthquake proof." Following the major earthquake in Mexico City in 1985, engineers developed building structures that were virtually quake proof. They designed them with the ability to be rigid and sturdy but also with the ability to move and bend at the same time. This type of balance is needed in the evangelical community today to help Christians survive the internal and external quakes that will challenge the super structure of their lives. They need to find a way to build a practical theology that is both flexible and sturdy. Therefore pastors and leaders in the church today need a strategy that will equip them to help those in their ministry process the challenge of doubt. The development of such a strategy was one of the primary goals of this research project. The first strategy in this section is for pastors and leaders who shepherd others through doubt. The second strategy is for individuals who are currently in a season of doubt (see table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Two Flex Strategies

Flex Strategy for Pastors	Flex Strategy for Doubters
Plan a Teaching Series on Doubt	You Are Normal
Give Listeners Room to Doubt on Regular Basis	You Are Not Alone
Acknowledge that Life is Full of Uncertainty	You Are in a Place that Requires Help from Others
Listen in a Non-judgmental Way	Find Some Helpful Resources
Diagnose the Type of Doubt at Hand	Surrender to the Process
Provide a Safe Place for People to Doubt	Make up Your Bed and Go to the Park
	Know that God is Bigger than Your Doubts

A Flex Strategy for Pastors

The following strategy for pastors and leaders is to equip them to meet the challenge of doubt that some believers will face in their relationships with God. This strategy will help these leaders deal with doubt from a pulpit and pastoral perspective.

If the leader has a platform to speak, preach, or teach, he or she needs to address the common doubts and fears that are present in the hearts and minds of the people whom they address. The following three strategies are helpful.

Plan a Teaching Series on Doubt

First, one of the best ways to deal with doubt is to bring it into the light and to talk about it in an authentic manner. The in-depth interviews referenced in Chapter Five revealed that secrecy was one of the primary ways that people coped with doubt. Although this coping mechanism was ineffective, it was common. A teaching series about doubt would be a great way to bring it out in the open. Choose a provocative title and promote it in advance to garner interest. Some possible titles are "The Benefit of Doubt," "Without a Doubt," "Reasonable Doubt," "I Doubt," or "Doubting Faith." The researcher recommends that the pastor or leader could cover the following four sub-topics in this series.

Know doubt. This introduction to doubt could cover a personal testimony of doubt or a story of an influential Christian who battled with doubt. It would be necessary to distinguish between faith, doubt, and unbelief in this teaching. The story of John the Baptist doubting while in prison would be a good text to start the series. Years ago, the researcher did a five week series on doubt on Sunday evenings in his local church. Many people responded enthusiastically to this teaching because it appeared to be a topic with

which many people were struggling, but about which nobody wanted to talk. The researcher began the series of talks by telling his own story about how he struggled with doubt for many years. This testimony set the tone for the rest of the talks because it leveled the ground between the "preacher" and the "parishioner."

If the leader has experienced a season of doubt in his or her journey, it would be helpful to start with that person's own account. But if the leader has not and does not struggle with doubt, then another option would be to tell the story about a Christian leader who has battled with doubt. For example, one could tell the story of C.S. Lewis' doubt, but not mention his identity or name until the end of the story. It would also build intrigue to put some quotes up on a screen from famous doubters, and later reveal who the author of these quotes were. Mother Teresa's or Martin Luther's journeys would be helpful to mention. This method will gain the communicator trust and credibility when addressing such an emotional and personal topic.

Dangerous doubt. This message could focus on the only kind of doubt that is dangerous, which is the kind that is not admitted. The leader should address the pitfalls of suppressing doubts and doubting in isolation. The story of Thomas' doubts concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ would be a good text, which could also lead into the following message.

In this message, one would want to define the difference between faith, doubt, and unbelief. Many of the interviewees from this project expressed relief when they stopped equating their doubt with unbelief. Distinguishing these key terms by revisiting the passages in James chapter one and Hebrews chapter eleven like the researcher did could be helpful.

In addition to the story of Thomas, one might also refer to Job as another example of a person who was not afraid to doubt out loud. Though Job's suffering doubt differs from Thomas' factual doubt, they both doubted out loud and within their respective communities.

Doubt proof. This teaching could deal with some apologetic issues related to the resurrection or another apologetic topic. Apologetics will not make anyone doubt-proof, but it can encourage believers that there are some reliable intellectual foundations to their faith. 1 Corinthians 15 could be a good text, along with some help from books by Lee Strobel or other apologists. The success of such an approach depends on the academic inclinations of one's congregation.

During nearly every interview, each evangelical doubter expressed some "classic Christian doubts" in their journey with God. Many in this research project voiced doubts and questions surrounding God's existence, God's goodness in light of suffering, the truthfulness of the Bible, and the nature of Jesus Christ. As many apologists like C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, and Gary Habermas would attest, giving some cogent intellectual answers to people who are asking these questions can be beneficial. Some Christian college students are bombarded by skeptical friends and professors without any defense. If pastors and leaders would address these issues more often, it would give students and others more confidence in these situations. Doing series like these on doubt are helpful, but many pastors like Tim Keller and Bill Hybels often interject apologetic side bars into their weekly sermons to help answer these types of questions.

Living doubt. This message could address the reality that doubt may be a life-long struggle. Also, it would be helpful to cover how the Christian faith is to be lived out and

not just thought about. Psalm 88 or another Psalm of lament could be a useful text, along with a few quotes from Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was the philosopher who emphasized action over mere theory. When someone is caught in the doom loop of doubt, it is easy for them to start "living inside their head." Several of the people interviewed for this project mentioned that phenomenon and how dangerous that can be to one's spiritual and emotional health. Kierkegaard vigorously attacked the idea that Christianity is just believing in your mind certain propositions about God, and conversely promoted the idea that Christianity is to be a lived reality, a way of life.

By delving into Psalm 88, the pastor or leader could teach his listeners about the importance of lament in the Bible. The evangelical community seems to emphasize joy and victory to the neglect of suffering and lament. By exegeting this Psalm, which does not have a sense of resolve like most other Psalms, the preacher could show that some have to live their entire lives with dissonance. Mentioning examples from chapter two of this project like Martin Luther's life long struggle with doubt or Mother Teresa's life long struggle with doubt would be informative.

This teaching series on doubt was informed by the theological, philosophical, and personal research conducted in this project. Theologically, evangelicals tend to shy away from questions, doubts, and biblical passages that leave more things unanswered than answered. This series will allow the leader to address some issues that many struggle with but do not talk about. Reflecting on the doubts of John the Baptist, Job, the Psalmist, and Thomas will validate the listeners own bout with doubt. Also, when they discover that key church leaders in the history of the faith doubted, it will give them the ability to place their own doubts in a proper context. Philosophically, understanding just a little bit

about how modernism and postmodernism has provided a fertile soil for doubt to grow

will help them to understand why doubt is so prevalent in Western culture. Personally,

most of the people interviewed, both those who stayed and left the church, expressed that

doubt was a taboo subject in their evangelical religious experience. Perhaps by teaching

on this subject in an open and biblical way, many evangelicals will be spared the trauma

of living alone in their doubts or even worse leaving the church altogether.

Give Listeners Room to Doubt on a Regular Basis

In most of the field research interviews, doubters frequently expressed the need to

have a safe place to doubt. Tim Keller, the prolific writer and pastor at Redeemer

Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, is a great example of someone who gives people room

to doubt in his public preaching. Keller recognized early in his ministry how much New

Yorkers value personal freedom and has presented his sermons in such a way that he

regularly acknowledges the doubts and fears of the people in his church.

Giving listeners room to doubt does not mean that the speaker is encouraging

them to doubt. It does mean that the communicator will frequently use disclaimer

statements in his or her teaching like, "I know many of you here today are struggling with

doubt. I want you to know you have come to a safe place." Another option is simply to

acknowledge the different perspectives people are bringing into the gathering. For

example, "I know there are some here today who are trying to figure out if God is real or

if he cares about your life. Others of you here have no doubt about the reality of God and

his involvement in your life." These side-bar statements make believers and unbelievers

feel more engaged in what the speaker has to say. They give people permission to

struggle and not have it all together. Communicating this way is another way to provide space for people to question.

Another way one could address the topic more often would be to demonstrate how the Christian life is a journey and not a destination. Teaching others to view the Christian life as a relational process rather than mental assent to propositions will be useful to many. Although one must be careful in the use of marriage analogies, the marriage relationship does help capture the idea that the Christian life is full of highs and lows, intimacy and distance. With such a picture, the preacher can help listeners normalize the lows and the distance of a season of doubt.

Acknowledge that Life is Full of Uncertainty

One of the greatest gifts a leader could give to people under his or her watch would be to utter these four powerful words: "I do not know." The confession to a group of Christians by the preacher that he or she does not have all the answers and that life is full of mysteries will give hope to others struggling to make sense of life. The overall feeling this researcher received from evangelical leaders growing up in a fundamentalist church was quite the opposite. For most, it was considered simply unacceptable to admit to any weakness, or to acknowledge that one does not have all the answers, or that many times Christians will experience the same lack of certainty and the same pain as their "pagan" neighbors. One of the doubters interviewed for this project who eventually became an atheist revealed that he never told his fundamentalist parents about his doubts. He didn't think they or anyone else could relate or understand. That's why this strategy of acknowledging life's uncertainties is so crucial. Paul's doxology at the end of Romans chapter eleven is helpful:

> Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
>   How unsearchable his judgments,
>   and his paths beyond tracing out!
> Who has known the mind of the Lord?
>   Or who has been his counselor?"
> Who has ever given to God,
>   that God should repay them?
> For from him and through him and for him are all things.
>   To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Rom. 11:22-36)

This passage in Romans is particularly instructive because it blatantly acknowledges the gap between God's knowledge and man's knowledge. Paul stated clearly that God's ways are unclear to mere humans and that we cannot understand the depths of who He is and what he does. Epistemic humility would greatly increase the ethos of believers to non-believers and these verses by Paul accomplish that.

Another passage in Hebrews chapter eleven talks about a group of unknown "others."

> There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Heb. 11:35-40)

The earlier passage in Hebrews 11:1-35a speaks of all the heroes of faith who saw God intervene in their lives in a miraculous way. No one knows why God rescued some and chose not to rescue others. No one has the perfect understanding of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man that Paul infers in Romans eleven. This is an unknown. The point pastors can make here is that true faith is all about trusting God in the midst of uncertainty. The false idea that faith is having this one hundred percent sense of

psychological certainty that somehow manipulates God into getting you what you want

needs to be debunked here. There is no reason why God came through in this life for

some of the heroes of faith in Hebrews eleven and why he did not come through in this

life for others. It had nothing to do with their certainty. Therefore, pastors do not need to

offer a guarantee that God will answer their prayers in a manner that pleases them. When

and how God chooses to intervene is strictly up to him. Christians can be certain that God

will be with them, but they cannot be certain that he will deliver them or intervene in this

earthly realm. That is uncertain and up to God alone.

Donald Rumsfeld most recently served as Secretary of Defense under George W.

Bush from 2001 to 2006. He offered a secular view of uncertainty that the media

ignorantly mocked, even though it was true and intellectually helpful. Addressing a

reporter's question as to what evidence he had of Iraqi terrorist links, Rumsfeld replied,

"There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known

unknowns. That is to say, that there are things that we know we don't know. But there are

also unknown unknowns. These are things that we don't know we don't know."[7] Of

course Rumsfeld's quote referred to our nation's war on terror, but his words have

theological implications as well. God reveals himself to us through nature, through his

Word, and through Christ. These are the things we know. Then there are things about

God and his ways that we do not know and things about God we do not know and may

never know. God's word says in Isaiah 55:8-9.

> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
> neither are your ways my ways,"
> declares the LORD.

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[7] Richard Cohen, "Donald Rumsfeld's Battle with Truth," *Washington Post*, April 7, 2014, accessed December 11, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/richard-cohen-donald-rumsfelds-battle-with-truth/2014/04/07/e2ee3928-be7e-11e3-b195-dd0c1174052c_story.html.

> "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
> so are my ways higher than your ways
> and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Evangelical leaders could learn a lot from Paul, Hebrews, Isaiah, and Rumsfeld. A little epistemological humility goes a long way. Confessing that one does not understand God at times or that life does not always make sense is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength.

From a pastoral perspective, pastors and other leaders need to be compassionate and empathetic to those who are coming to them for help with their doubts on an individual basis. The following three steps should be helpful for any leader when counseling or talking with someone about their doubts.

Listen in a Non-judgmental Way

This research project revealed that evangelicals who are in a season of doubt fear being judged by family members, friends, and especially those in leadership of their particular organization. An approach of empathetic listening is imperative. Most doubters feel their entire world is caving in around them. This feeling comes from their new understanding that what they thought was real and true may be a myth. They are in a place of great psychological and spiritual pain. A quick one-liner from a pastor such as "Doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs" or "You've just got to believe" comes across as shallow and dismissive. There is some profound wisdom in those sayings, but it will take time for a doubter to be able to process those words. One of the interviewees who finally had the courage to tell another pastor about her doubts after being rejected as a youth, talked about the kindness in this pastor's approach and how initially he just

listened and did not try to answer all of her questions. "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."[8] Stephen Covey's wisdom still rings true.

Diagnose the Type of Doubt at Hand

When a person wrestling with doubt comes to a leader for help, the leader needs to know what type of doubt is at hand. There are many shades of doubt, both theological and experiential. Gary Habermas has written and lectured extensively on this subject. He divides doubt into three categories.

First, Habermas identifies "factual doubt." These are doubts that deal with classic Christian questions concerning the existence of God, the veracity of Scripture, and the historicity of Jesus Christ. In this case, Habermas suggests offering the person some good apologetic literature.

Second, there is "emotional doubt." This is doubt that is related to one's psychological state or perhaps a wound in one's past. Many times doubters equate faith with feelings, so when the feelings are not there, doubt can ensue.

Third, Habermas identifies "volitional doubt." This kind of doubt deals with issues concerning one's salvation or the willful choice not to repent of certain sins or obey clear commands in Scripture. Often it takes time to get down to the issues of the will with someone.[9]

Knowing that there are different types of doubt will help a pastor not fall into a one-size-fits-all mentality. Once a pastor is able to diagnose the kind of doubt his or her

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[8] Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 247.

[9] Gary R. Habermas, *Dealing with Doubt*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990) online edition, (accessed December 11, 2014) http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/dealing_with_doubt/dealing_with_doubt.htm.

parishioner is grappling with, then they will know what type of help to offer. It is easy to assume all doubts fall into the factual category and that all a person needs is a good book on apologetics. As this project revealed, doubt is usually more complex rather than simple. Habermas' three categories of doubt will help pastors avoid that mistake.

Provide a Safe Place for People to Doubt

Throughout the fieldwork interviews, those doubters who stayed in the church and those doubters who left voiced this desire multiple times: "I wish I had had a safe place to doubt when I was going through that season in my life." One of the primary reasons evangelical Christians doubt alone is because they do not feel safe to tell anyone what is happening in their lives. A pastor or leader can provide a safe place to doubt by simply refusing to panic or by avoiding the attempt to fix the person's doubts too quickly. If a leader can simply provide an accepting environment for the person struggling, a lot of progress will be made. Derek Rishmawy offers this advice:

> I'm all for guarding the flock, teaching against false doctrine at appropriate moments, and so forth. And yet, evangelical pastors need to work on cultivating safe spaces for their people to ask the real questions they have, precisely so that they might hear good biblical answers *and* hear questions that allow them to question their own doubts.[10]

Grief Share, Divorce Care, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Celebrate Recovery have been safe places for people to process loss, relational pain, and addictions. Because of the prevalence of doubt, a support group for people going through doubt could help. The researcher does not make a recommendation about whether or not "doubt" should be in the name of the group, like "Doubter's Anonymous," or "Doubt Care," since such a decision should fit the context of the group. In general, the leader needs to assess the

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[10] Rishmawy.

situation in his or her context and tailor make it appropriately. Finding someone who has been through doubt to facilitate the group would make a lot of sense.

Overall, leaders and pastors need to communicate through words and actions that it is okay to have doubts. Leaders need to provide a safe a place to doubt by listening and being patient, and by waiting to see how God will work in the lives of the people who are struggling with doubt.

A Flex Strategy for Doubters

The following strategy is for evangelicals who are going through a season of doubt. These strategies are listed above in Table 6.1. It by no means exhaustively applies to all people and all doubters everywhere. At the same time, the wisdom and advice that follows flows from the experiences of many men and women who have spent a large amount of time, thought, and prayer dealing with doubt. According to the field research, pain and suffering, disappointment with God, and thoughts of being abnormal because of doubts led many into this secretive battle with doubt. This strategy for doubters is directly connected to the needs and experiences of both those that stayed and those that left the evangelical fold, as shown in Table 5.4's side-by-side summary.

Some linguists believe that the most powerful word in the English language is the word "you."[11] So the researcher suggests that the following recommendations be expressed directly to the doubter in the second person.

You are Normal

One of the most common emotions associated with doubt is shame. Psychology explains that guilt stems from the fact that one has *done something* wrong, but shame

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[11] Dorothy Leeds, *Power Speak: The Complete Guide to Successful Persuasion* (New York, NY: Berkley Books and Prentice Hall Press, 1988), 133-135.

says one *is* wrong.[12] If one is going through a period of doubt, a person may feel out of place and full of shame. It is common to look around at one's circle of Christian friends who seem to have no struggles with doubt. This makes one feel as if he or she is abnormal. They seem to "get it," but the person in question does not get it. One feels like having doubts means that one is not a Christian. Or, it means that if one is a Christian, then one is certainly not a good one. It feels as if most people do not wrestle with doubt. But the struggling doubter can rest assured that although one may feel abnormal, he or she is not abnormal. In fact, the opposite is true. The doubter is going through a very common and normal process.

You are Not Alone

The fact of the matter is the Bible is loaded with doubters. Adam and Eve doubted. Abraham doubted. Moses doubted. David doubted. Elijah doubted. Habakkuk doubted. Job doubted. John the Baptist doubted. Peter doubted. Jesus doubted. Doubt is a part of the process for many Christians and it is a part of being human. Church history reveals that there is a long line of doubters in the Christian faith. Augustine, Luther, C.S. Lewis, and Mother Teresa all struggled with doubt. Many contemporary writers like Philip Yancey, Anne Lamott, Os Guinness, and Brennan Manning have written very candidly about their nagging doubts. Doubters should not be deceived into thinking that they are alone in their doubts. There are doubters in the Bible. There are doubters throughout church history. There are doubters all around.

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[12] John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family: A New Way of Creating Solid Self-Esteem* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988), 2-3.

You are in a Place that Requires Help from Others

One of the most ineffective ways to deal with doubt is to keep it to oneself.

Perhaps a person thinks he or she can work this out on one's own. But most people

probably cannot. One of the most effective ways to deal with doubt is to doubt out loud.

In other words, a struggling doubter needs to tell a trusted friend, mentor, or pastor about

what one is battling. A person will need someone else to guide him or her through this

season and to help deal with the nuances of doubt. It may take time to find the right

person to help process one's doubt. But the doubter can be patient and trust that such

people will come into his or her life. Philip Yancey expresses his advice for finding

community for doubting in the following way:

> Inquisitiveness and questioning are inevitable parts of the life of faith. Where
> there is *certainty* there is no room for *faith*. I encourage people not to doubt alone,
> rather to find some people who are safe "doubt companions," and also to doubt
> their doubts as much as their faith. But it doesn't help simply to deny doubts or to
> feel guilty about them. After all, many people have been down that path before
> and have emerged with a strong faith.[13]

Yancey's idea of finding "doubt companions" is a helpful concept, as is his

encouragement for the doubter to hold on to the truth that many have gone this way

before and have ended up with strong faith.

Find Some Helpful Resources

There are many helpful resources that one can obtain about dealing with doubt.

These resources will help people know that they are normal, that they are not alone, and

will also serve as a companion to guide them through the turbulent seas of doubt. Some

popular books on doubt are *God in the Dark* by Os Guinness, *Reaching for the Invisible

God* by Philip Yancey, *The Myth of Certainty* by Daniel Taylor, and *The Benefit of Doubt*

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[13] Yancey.

by Gregory Boyd. Gary Habermas offers his book *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God* for free at his website. He breaks down doubt into three categories: factual doubt, emotional doubt, and volitional doubt. iTunes University offers free downloads of lectures that talk about doubt. Some good ones to start with would be Peter Enns' address "The Benefit of Doubt" at Azusa Pacific, Peter Kreeft's lecture on "Faith, Doubt, and Reason" at Villanova, The Ockenga Institute of Gordon Conwell Lecture Series on "Suffering and Doubt," and American Public Media interview with Jennifer Michael Hecht on "A History of Doubt."

Surrender to the Process

Because doubt can be so painful and relentless, it is easy to get frustrated when the doubt simply will not go away. Perhaps a doubter has tried prayer, reading the Bible, or a great book on doubt. Nevertheless, the doubts will not go away. They are still there. The doubter must refuse to worry, because for most people, dealing with doubt takes time. As difficult as it may seem, God may actually be doing a great work in one's life in the process of struggling through doubts. A doubter might say to himself or herself, "Well how can that be? I don't even know if God really exists right now?" God is bigger than one's thoughts and doubts. Most people who have been down this road of doubt will say that the doubter needs to surrender to the process. It does not mean that a person is passive. But it does mean that a person will have to let go of his or her time table for overcoming the doubts. Perhaps God is up to something. Philosopher Robert Baird hints at the kind of work God might be up to in permitting this season of doubt:

> Most basic beliefs and value commitments are initially inherited from parents, peers, and society at large. If these beliefs and commitments are not challenged by creative doubt, they tend to become simply verbal professions having little vitality. Creative doubt stimulates the evaluation of beliefs. Beliefs found wanting

may appropriately be discarded. Those found adequate may be reasserted with new vigor and life.[14]

This re-evaluation of beliefs, with the discarding of inadequate ones, is an important way in which God purges the Christian. It is important to surrender to it.

Make up Your Bed and Go to the Park

One doubter told this researcher that simply getting out of bed and going to take a walk at the park with a friend helped him process his doubt. In spite of the benefits to doubt just mentioned, one of the biggest quagmires doubt creates is that it can force a person to "live life in your head." A person feels like his or her head is about to explode because all these thoughts, ideas, Bible verses, and contradictions cannot be reconciled. Hours and days of one's life can be spent not really living but instead thinking. One of the most influential Christians in the protestant tradition, Martin Luther, known for his great faith and courage for standing up to the entire Roman Catholic Church, struggled greatly with doubt. He called it *anfechtungen.* Here is a bit of his practical advice to fellow strugglers: "Be with people. Do not isolate yourself. Listen to music. Exercise. Drink. Have sex with your spouse. Wrestle with God like Jacob. Let a friend speak truth to you."[15] Luther compares these remedies to putting one's trust in a doctor while sick. He says that sometimes a sick person feels he's getting sicker, while a doctor who knows the disease says, "No, you are actually getting better." Luther's advice is to trust the doctor. In other words, the doubter should trust the friend and his or her counsel rather than one's immediate thoughts and feelings.[16]

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[14] Robert M. Baird, "The Creative Role of Doubt in Religion," *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1980), accessed April 14, 2014 http://www.jstor.org/stable/27505571, 172-179.

[15] Marty, Kindle edition 336-345.

[16] Marty, Kindle edition 336-345.

Know that God is Bigger than Your Doubts

When a person battles with doubt, one of the biggest temptations is to internalize those doubts and not talk to God about it. But it is better to doubt out loud, as Job and Thomas did. When looking at the stories of Job and Thomas, one will find two different people, living in two different contexts, dealing with two different kinds of doubt. Job's doubt came from the catastrophic loss he experienced whereas Thomas' doubt came from his inability to trust his friend's account that Jesus had risen from the dead. As different as these two men are, they both had the courage to doubt out loud. Job doubted to his friends and to God. As a matter of fact, Job raged against God. Thomas told his friends directly that he did not believe the news. He would need to see Jesus face-to-face for himself in order to believe. No matter how unpopular that was, both doubted out loud. God did not kick Job off the planet and Jesus did not kick Thomas out of the small group either. God is bigger than one's doubts and he desires that the struggling doubter talk to him about it. It can also be helpful to journal as a part of this process. Both strategies get this doubt out in the open. If there is a God and he is all knowing, the doubter might as well state it out loud, for his or her own sake, not for God's.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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About four years ago, this researcher experienced a rather intense battle with doubt precipitated by a series of painful events. He sought out a mentor who talked about how the Orthodox tradition in the Christian faith actually gives room for doubt. As time unfolded, two other Godly men told the researcher how much the Orthodox tradition had meant to them, and one of them mailed the researcher a book by Kallistos Ware simply entitled *The Orthodox Way*. While re-reading this book the researcher stumbled upon this

quote that seemed to encapsulate many of the thoughts and ideas presented in this project.

Ware wrote:

> Because faith is not logical certainty but a personal relationship, and because this personal relationship is as yet very incomplete in each of us and needs continually to develop further, it is by no means impossible for faith to coexist with doubt. The two are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps there are some who by God's grace retain throughout their life the faith of a little child, enabling them to accept without question all that they have been taught. For most of those living in the West today, however, such an attitude is simply not possible. We have to make our own the cry, "Lord, I believe: help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). For very many of us this will remain our constant prayer right up to the very gates of death. Yet doubt does not in itself signify lack of faith. It may mean the opposite—that faith is alive and growing. For faith implies not complacency but taking risks, not shutting ourselves off from the unknown but advancing boldly to meet it.[17]

Ware's commentary on faith, doubt, and certainty captured the essence of believers' thoughts and struggles with doubt in this modern/postmodern age. Those who have the gift of childlike faith and certainty do not need to be disturbed. On the other hand, those who wrestle with an invisible God in a time that encourages and promotes atheism should not be discarded for their lack of faith. Perhaps this project served as an impetus to encourage doubters and those that help them to launch out into their uncertainty contexts with boldness and grace.

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[17] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 16.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

Writing this dissertation on evangelical doubt has been a welcomed blessing for this researcher. He has always desired to push further into the subject of doubt, especially its theological and philosophical roots. This year of studying, writing, researching, and talking to a variety of people about their doubts has been a very meaningful experience. It is his desire that this experience will be translated into real life action that will help others who are dealing with doubt, as well as leaders who are helping others deal with doubt. This chapter offered an opportunity for the researcher to make some personal reflections on the research project and the entire Doctor of Ministry cohort journey.

Reflections on the Dissertation

As mentioned in Chapter One, the researcher has personally struggled with doubt in his own life. Starting at the age of 22, he began to question why God was not answering his prayers the way he expected. He was involved in the charismatic renewal movement, which was different from his Southern Baptist upbringing, and was enjoying the way God was working in him and in his friends' lives in a fresh way. Through teaching and the reading of the Bible, he began to believe that God could do supernatural wonders through him and his group if they simply fasted and prayed. After many failed attempts at seeing God's hand move in a miraculous way, he began to have doubts. The doubts were simple at first: "Why isn't this working?" Then they progressed further, from

"Does God really answer prayer and do miracles?" to "Does God really exist?" These thoughts began to swirl in the mind of the researcher for months, which turned in to years. He poured over apologetic literature, read books on inner healing, and even tried to have a pastor cast out the demon of doubt, but nothing worked. He continued to pray, read the Bible, and go to church, but the doubts remained.

Finally, the researcher ran across a book by Os Guinness called *God in the Dark* that began to give him some hope. Simultaneously, he began listening to a British Bible study teacher talk about the grace of God. Then, he found an Episcopalian writer named Leanne Payne. Payne described what happens to a person going through doubt as the rational side of the mind eating up the intuitive side of the mind. This gave the researcher some light because someone was able to describe this condition. Over time, most of the doubts subsided, but other doubts still remain and have simply taken a different form. This autobiography of the researcher's doubt provided a good part of the backdrop for this project.

Strengths

It is difficult for the researcher to accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of a project of this magnitude because so much work was done by so many people to make this a reality. Nevertheless, he was able to identify several strengths.

First, this thesis dealt with a neglected subject matter. Doubt seemed to be a problem not just for the researcher but for many people he attempted to pastor. Doubt was like the elephant in the room that no one wanted to address. Fortunately, there are evangelicals like Philip Yancey, Gregory Boyd, and Daniel Taylor who are writing and speaking about the subject. Peter Enns would be another recent scholar who is passionate

about doubt. But by and large, doubt goes neglected in most evangelical circles and when it is addressed, it appears to be a mere footnote and not a real issue.

Second, the project allowed the researcher to give a sweeping overview of the subject. The theological and philosophical sections allowed the researcher to give a broad overview rather than just hone in on one passage or one particular philosopher. This provided a large context on the subject matter that in turn allowed him to get into the details of doubt in the one-on-one interviews.

Third, the thesis project allowed the researcher to enter the fieldwork with an open mind. The researcher took the advice of his thesis advisor and chose the grounded theory method for the fieldwork. There were traces of phenomenology as well. These two methodological approaches helped the researcher bracket his own experience and knowledge and listen to the interviewees for fresh insights on the subject.

Weaknesses

The project did have weaknesses in addition to strengths. Because it was a sweeping overview, the theological section neglected some key passages on doubt like Psalm 88 and the Book of Habakkuk. These passages delve into the psychological and theological hearts and minds of people who are passionately doubting out loud to God.

Second, because of time constraints the researcher conducted only twelve in-depth interviews. There was much more data on doubt left out in the field due to the reality of work responsibilities and making deadlines. If time and money were no issue, the researcher would have enjoyed doubling to tripling the number of in-depth interviews as well as following up with a control group to test the grounded theory.

Third, because of the nature of the methodology and issues of confidentiality, the

individual stories of the various doubters could not be shared completely. If the

researcher had been able to include the full versions of stories of the interviewees, he

believes he could have discovered even more valuable information. For example, the

various vocations of the interviewees—three lawyers, one military special operations

officer, a politician, a clinical psychologist, and a sociologist/consultant—created deeper

layers of interest and helpful context. In another example, the backgrounds of the

interviewees demonstrated that doubt can strike any believer, regardless of his or her

upbringing. Some of the doubters grew up on the mission field and others were raised in

affluence. No one is impervious to doubt. But the limited scope of the thesis project

excluded such helpful context.

<div align="center">*Potential Topics for Further Research*</div>

On some level, the subject of doubt is as mysterious and vast as the oceans of the

world. There are too many oceans to be explored in one's lifetime and what lies beneath

the surface will forever remain a mystery. They are examples of what Rumsfeld called

"known unknowns." At the same time, there are many areas in relation to doubt that

would be worthy of exploration.

For example, a research project could look at different personality profiles and

personality types to see if some are more or less susceptible than others to doubt. One

could use either the Myers-Briggs or the Jungian version of a personality inventory. This

would be an enlightening and helpful piece of the doubt puzzle to explore.

Another field of exploration is Catholic and Orthodox doubt. Looking at doubt

from these two influential branches of church history would provide a great contrast and

comparison research project. A researcher could ask, "Do these denominations process doubt better than evangelicals; or is it the other way around?" Perhaps there would be many common themes among Christian doubters, or perhaps strong patterns would emerge to demonstrate that one denomination or tradition handles doubt more helpfully.

Another interesting Doctor of Ministry investigation would be to look into doubt experienced by eastern religions. One could look at how Buddhists or Hindus process doubt. This would be enriching because of the vast difference between eastern and western religions. Their metaphysical viewpoint and epistemology are so different than the religions like Christianity and Islam that ground their beliefs in a book. So, a researcher could compare such traditions to investigate the different ways in which they handle doubt.

A final possible research horizon is the psychology of certainty. This would be a study of why humans crave certainty. As the researcher discussed, the quest for certainty fuels both religious and atheistic fundamentalism. He also demonstrated that this desire for certainty was the primary antecedent that each of his interviewees shared prior to his or her season of doubt. It is almost as if the psychology of certainty sets people up for doubt. A future researcher could investigate these connections.

Reflections on the Doctor of Ministry Journey

For this researcher, the entire doctor of ministry journey has transformed his life in several ways. First, it has allowed him to interact with Christians from all over the world from different types of denominations. This provided lively interactions inside and outside the classroom. This led to a real sense of community that was forged at that

particular time. It was inspiring to see how God was working in such a variety of ways through such a diverse array of people.

Second, the doctor of ministry journey helped the researcher deal more effectively with evaluating the mid-life game and forging a path for the future. When he entered the cohort, the researcher had just gone through an extremely painful season in his life. There were ongoing consequences and complications of the situation that caused the researcher to miss an entire week of class. However, in the classes themselves, Robert Walling and others were very instrumental in helping him see where the direction of his ministry needed to go into the future. The mantra repeated over and over by Walling still rings in this researcher's ears: "Most leaders don't finish well." This gave the researcher a new fire to finish the race well.

Third, the process of writing a dissertation was both arduous and delightful. The arduous part was the continual challenge of time management given the additional demands of a full time job and family. The delight came in the form of doing the actual research and getting to know fellow doubters through the fieldwork.

In summation, it was an enlightening five years to get to know various members of the cohort, sit under the teaching of Terry Walling, and write a dissertation about a subject matter that needed to be addressed in a fresh way.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix: Interview Questionnaire

Tell me about your experiences in the evangelical community.

When did you first experience doubt?

What were some feelings? Shame? Secretive?

What do you think is the relationship between doubt and faith?

Could you describe the events that led up to doubt?

Could you describe the events that followed doubt?

What do you feel/think contributed to doubt?

What was going on in your life then? Context?

Talk to me about certainty.

How would you describe how you viewed doubt before doubt happened?

How, if at all, has your view of doubt changed?

What positive changes have occurred in your life?

What negative changes, if any, have occurred in your life?

Tell me how you go about processing doubt.

Tell me how you would describe the person you are now.

Describe the most important lessons you learned through doubt.

Who has been the most helpful to you during this time?

What did church help you with?

How has church been helpful?

How have you grown as a person since doubt?

What advice would you give to someone who is in the midst of doubt?

What images help describe your doubt?

How did your evangelical community respond to your doubt?

Why did you leave?

Why did you stay?

How would you describe doubt?

What did you feel in the midst of doubt?

What was God thinking about your doubt-how did he view it? Sinful?

What did you feel like when you left the Christian faith?

What did you feel like when you entered the evangelical community?

Is there anything else you think I should know to understand doubt better?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

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